To All My Darlings

The Definitive Exploration of Marguerite Young's Magnum Opus Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

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Introduction

This is the unabridged collection of all the research that was done from 2019 to 2025 by myself in my attempt to understand what Young was doing and how she built her epic novel. Since the website is easier to manage than the eBook, further research from 2026 on will be here. Miss MacIntosh, My Darling by Marguerite Young is available to purchase from Dalkey Archive Press, on Amazon as a new edition in 2022 (print and Kindle), and to borrow from the Open Library.

Each chapter page has a summary, research resources, and vocabulary. In 2026 every chapter was reviewed again: quotations from the novel were checked word for word, outside quotations were traced to their sources, the Bible is quoted from the King James Version, and passages taken from Wikipedia are marked “(Wikipedia).” The Dictionary gathers the vocabulary, and The Novel as a Liberal Arts Education gathers Young’s references into a course catalog.

This is a labor of love. There is no publishing house backing this work. It is just a person who fell in love with a book because it became the ultimate reason for having spent a lifetime reading.

Marguerite Young told interviewers Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “If you don’t have obsessions, don’t write,” and “my characters are obsessed” (Review of Contemporary Fiction, Spring 2003), so this person decided to become obsessed with Miss MacIntosh, My Darling. There are oceans and mountains of material to explore in one of America’s greatest epic novels. With Miss MacIntosh, My Darling I have found my reason for reading. I hope you find your book and your reason for reading.

Summary

Miss MacIntosh, My Darling is an epic coming of age story of a young girl, Vera Cartwheel. It culminates in a long bus ride across the Midwest to find her nursemaid, Miss Georgia MacIntosh, from What Cheer, Iowa. On the bus she encounters: the bus driver, Moses Hunnecker; the old doctor, Justice O’Leary; and a married couple, Madge and Homer Capehorn.

The bus driver, Moses, has never been married and has superstitions like not ever cutting his hair. The old doc, O’Leary, was a local physician who made house calls but now that he is older is suffering from dementia according to Moses. The old doc believes he is still delivering babies even though he is retired now. Madge and Homer Capehorn are a newly married couple and Madge is pregnant. She implies it is not his child and she is not marrying the man she wanted. They are returning to their small town to live with her mother-in-law since her parents are dead. Vera overhears all the small town gossip and rumors. She pays particular attention to Madge and her views on pregnancy and marriage.

During the trip Vera shares her story of how she grew up and the adults she had access to: her mother, Catherine; her father, Jock Cartwheel; her nursemaid, Miss MacIntosh; the

family lawyer, Joachim Spitzer and his twin brother, Peron. These adults were supposed to teach Vera what she needed to know about living. Since she is the narrator of the story, telling even the inner lives of the others, she examines the lives of each one and decides in the end how she will live her life.

Her mother, Catherine, is an opium addict and has taken to her bed. She never leaves the house and only lives in an imaginary world made up of her drug induced hallucinations. Vera is looked after by a governess, Miss Georgia MacIntosh. Mr. Spitzer, lawyer of Catherine's estate, hired her after Catherine took to her bed. Miss MacIntosh is the ideal example of practicality. She has Vera memorize facts and adheres to a strict schedule in order to establish a sense of discipline, work ethic, and reality in Vera that directly counters Catherine's illusions.

Miss MacIntosh harbors deep scars of her own and when Vera turns fourteen, Miss MacIntosh sabotages Vera's birthday party. Vera, while staying up and reveling in the beautiful night in the garden on her birthday, wanders around the estate and enters Miss MacIntosh's room and finds her deepest secret. Miss MacIntosh assaults Vera and in the morning pretends nothing has happened. Vera's innocence is lost and she confronts Miss MacIntosh about what happened that night. Miss MacIntosh hints at how she will die. It is implied that Miss MacIntosh is dead, having committed suicide by walking into the ocean. She once carried rocks in her pockets "perhaps as ballast," but on the morning she disappeared she left her clothes strewn on the beach. Mr. Spitzer assumes she has just left. Her body is never found. Vera is inconsolable and her mother Catherine can only offer her an escape through drugs to ease her grief.

Mr. Spitzer, Joachim, is a lawyer who is the manager of Catherine's and Cousin Hannah's estates. As the last close adult that may help Vera navigate growing up, he is unable to because he is consumed with grief at the early loss of his twin brother, Peron, by apparent suicide. A large part of the story centers around Mr. Spitzer and his attempts to make sense of life, death and love through philosophical questioning. He was involved in a love triangle with Catherine. Joachim loved Catherine but she did not love him. Catherine was in love with his twin brother, Peron. Peron did not love Catherine. He died young and Joachim stayed by Catherine's side the rest of her life. Mr. Spitzer dresses like Jock, Catherine's late husband, Peron and other characters in the book.

When Vera is old enough she escapes her mother, Catherine. Since Miss MacIntosh's body was never found Vera believes she may still exist and decides to go to Miss MacIntosh's birthplace, What Cheer, Iowa. In Vera's mind, What Cheer, Iowa has become a magical place that will help her make sense of life. Vera never makes it to What Cheer, Iowa and instead ends up in Indiana, considered the heart of the Middle West. Vera spends the night in a hotel. During that stay she encounters more adults at the tavern and hears their stories. Conclusions are given for Mr. Spitzer after Catherine's death and parts of Miss MacIntosh's life. In the end Vera decides to marry a stone deaf man. There is no such thing as perfection or a perfect moment in this life. Vera realizes that "Whatever is average is the dream. Whatever is hidden is the revealed."

Chapter 1

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Vera Cartwheel rides a Grey Goose bus through the mist of the American Midwest. The driver, Moses Hunnecker, has long bushy hair. He whistles, drinks openly from a whiskey bottle, calls on God and the angels, and drives erratically. Vera imagines a wife and children waiting for him at home, then wonders whether she has invented them. The only other passengers are a sleeping couple, Madge and Homer Capehorn. Madge is pregnant and seems to resent it, and Homer sleeps in placid innocence. Along the roadside Vera sees a moving van piled with furniture and a double-headed man staring into nothing. These sights lead her to reflect that individuality is an illusion and every soul is joined to every other. She explains why she is traveling. She is searching for Miss MacIntosh, the plain, red-haired nursemaid from What Cheer, Iowa, who disappeared or died. She was the one solid presence in Vera's childhood, in a house by the New England sea ruled by her mother's opium dreams.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Miss MacIntosh · Moses Hunnecker · Madge Capehorn · Homer Capehorn

Concepts present

Themes: Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · The Search for Meaning

Symbols: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Fog and Mist · The Bus and the Journey · The House · The Umbrella · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Freud and Jung · Kant and Hegel · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Phenomenology · William James and Pragmatism

Allusions: American Religious Movements · Deafness and Sign Language · Don Quixote · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · American Writers · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- The opening depiction of the bus-driver, his erratic driving, and his imagined family life introduces a sense of instability mixed with hopeful human connection. Vera speculates about the bus-driver's wife and children, highlighting a longing for

established human relationships and happiness that seems almost mythical or legendary. The bus-driver's erratic driving amid heavy mist and his open drinking juxtaposed with calls upon God and angels create a complex character who embodies both chaos and faith.

- The detailed description of Madge contrasts sharply with Homer's blissful innocence and placid smile. This passage explores themes of denial, despair, and innocence amidst difficult circumstances. Madge's appearance and behavior suggest a deep inner conflict and suffering, while Homer's peaceful sleep offers a counterpoint of hope or oblivion.
- Vera's descriptions of the landscape create an atmosphere of desolation, otherworldliness, and existential uncertainty. This setting evokes a sense of isolation and the fading of reality into illusion, emphasizing Vera's internal struggles and sense of alienation.
- The image of the double-headed man standing by the roadside, staring into nothingness, symbolizes the fragmented self and the elusive nature of reality. Vera reflects on the "organization of illusion" and the interconnectedness of all souls, suggesting that individuality is an illusion and that deeper unity might exist beyond appearances. This philosophical meditation on identity and connection is central to the chapter's thematic core.
- Vera's long and restless search for Miss MacIntosh, an old red-headed nursemaid who was a moral guide and symbol of truth and constancy, represents a quest for stability, love, and truth in a world of illusions and loss. Miss MacIntosh embodies simple virtues, common sense, and a grounded view of life, contrasting with Vera's experience of chaos and dreams. This passage reveals Vera's deep loneliness and yearning for a meaningful human connection.
- Miss MacIntosh's rejection of illusions and adherence to "truth to nature" underscores the tension between the dream world and reality. Her practical, no-nonsense attitude highlights Vera's struggle to reconcile the dreamlike, illusory aspects of existence with the desire for concrete, simple truth. This tension is a major thematic element of the chapter.
- The closing passage emphasizes Miss MacIntosh's practical strength and sensibility amidst desolation. Her rejection of luxury and illusion in favor of plainness and resilience serves as a counterpoint to Vera's journey through a world of fading images and lost souls. This passage reinforces themes of endurance, reality, and the search for meaning in a harsh world.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Vera imagines the bus-driver's wife and children, then wonders whether his family life is "an emanation of my over-active imagination." What does it suggest that the novel

opens with its narrator inventing other people's lives and then doubting her inventions?

- The pregnant girl is covered from head to toe in charms, sports, butterflies, and a stuffed canary, "discursive details which should not focus attention, yet drew attention to her." What is she hiding, and what does the hiding reveal?
- The flat road becomes "the first creation when only the spirit of God had moved upon the deep," and then "There was now no landscape but the soul's." How does the chapter turn an Indiana highway into an inner landscape?
- A man with a child on his shoulders becomes "a double-headed man." Why might this passing image stay "forever engraved on memory's whirling disc"?

Characters

- Miss MacIntosh's religion is "truth to nature," and she insists that "Common sense is the finest sense." Yet Vera remembers her as "the dead steersman" and "the heart of all hearts." How does the plainest person in the book become its most mythic figure?
- Vera says the years of Miss MacIntosh's death "had added to her stature, making her seem almost vague." How does memory both enlarge and blur the people it keeps?
- Vera gave up architecture "because I could not plan a house if there was one soul which could not live in it," and later typed "mortality rates through a blur of tears." What do these jobs reveal about her?
- The blind juggler asks, "When shall the light, Peter, enter my soul?" Why does Vera hear his question "like my own"?

Connections

- "Every heart is the other heart. Every soul is the other soul. Every face is the other face. The individual is the one illusion." How does this claim prepare for the novel's wheel of characters turning around Miss MacIntosh at the hub? See The Wheel and the Spokes.
- Vera comes from a house by the sea and enters the Midwest because Miss MacIntosh told her to "see America first." How does the chapter set the ocean of the Cartwheel house against the plain interior of the country?
- Don Quixote and Tantalus both appear in the chapter's first pages. What do a knight who fights imaginary enemies and a man forever reaching for what recedes have in common with Vera?
- The Cartwheel garden is full of statues, cupids, psyches, and the Apollo Belvedere, "sculptured by man dreaming that he was other than he was." Why does Miss MacIntosh distrust them?

Reflection

- “All my life I had been reaching for the tangible, and it had evaded me.” What in ordinary life seems most solid and turns out hardest to hold?
- Vera’s quest is “the search for life, for love, for truth that does not fail.” Is a truth that does not fail possible, or is the search itself the point?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- Vera, the narrator and seeker, deeply introspective and philosophical, haunted by loss and the search for truth.

Miss Georgia MacIntosh

- Vera’s lost companion and moral anchor, embodying simplicity, truth, and steadfastness.
- Young saw this common sense as a disguise: “Her whole life is an impersonation. She’s by no means sensible. It’s just her verbalism that makes her seem sensible” (Marguerite Young, interview with Duncan MacDonald, Observation Point, 1965). “Miss Macintosh was the one illusionist in her assumption that there was a simple foundation of truth” (Marguerite Young, interview, WNYC radio, New York).

Moses Hunnecker (The Bus Driver)

- A complex figure mixing spiritual invocation with reckless behavior, embodying ambiguity.

Madge Capehorn (born Edwards) and Homer Capehorn

- Symbols of innocence and conflict, youth and resistance to natural processes.

Research: Themes

The Bus Journey and Characters

- The story begins with a bus driver whistling and driving erratically through heavy mist in a rural, indistinct part of interior America. The bleak, mist-shrouded landscape evokes a feeling of desolation and uncertainty.
- Moses Hunnecker (The Bus Driver) is described as a large-headed man with bushy hair, who drinks whiskey openly and calls upon God and angels, suggesting a complex mix of spiritual longing and reckless behavior. His family life is ambiguous, possibly a projection of Vera’s desires.

- A sleeping young couple (Madge and Homer) joins the bus at a pottery town. The girl is pregnant but resists her condition, described in vivid detail with a mix of artificiality and natural growth, symbolizing conflict and alienation. The boy contrasts her with innocence and blissful stolidity.
- The bus brushes against a moving van carrying an array of household items, including a feathered hat bobbing in the mist like a bird, evoking a surreal atmosphere where everyday objects gain symbolic weight.
- The journey progresses into a formless, oceanic-like mist-covered plain with no distinct landmarks, symbolizing the dissolution of the familiar world and the encroachment of the unknown or the subconscious.

Philosophical Reflection on Illusion and Connection

See: Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · The Search for Meaning

Vera reflects on the nature of memory, illusion, and the human soul

See: Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- The idea that individuality is an illusion and that every heart, soul, and face is interconnected.
- The metaphor of ships passing in the night, representing fleeting human connections.
- Vera's lifelong search for tangible truth and connection, which has often evaded her, leaving only illusions and disconnected images.

Vera Cartwheel's Personal Quest and History

See: Memory and the Past · The Search for Meaning

- Vera reveals herself as searching for a lost companion, Miss MacIntosh, an old nursemaid who symbolized stability, truth, and moral guidance in Vera's life.
- Miss MacIntosh is described as a simple, practical woman with a broken nose and red hair, who rejected illusions and fanciful dreams in favor of truth to nature. She was a grounding figure during Vera's turbulent childhood amid a family haunted by opium and dreams.
- Vera has wandered through various cities, employment, and social strata, always searching for Miss MacIntosh who had disappeared or died. This search is both literal and symbolic of Vera's deeper quest for meaning, love, and truth.
- Vera contrasts the opulent but empty grandeur of her mother's house, filled with ghosts and illusions, with the plain, unpretentious life Miss MacIntosh led by the sea. This contrast highlights the theme of reality versus illusion in the narrative.
- Vera contemplates the ephemeral nature of life, the inevitability of death, and the elusive quest for light and meaning in a world filled with darkness and dreams that fail.
- Vera's journey is both physical and spiritual, seeking a reality not distorted by illusion.

- The narrative questions what is real, suggesting individuality and perception may be illusory.
- The human condition is described as one of alienation, with fleeting and often failed attempts at connection.
- The past haunts the present, and memory is both a source of pain and a guide.
- Miss MacIntosh's simple life contrasts with grand illusions, suggesting truth lies in everyday reality.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Bus

See: The Bus and the Journey

- A vessel moving through uncertain, misty landscapes, symbolizing the journey of life and the search for meaning.

Mist and Grey Landscape

See: Fog and Mist · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Representing ambiguity, the unknown, and the dissolution of familiar reality.

Household Items on the Moving Van

See: The House

- Everyday objects gaining symbolic, almost surreal significance.

The Double-Headed Man

See: Twins and Doubles

- A mysterious figure by the roadside symbolizing fragmented identity or duality.

Miss MacIntosh's Whaler's Hat and Umbrella

See: The Umbrella · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Symbols of groundedness and practicality against the backdrop of illusion.

The Opulent but Empty House

See: The House

- Represents illusion, decay, and the failure of grandeur without truth.

Research: Resources

- Jehovah's Witnesses is a millenarian (the belief by a religious, social, or political group or movement in a coming fundamental transformation of society, after which "all things will be changed") restorationist (is the belief that Christianity has been or should be restored along the lines of what is known about the apostolic early church, which restorationists see as the search for a purer and more ancient form of the religion) Christian denomination with nontrinitarian (is a form of Christianity that rejects the mainstream Christian doctrine of the Trinity: the belief that God is three distinct hypostases or persons who are coeternal, coequal, and indivisibly united in one being, or essence) beliefs distinct from mainstream Christianity. Jehovah's Witnesses are best known for their door-to-door preaching, distributing literature such as The Watchtower and Awake!, and for refusing military service, refusal to salute state symbols and blood transfusions. They consider the use of God's name vital for proper worship. They reject Trinitarianism, inherent immortality of the soul, and hellfire, which they consider to be unscriptural doctrines. They do not observe Christmas, Easter, birthdays or other holidays and customs they consider to have pagan origins incompatible with Christianity. They prefer to use their own Bible translation, the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures, although their literature occasionally quotes and cites other Bible translations. Adherents commonly refer to their body of beliefs as "The Truth" and consider themselves to be "in the Truth." They consider "human society" to be morally corrupt and under the influence of Satan, and most limit their social interaction with non-Witnesses. Congregational disciplinary actions include disfellowshipping, their term for formal expulsion and shunning, a last resort for what they consider serious offenses. Baptized individuals who formally leave are considered disassociated and are also shunned. Disfellowshipped and disassociated individuals may eventually be reinstated if deemed repentant. (Wikipedia) The movement grew out of the Bible Student movement that Charles Taze Russell began in the 1870s, and it took the name Jehovah's Witnesses in 1931.
- The "Grey Goose" bus: "Gray Goose" became American slang for a prison bus, often a converted Greyhound painted grey, used to move prisoners between jails, courts, and prisons, always migrating like geese from one prison to another. Green's Dictionary of Slang first records the term in 1976, after the novel was published, so it is a later echo rather than Young's source, but read that way the bus suggests displacement and a loss of freedom, movement without arrival. The name also recalls the old song "Go Tell Aunt Rhody," whose old grey goose is dead, which the bus-driver sings in Chapter 5. See On the bus (Ch 1) and Go Tell Aunt Rhody (Ch 5).
- Harold Bloom says Don Quixote is the first modern novel, and that the protagonist is at war with Freud's reality principle, which accepts the necessity of dying. Bloom says that the novel has an endless range of meanings, but that a recurring theme is the human need to withstand suffering. Edith Grossman, who wrote and published a highly acclaimed English translation of the novel in 2003, says that the book is mostly meant to move people into emotion using a systematic change of course, on the verge of both tragedy and comedy at the same time. Grossman has stated: "The question is that

Quixote has multiple interpretations [...] and how do I deal with that in my translation. I'm going to answer your question by avoiding it [...] so when I first started reading the Quixote I thought it was the most tragic book in the world, and I would read it and weep [...] As I grew older [...] my skin grew thicker [...] and so when I was working on the translation I was actually sitting at my computer and laughing out loud. This is done [...] as Cervantes did it [...] by never letting the reader rest. You are never certain that you truly got it. Because as soon as you think you understand something, Cervantes introduces something that contradicts your premise." The novel's structure is episodic in form. The full title is indicative of the tale's object, as ingenioso (Spanish) means "quick with inventiveness," marking the transition of modern literature from dramatic to thematic unity. The novel takes place over a long period of time, including many adventures united by common themes of the nature of reality, reading, and dialogue in general. Although burlesque on the surface, the novel, especially in its second half, has served as an important thematic source not only in literature but also in much of art and music, inspiring works by Pablo Picasso and Richard Strauss. The contrasts between the tall, thin, fancy-struck and idealistic Quixote and the short, stout, world-weary Panza is a motif echoed ever since the book's publication, and Don Quixote's imaginings are the butt of outrageous and cruel practical jokes in the novel. Even faithful and simple Sancho is forced to deceive him at certain points. The novel is considered a satire of orthodoxy, veracity and even nationalism. In exploring the individualism of his characters, Cervantes helped lead literary practice beyond the narrow convention of the chivalric romance. He spoofs the chivalric romance through a straightforward retelling of a series of acts that redound to the knightly virtues of the hero. The character of Don Quixote became so well known in its time that the word quixotic was quickly adopted by many languages. Characters such as Sancho Panza and Don Quixote's steed, Rocinante, are emblems of Western literary culture. The phrase "tilting at windmills" to describe an act of attacking imaginary enemies (or an act of extreme idealism), derives from an iconic scene in the book. It stands in a unique position between medieval romance and the modern novel. The former consists of disconnected stories featuring the same characters and settings with little exploration of the inner life of even the main character. The latter are usually focused on the psychological evolution of their characters. In Part I, Quixote imposes himself on his environment. By Part II, people know about him through "having read his adventures," and so, he needs to do less to maintain his image. By his deathbed, he has regained his sanity, and is once more "Alonso Quixano the Good." (Wikipedia) Vera wonders whether the bus-driver is "some mad Don Quixote chasing windmills." See On Don Quixote (Ch 1).

- "his bushy hair grew almost to his shoulders": The bus driver came from life. "And I met such a bus driver on my way perhaps to New Harmony," Young said (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). The novel "takes place at that time when Republicans were threatening to let their hair grow until Roosevelt got out of the White House" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Moses Hunnecker, the Chapter 5 resources, and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.

- “an emanation of my over-active imagination”: Blaise Pascal thought imagination was powerful but often led people astray. In his Pensées he called it “that deceitful part in man, that mistress of error and falsity, the more deceptive that she is not always so” (Pensées 82, trans. W. F. Trotter). Vera, doubting the bus-driver’s family as her own invention, fears the same trick of the mind. He also argued that believing in God is more beneficial than not believing in God, which is known as Pascal’s wager.
- Madge is a traditional nickname for Margaret, which comes from the Greek word for “pearl.” Margaret’s French form is Marguerite, the author’s own name. The girl on the bus wears “ten cent store pearls” dripping from her ears.
- Madge’s maiden name is Edwards. John Edwards, an eighteenth-century Welsh translator and poet, put the second and third parts of Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress into Welsh in the 1760s.
- Homer means hostage, pledge. It is also the name of the poet of the Iliad and the Odyssey.
- Capehorn is a French occupational name for a robe-master or maker of hoods. It also suggests Cape Horn, the stormy southern tip of South America, where many sailing ships were lost rounding the Horn.
- “one stuffed yellow canary with a moth-eaten wing”: Young saw this girl “on a bus once in Iowa with the bird on her hat,” and the hat reminded her of the song “The Bird on Nellie’s Hat” (1906). She said she wrote the long description “40 times,” and that Elizabeth Bowen told her, “I knew on page two that it was a great book because of that sentence” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Madge Capehorn and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “old Coca-Cola and aspirin signboards”: Painted advertisements for Coca-Cola covered barn walls and the sides of buildings across the country from the 1890s on, and Bayer began selling aspirin in 1899. By the 1930s such signs lined every highway, and Young’s are “tattered as tramps.” See Burma-Shave signs (Ch 5).
- “the depths of southern Indiana, a state as yet unknown to me”: Young was born in Indianapolis and lived for years in New Harmony, in the far southwestern corner of the state, where she wrote Angel in the Forest. Vera, raised by the New England sea, enters Young’s own home state as a stranger. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “many curious pieces of rural architecture”: The descriptions of what is seen from the bus window are reminiscent of what might have been seen on the historic Route 66. Route 66 ran from Chicago to Los Angeles and never entered Indiana, where this bus is traveling, but the roadside culture it made famous ran along highways all over the country in the 1930s and 1940s. In Indiana the great road was the old National Road, U.S. 40, which crossed the state through Richmond, Indianapolis, and Terre Haute.
- “an enormous coffee urn with its lid opened against the sky, a wigwam nightclub”: These are examples of novelty or mimetic roadside architecture, buildings shaped like the things they sold or advertised, which sprang up along American highways in the 1920s and 1930s. Real examples include the Coffee Pot in Bedford, Pennsylvania (1927), the Wigwam Village motels that began in Cave City, Kentucky, in 1937, and the

Haines Shoe House in Pennsylvania (1948). “The old woman who lived in the shoe” comes from the Mother Goose rhyme.

- “when only the spirit of God had moved upon the deep”: This echoes Genesis 1:2, “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” The flat, misty Midwest becomes the world before creation, “the face of the ambiguous waters, of no boundary line, no shore.” See Genesis.
- Tantalus in Greek mythology was famous for his punishment: to stand in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree, the fruit never within reach and the water always receding before he could drink.
- “passing like ships in the night”: The phrase comes from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s Tales of a Wayside Inn: “Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing, / Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness.” Young extends it to “ships manned by dead helmsmen, by ghostly crews.” See American Writers.
- “What was the organization of illusion, of memory?”: Phenomenology is a philosophical study and movement largely associated with the early 20th century that seeks to objectively investigate the nature of subjective, conscious experience. It attempts to describe the universal features of consciousness while avoiding assumptions about the external world, aiming to describe phenomena as they appear to the subject, and to explore the meaning and significance of the lived experiences. (Wikipedia) Vera’s question, how illusion and memory are organized in the mind, is the kind phenomenology asks. See Phenomenology.
- “a web of spidery logic establishing the most secret relationships”: Logic is the study of correct reasoning. It includes both formal and informal logic. Formal logic is the study of deductively valid inferences or logical truths. It examines how conclusions follow from premises based on the structure of arguments alone, independent of their topic and content. Informal logic is associated with informal fallacies, critical thinking, and argumentation theory. Informal logic examines arguments expressed in natural language whereas formal logic uses formal language. (Wikipedia) Vera imagines a logic no philosopher could write down, seen only by “some omniscient eye,” connecting strangers who have never met.
- “deep calling to deep”: Psalm 42:7 reads, “Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me.” The same psalm opens with the soul’s thirst: “My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?” (Psalm 42:2, KJV). Vera repeats the phrase three times in this chapter, and it captures her spiritual hunger and the existential tension between life, death, and the hope for a transcendent encounter that will end her wandering and questioning.
- “all barriers dissolving, all souls as one and united”: Dialectic is the art of investigating or discussing the truth of opinions and an inquiry into metaphysical contradictions and their solutions. In Hegel’s dialectic, opposites meet and are resolved in a higher unity,

until all is gathered into one whole. Vera's vision ends in such a unity: "Every heart is the other heart. Every soul is the other soul." See Kant and Hegel.

- "like a drowning man who clutches at a straw": The old proverb says that a drowning man will clutch at a straw, any small hope however useless. Vera flees illusion the way a drowning man grabs for the straw, and finds illusion again in front of her.
- "dead souls like the autumn leaves": The comparison of the dead to falling leaves runs through the whole epic tradition. In the Iliad, the generations of men are like leaves; in the Aeneid, the souls crowding the shore of the underworld river are as many as the leaves that fall in the first frost of autumn; Dante repeats the image in Inferno 3; and Milton's fallen angels lie "thick as autumnal leaves that strow the brooks / In Vallombrosa." Young, who studied the epic at the University of Chicago, also named Gogol's novel Dead Souls as one of the books that formed her.
- "a patient asks under the ether mask": Ether was one of the first surgical anesthetics. William Morton demonstrated it publicly at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston in 1846, and for a century patients breathed it through a mask over the nose and mouth before an operation. Vera compares her half-sleeping life to the dreams of a patient going under.
- "which seems like a train riding among the trackless stars": Trains run all through this chapter: the toy train crossing a toy bridge, the day train jogging through the coal country, and the dream train of the ether mask, which ends "and there is no train." In a 1965 radio interview with Studs Terkel, Young explained why her novel rides a bus instead: "I chose a bus because it does not go on a rail, and it therefore could be a more erratic journey than a train journey. I was very much interested in the idea of a train of memory or illusion, but I suppose I rejected a train journey for the same reason that William James didn't want to speak of the train of memory, but rather the stream of consciousness." Philosophers had long pictured thought as a train of linked ideas; Thomas Hobbes titled a chapter of Leviathan (1651) "Of the Consequence or Trayne of Imaginations." William James rejected the image in The Principles of Psychology (1890): "Such words as 'chain' or 'train' do not describe it fitly. . . . It is nothing jointed; it flows. A 'river' or a 'stream' are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described." A train runs on fixed rails from station to station. Vera's bus wanders through the mist, and its road turns and seems "to go back the way it had gone before." See William James and Pragmatism.
- "I, Vera Cartwheel": Vera means "true" in Latin and "faith" in Russian. The narrator who searches for "truth that does not fail" carries both meanings in her first name. See On the names (Ch 1).
- Cartwheel was a symbol of industry or used as a pun as in the arms of Carter. A cartwheel is also the wheel of a cart and an acrobat's sideways spin. Young described the whole novel as a wheel with Miss MacIntosh at the hub, so Vera's family name carries the book's central image.
- Hegel described his philosophical system as "a circle of circles." Young described the novel the same way in the Friedman and Fuchs interview: "I always thought of Miss

MacIntosh as the center of the wheel, the hub, then the spokes as the subsidiary, secondary characters, and the wheel as endlessly expanding like a universe." Here Vera calls Miss MacIntosh "the central heart, the heart of all hearts." See On the structure (Ch 1) and The Wheel and the Spokes.

- "the dead steersman": In Virgil's Aeneid, Palinurus, the helmsman of Aeneas's ship, is lulled to sleep by the god Sleep and falls overboard, and in the underworld his unburied shade begs Aeneas for rest. Vera's name for Miss MacIntosh, lost to the sea, makes the old nursemaid the steersman of the whole voyage, now gone overboard.
- The name Georgia means tiller of the soil, farmer.
- MacIntosh comes from the Gaelic Mac an Tòisich, "son of the chief" or leader.
- "harvests of dragons' teeth and reaping the whirlwind": In Greek myth, Cadmus and later Jason sowed the teeth of a dragon in the ground, and armed men sprang up from them and fought. "Reaping the whirlwind" comes from Hosea 8:7: "For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind." The street preachers promise harvests of war and ruin grown from what was sown.
- The most famous Macintosh is Charles Macintosh, the Scottish chemist who patented a way of waterproofing cloth with a rubber solution in 1823. The raincoat named for him, the mackintosh, is Miss MacIntosh's "plaid, faded waterproof," and she always wears it outside. See Charles MacIntosh (Ch 3).
- "her bent black umbrella uplifted like some enormous, dark, scudding bird": Young recalled a summer at Yaddo, the artists' colony in Saratoga Springs, when the guests, among them Truman Capote, played a murder game in which a person was accused if caught "under a black umbrella" (Charles Ruas, Conversations with American Writers, Knopf, 1985). See The Umbrella and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- "the salt of common sense": The phrase recalls Matthew 5:13, "Ye are the salt of the earth," said of the plain and faithful. Miss MacIntosh's gospel is common sense: "Common sense is the finest sense." See Common sense (Ch 23).
- "that I must lead a useful life and see America first": "See America First" was a real slogan. It began with a 1906 movement to persuade Americans to travel in the American West instead of Europe, and the Great Northern Railway used it to promote Glacier National Park. Miss MacIntosh's advice sends Vera into "the broad interior, the spacious Middle West."
- "the search for life, for love, for truth that does not fail": Vera's statement of her motive gives the novel one of its governing phrases. See The Search for Life, for Love, for Truth That Does Not Fail.
- "a dead girl's love letters scattered on the floor of her empty bedroom": The chapter does not name the dead girl. One reading takes her to be Miss MacIntosh, the "dead steersman," Vera's lost companion and moral guide who had disappeared or died, whose memory drives Vera's search for life, love, and truth. She may also be one of the many lost souls Vera met in the harbor cities, each of whom sends her on the journey.

- “the palm leaves crossed above the marble mantel piece” Palm leaves traditionally symbolize victory, peace, or martyrdom, especially in Christian iconography. Their presence “crossed” above a cold, marble mantelpiece evokes a memorial or shrine, reinforcing the idea of death and remembrance, perhaps hinting at a spiritual or solemn aspect of the lost figure.
- “her rosary hanging on a brass bedpost” The rosary is a symbol of faith, prayer, and the search for spiritual meaning or solace. Its placement on the bedpost of an empty room suggests a clinging to faith or hope in a place now vacant, emphasizing spiritual yearning amid loss.
- “because of her suicide”: This stark fact grounds the previous symbols in tragedy and finality. The suicide adds emotional weight and explains why these relics are scattered and why the search is urgent and poignant: there is a desperate need for understanding or closure.
- “because of a deaf musician” This figure introduces the theme of communication and isolation. A deaf musician cannot hear the music he creates or the world around him, symbolizing a disconnect or failure of connection, similar to the unanswered questions Vera faces.
- “because of a drunkard’s celestial dream of childhood” This phrase suggests a vision or hope, however fragile or impaired, that persists despite hardship or degradation. The drunkard’s “celestial dream” implies a longing for innocence, transcendence, or redemption.
- “because of the answers not heard” This line expresses frustration and yearning for understanding, the elusive nature of truth, or the silence in response to crucial questions. It conveys the theme of searching for meaning in a world that is often unresponsive or inscrutable.
- “because of a blind man’s groping for his coffee cup at an all-night quick-lunch stand on the fog-shrouded waterfront of that great harbor city” This vivid image symbolizes the human condition of blindness or ignorance, fumbling in darkness or uncertainty. The fog-shrouded waterfront amplifies the atmosphere of mystery, obscurity, and searching for clarity or sustenance (coffee cup) in a confusing and cold environment.
- “as he had asked of his companion” This question encapsulates the existential yearning for illumination, understanding, hope, and spiritual awakening.
  - “When shall the light, Peter, enter my soul?”: 1 Peter 2:9 highlights that believers are called out of darkness into God’s light. 2 Peter 1:19 compares the prophetic message to a light in a dark place, offering hope for a new spiritual dawn. 1 Peter 5:10 assures believers that after suffering, God will restore and strengthen them. 2 Corinthians 4:6 speaks of God’s light shining in hearts, providing knowledge of His glory. Psalm 43:3 is a prayer asking God for His guiding light and truth. Micah 7:8 expresses hope that even in darkness, the Lord will be a light. Ephesians 5:14 encourages those who are spiritually asleep to wake up and receive Christ’s light. The blind man’s question is a metaphor for the quest for spiritual

illumination and the deep human need to find light within the soul, to overcome both literal and figurative darkness.

    - “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light” (Matthew 6:22, KJV). The phrase suggests that when one has a clear and true vision (healthy eyes), it positively affects the whole self, filling it with light which is understood as awareness, understanding, and vitality.

- “the world’s greatest juggler, performing for the Lord’s sake and glory”: The blind man recalls the medieval legend of Our Lady’s Juggler, a poor tumbler who, having nothing else to offer, performs his tricks before a statue of the Virgin in a monastery chapel, and the statue comes to life to bless him. Anatole France retold it as “Le Jongleur de Notre-Dame” in 1892, and Massenet made it an opera in 1902.
- “by evening comet plane”: The de Havilland Comet, the first jet airliner, began passenger service in 1952, while Young was writing the novel. Whether or not she meant the Comet, Vera’s flight looks down on “the earth’s abstract curvature in space.”
- Marguerite Young in the Dalkey Interview said she talked to coal miners in the Ozarks and it was because of them that she decided to write about New Harmony (a utopia in Angel in the Forest) and that it is based upon social consciousness.
- The history of coal mining in the United States is the story of class warfare where the corporations held all the wealth and left the workers with very little. Unions were formed to try and combat this. The worst coal mine explosion in American history, at Monongah, West Virginia, in 1907, killed three hundred and sixty-two men. There were skirmishes where the National Guard were called in and during the Ludlow Massacre in Colorado in 1914 killed men, women, and children.
- “the disc throwers, the fat cupids, the thin psyches with flowing curls, the mute Apollo Belvedere”: The statues in Catherine’s garden are the classics of European sculpture. Myron’s Discobolus, the discus thrower, is known from Roman copies of a Greek bronze of about 450 B.C. Psyche, whose name is Greek for both “soul” and “butterfly,” is the mortal bride of Cupid in Apuleius’s tale. The Apollo Belvedere in the Vatican, a Roman marble copy of a Greek bronze, was praised for centuries as the ideal of human beauty, and here it is “mute.”
- “Her religion was truth to nature”: “Truth to nature” was the watchword of the art critic John Ruskin, who in Modern Painters (1843) urged artists to paint the world exactly as it is, and it became the creed of the Pre-Raphaelite painters. Young gives the art critics’ doctrine to a nursemaid who has no use for art at all.

Vocabulary

Allée

A walk or path lined with trees or tall hedges. Young writes “allees.”

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Anarchic

Without order or control; lawless.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Archaic

Very old; belonging to a much earlier time.

Asphodel

A lily-like flower that, in Greek myth, covers the meadows of the underworld where ordinary souls go after death.

Avid

Eager or greedy.

Bisect

To cut or divide into two parts.

Cameo

A carved gem or shell with a raised profile, usually a head, set against a background of a different color.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chiffon

A sheer, lightweight fabric of silk or nylon.

Chinese puzzle

An intricate puzzle, such as a set of interlocking pieces; anything baffling and complicated.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Clothes horse

A wooden frame for drying or airing clothes.

Constitutional

A walk taken regularly for the sake of one’s health.

Cornice

A decorative molding that runs along the top of a wall or building.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Curdled

Thickened into lumps, like soured milk.

Daft

Silly or crazy.

Delusive

Misleading; giving a false impression.

Denuded

Stripped bare.

Discursive

Rambling from one subject to another.

Dismembered

With the limbs cut off; torn apart.

Ducal

Belonging to a duke.

Dungarees

Work trousers or overalls of heavy cotton denim.

Emanation

Something that flows out from a source.

Ermine

The white winter fur of the stoat, used to trim the robes of kings and nobles.

Erratically

Unpredictably; irregularly.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Fly-specked

Spotted with the tiny marks left by flies.

Fusty

Old-fashioned and musty.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Garter

A band worn around the leg to hold up a stocking.

Gauze

A thin, transparent fabric.

Girded

Encircled or bound tightly, as with a belt or girdle.

Hale

Healthy and strong, especially said of someone older.

Helmsman

The person who steers a ship.

Imploring

Begging earnestly.

Incongruous

Out of place; not in keeping with its surroundings.

Inexactitude

Lack of exactness.

Laggard

Slow; falling behind.

Languorous

Oppressive stillness or tiredness, inactivity of a pleasurable kind. Young spells it “langorous.”

Listlessly

Without energy or interest.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Lumbering

Moving heavily and clumsily.

Moccasins

Soft leather shoes first made by Native American peoples.

Mortality rate

The number of deaths in a population over a given period.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Petticoat

An underskirt.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Planetarium

A domed theater in which images of the night sky are projected onto the ceiling.

Pretender

One who pretends; also, someone who claims a throne or title without a rightful claim.

Protuberance

A bulge or swelling.

Quail

A small, plump ground bird hunted as game.

Rabbit warren

A network of rabbit burrows. Figuratively, a crowded building full of small, maze-like rooms.

Refuse

Garbage or trash. As a noun it is pronounced REF-yoos.

Remorseless

Without pity; relentless.

Resonant

Echoing; deep and full in sound.

Reticule

A small drawstring handbag.

Rouge

A red powder or cream used to color the cheeks or lips.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Scudding

Moving fast before the wind.

Sensorium

The whole of a person’s senses; the seat of sensation in the brain.

Sentient

Able to feel and perceive.

Skein

A loosely coiled length of yarn or thread.

Slag

The stony waste left over when metal is smelted from ore.

Sleazy

Of cloth: thin and flimsy. This was the word's first meaning; the sense of sordid came later.

Sleight of hand

Skillful tricks done with the hands, such as a magician's.

Spangled

Covered with spangles, small glittering ornaments.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Spinster

An unmarried woman, especially an older one. The word first meant a woman who spun thread.

Stolidity

Calm, unemotional dullness.

Sycophant

A flatterer who seeks favor. As an adjective, fawning and flattering.

Taloned

Having talons, the sharp claws of a bird of prey.

Ten cent store

A five-and-ten, a store selling cheap goods, such as Woolworth's.

Tenement

A crowded, run-down apartment building.

Tethered

Tied with a rope or chain.

Transfusion

The transfer of blood into a person's veins.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Unpresuming

Modest; not putting oneself forward.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Vanity case

A small case for carrying makeup.

Waterproof

An old word for a raincoat, as in Miss MacIntosh's "plaid, faded waterproof."

Whalebone

Baleen, the flexible plates from the mouths of certain whales, once used to stiffen corsets.

Wigwam

A domed dwelling of the Algonquian peoples of the Northeast and Great Lakes, framed with bent poles and covered with bark or mats.

Chapter 2

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Vera describes her mother, Catherine. She is an opium addict who has lain in bed for years among jewels and phantoms and treats her hallucinations as more real than the world. The chapter traces how she came to this. There was a brief marriage to Jock Cartwheel, and a love triangle with twin brothers: Catherine loved Peron Spitzer, who did not love her, while his brother Joachim loved Catherine without return. Joachim, Mr. Spitzer, is the family lawyer and visits her bedside every evening. An Egyptian sailor arrives looking for the dead Peron and mistakes Joachim for him, and Catherine gives the sailor elaborate directions through her labyrinthine house. There is also the vanished chauffeur, James, who long ago made off with her automobile and who, in her visions, drives her endlessly toward Alaska. Whenever her canary dies, Mr. Spitzer secretly replaces it. The chapter ends when a canary escapes into a thunderstorm. Catherine calmly accepts that she must now live forever and dismisses its distant twittering as another dream.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · James the Chauffeur · The Egyptian Sailor · Mr. Res Tacamah · Mr. Chandelier · Vera Cartwheel · Peron Spitzer · Madge Capehorn · Jock Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Madness and Sanity · Memory and the Past · Society, Class, and Race

Symbols: Birds · Clocks and Watches · Eyes and Blindness · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Pearls and Jewels · Pregnancy, Birth, and Children · The House · The Sea and Water · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Augustine and Christian Theology · Descartes and Dualism · Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) · Epicureanism · Nietzsche · Plato and Platonism · Taoism and Zhuangzi · The Problem of Universals · Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory

Allusions: American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Dante · Edgar Allan Poe · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · Milton · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The History of Opium · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a vivid description of Catherine's detachment from reality, her retreat into a world of dreams, phantoms, and visions. She sleeps in a stately bed, surrounded by jewels and illusions, her body horizontal and still but her mind endlessly active in a twilight realm where days and nights blur into one. This passage establishes her condition as one suspended between life and death, reality and fantasy, and introduces her as a luminous, ethereal figure whose identity is intertwined with opium dreams and spectral visitors like dead kings, angels, and movie stars. The birthmark she conceals and the shadowed cheek symbolize her hidden imperfections and her withdrawal from the world.
- This chapter explains the complex, tragic backstory of Catherine's life, including her failed marriage to Jock Cartwheel, a reckless sportsman who disappeared in the Alps, the social humiliations she endured, and the inheritance that burdened her. It also reveals her denial of her father's strict domination and orthodox faith, and her agnostic stance despite the angels in her opium paradise. It deepens the understanding of her motivations for retreating into this dreamlike existence and the loss and abandonment she suffered.
- The relationship between Catherine and Mr. Spitzer, a semi-retired lawyer who visits her faithfully every evening, is a crucial element. He is portrayed as a somewhat hapless, absent-minded man broken by his brother's death, yet devoted to Catherine. Their interactions mix reality and fantasy, with Catherine often tormenting him with her elusive remarks and suggestions of invisible presences, while he tries to maintain order and reason. This dynamic illustrates the tension between her dream world and his grasp on reality, as well as her complex feelings of resentment and fondness toward him.
- This chapter emphasizes Catherine's uncanny knowledge of Mr. Spitzer's movements and minor details of his life which he himself forgets. It raises the question of whether she is truly alive or already dead, and whether Mr. Spitzer even exists as she perceives him. Her world is one of illusions and ghostly realities, where distinctions between life and death, real and unreal, blur. The servants' superstitions about her nocturnal wanderings and mysterious occurrences in the house add to the enigmatic aura.
- A significant episode is the arrival of a gold-turbaned Egyptian sailor who claims to have come looking for Mr. Spitzer's dead twin brother. Catherine insists on the Egyptian sailor's reality, giving him detailed instructions to navigate the labyrinthine house, while Mr. Spitzer tries, even by a legal argument, to convince the Egyptian sailor that the man he seeks, Mr. Spitzer's twin brother Peron, is dead, and that this is a case of mistaken identity. This episode symbolizes the permeable boundary between the worlds of the living and the dead, and Catherine's role as a mediator or gatekeeper of these overlapping realities.

- Here Catherine expresses a worldview in which the dream is the only reality worth accepting, because the real world is inevitably disappointing and unrealized. She sees life as a vast deception, and the dreams as protective and expansive, allowing a multiplicity of experiences and visions that transcend strict physical reality. This philosophical stance encapsulates the chapter's major theme which is the tension between illusion and reality and the necessity of dreams to sustain life.
- Catherine's only faithful companion is a little yellow canary, kept in a gilded cage and drugged, Vera supposes, by the poisonous atmosphere of the room itself, perhaps by the opium in the gilded coffee cup where it perches. The bird symbolizes the tenuous thread of life sustaining her, and the careful subterfuge to replace the canary when it dies illustrates the fragile illusions that maintain her dream world and her existence. Mr. Spitzer's role in maintaining this secret further highlights the delicate balance between reality and fantasy that defines her life.
- Catherine imagines herself endlessly riding with James, her ex-chauffeur, toward Alaska, a place she never reaches despite years of travel. This endless, repetitive journey through an endless city symbolizes her trapped state between worlds, the impossibility of escape or arrival, and the persistence of memory and illusion. James's dark intentions and her helplessness add a note of impending danger to this surreal journey.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Catherine "presumed always that things were not what they seemed, that all forms must change their shapes." How does the chapter itself keep changing shape as it moves from her bed to Mr. Spitzer's walks, the Egyptian, James, and the canary?
- The dreams "had begotten her, and she was their creation. She had not created the dreams, for they had created her." What does it mean for a person to be made by her own dreams?
- Catherine gives the Egyptian directions through a house where "there were rooms between the rooms, and now the doors had changed their places." How is the house a map of her mind?
- The servants reason that Catherine must walk at night, "how else could she know so much?" How does the chapter keep both explanations open, the secret detective and the omniscient dreamer?

Characters

- Mr. Spitzer "did not believe in Fate but in self-determination," yet "Fate had assigned this peculiar role to him." Is he faithful by choice, by habit, or by fate?
- Mr. Spitzer's "stupidity was now become, in fact, his only unusual gift, almost sublime." What can a slow, literal-minded man protect that a brilliant one could not?

- Catherine refused the Mr. Spitzer who loved her for the brother who did not, because of “bodily resemblances beclouding dissimilars.” How do the twins divide what she wanted between them?
- “That James was absent made him always present.” Why does Catherine’s mind keep the one servant who robbed her and who, in her visions, plots to kill her?
- Catherine’s blind mother “had fooled many of those who were closest to her,” and her father’s Seeing Eye dog was blind too. What does this family history of hidden blindness suggest about Catherine’s visions?

Connections

- The canaries are replaced so that “the illusions were sustained, even by precarious subterfuge,” and Mr. Spitzer arranges it. How does this kindly deception compare with the deception Catherine believes the whole world plays on her?
- Catherine says there are “two worlds,” “this and its counterpart,” and that “no great distinction should be made between the living and the dead.” How does the visit of the Egyptian, looking for a dead man and finding his living twin, act out this belief? See Twins and Doubles.
- In Chapter 1 Vera rides a bus into the Midwest, searching. Here Catherine drives forever toward Alaska and never arrives. How do the mother’s journey and the daughter’s journey differ?

Reflection

- Catherine “pretended that the real was the dream, that the dream was the real,” and calls this “a universal failure, that on which the whole of life depended.” In what ways does ordinary life depend on dreams that will never be checked against reality?
- When Marco Polo flies into the storm, Catherine is calm, “resigned hopelessly to the fact that now she must certainly live, of course, forever.” Why might losing the thing a life depends on bring calm instead of despair?

Research: Characters

Catherine Helena Cartwheel (Snowden)

- A central figure who has withdrawn from life into a dreamlike, opium-fueled existence.
- She suffers from an invisible birthmark (a blot on her left cheek), which symbolizes hidden flaws and may represent her motivation for retreating from reality.
- She is portrayed as a “beautiful corpse,” eternally young yet fixed in a horizontal, motionless state.
- Surrounds herself with phantoms, dreams, and visions including historical figures, spirits, and imaginary visitors.

- She is complexly caught between sanity and madness, reality and fantasy, embodying a state of suspended animation.
- Her retreat to bed and isolation is linked to personal trauma: an unhappy marriage (Jock Cartwheel), abandonment, social humiliation, and a controlling father.

Mr. Spitzer (Joachim)

- Catherine's faithful but often ignored visitor, a semi-retired lawyer.
- He is a figure of reason, order, and routine, marked by absent-mindedness and a broken career after the death of his twin brother (Peron).
- Despite his marriage proposal being rejected by Catherine, he visits her regularly.
- He represents the tether to reality and the outside world.
- His relationship with Catherine is ambiguous; he is both her guardian and unrequited lover.

James, the Chauffeur

- An ex-convict and former servant who has abandoned the household but remains a figure in Catherine's dreams.
- Symbolizes loyalty, escape, and impending threat.
- Imagined as driving them endlessly to Alaska, plotting harm but never quite reaching the destination.

The Little Yellow Canary

- Catherine's only faithful companion, kept in a gilded cage.
- Symbolizes life, hope, and fragile continuity amidst decay and madness.
- Catherine believes her life is bound to the canary's survival.
- Mr. Spitzer secretly arranges for the canaries to be replaced to maintain the illusion of continuity.

An Egyptian Sailor

- Depicted vividly as "gold-turbaned, his face glistening like clouded water," immediately evoking an exotic and otherworldly presence.
- His arrival is marked by a sense of ambiguity and displacement.
- He is described as a lost traveler, both literally and metaphorically, crossing boundaries between worlds and times.
- The sailor's purpose is to find Mr. Spitzer.
- Despite the confusion and mistaken identity that ensues, the Egyptian's quest is sincere and urgent. He carries a piece of papyrus, which is later revealed to be a race

dope sheet, connecting him to earthly concerns such as horse racing and victory, yet his demeanor and context suggest he is more than just a mundane visitor.

- His presence introduces a collision between the “real world” and the mysterious, spectral realm inhabited by Catherine and her guests.
- The Egyptian Sailor symbolizes the crossing of boundaries: life and death, reality and dream, the past and the present.
- His lost voyage, caused by “ambiguities” such as misread stars and winds, mirrors Catherine’s own disorientation in time and space, encapsulating themes of fate, chance, and the unknowable.
- His dance of ecstatic excitement upon seeing Mr. Spitzer, and the subsequent confusion over identity, emphasize the fluidity of existence in this narrative.
- His interaction with Mr. Spitzer underscores the tension between the tangible and the ethereal, as Mr. Spitzer tries to convince him of the death of his brother, while Catherine embraces the coexistence of these two realms.
- The Egyptian’s presence unsettles Mr. Spitzer, reflecting a resistance to the intrusion of the supernatural or the past into his orderly, if somewhat diminished, life.
- Catherine’s support of the Egyptian Sailor, defending his reality and expressing fury at the servants’ neglect of him, reveals her own deep immersion in the dream world and her rejection of mundane reality.
- This dynamic portrays the Egyptian as a catalyst for revealing Catherine’s fractured state and the complex interplay between sanity and madness.
- He may also be a reference to “The Shipwrecked Sailor.” It is an ancient Egyptian tale, likely composed during the Middle Kingdom (c. 2040-1782 BCE), found on a papyrus scroll. It tells the story of a sailor who is shipwrecked and marooned on a mythical island, where he encounters a giant serpent and eventually returns home with tales and treasures.

Mr. Res Tacamah

- Mr. Res Tacamah’s characterization by Catherine as a “drug bottle with ears” implies a dual role: both as a source of the narcotic influence that enables her prolonged sleep-like state and as a silent witness or confidant to her fragmented consciousness and delirium.
- The figure’s “ears to hear her ravings” indicates that this presence is attuned to her incoherent, abstracted speech, thereby symbolizing the inanimate yet intimate object through which her mind communicates and seeks solace.
- It also underscores the isolation and detachment from reality experienced by Catherine, for her closest “companions” are non-human, immaterial entities or hallucinations rather than living persons.
- Mr. Res Tacamah, as a drug bottle, is part of the apparatus that maintains her “slumberous life,” preventing her madness from overtaking her by regulating her doses

of opium and sedatives.

- His presence reflects the complex interplay between dependency, control, and the fragile boundary between wakefulness and sleep that defines her existence.
- Mr. Res Tacamah is part of Catherine's dreamscape, a personification of the substances and hallucinations that populate her consciousness.
- He is described with a proper name, which humanizes the drug bottle and elevates its significance in her interior world, emphasizing how deeply embedded the opium experience is in the fabric of her identity and daily life.

Mr. Chandelier

- Mr. Chandelier can be seen as an anthropomorphized object, a personification of the chandelier itself.
- Catherine imagines him as her companion, "not always faithful," suggesting a capricious, elusive presence that mirrors the instability and unreliability of her dream world.
- This personification transforms an inanimate object into a character with agency and presence in her inner life, blurring the boundaries between reality and imagination.
- Mr. Chandelier is described with almost ghostly qualities: he has "seven lighted candles in his seven crystal hands," an image evoking mysticism and ritual, linking him to the theme of ritualistic control and orthodoxy that pervades Catherine's background, especially considering her father's "fantastic rituals each hour of day or night."
- The seven candles may also evoke the idea of illumination, yet in her world, this illumination is shadowed, uncertain, part of the "eternal twilight" that envelops her perception.
- Mr. Chandelier's presence also serves as a counterpoint to Catherine's physical paralysis and mental wandering. While she lies "horizontal," immobile, he is often depicted as moving between stillness and motion, reality and dream. This duality reflects Catherine's own suspended state between life and death, consciousness and oblivion.
- Mr. Chandelier is an emblematic figure embodying the interplay of light and shadow, life and death, presence and absence in her opium-induced limbo.
- Mr. Chandelier's "seven crystal hands" holding candles may symbolize the multiplicity of facets in Catherine's fractured consciousness and fragmented reality. Each candle can be interpreted as a flickering point of awareness, a fragile beacon in the "glassy surface" of her uncertain existence. Yet these lights are also delicate and impermanent, just as her world is "this play of illusion" where "all forms must change their shapes."

Catherine’s parents: mother, father and seeing eye dog

- Catherine’s mother suffers from a progressive hereditary blindness, which is emphasized repeatedly in the novel.
- This condition is not merely a physical ailment but also a metaphorical element that shapes her entire existence.
- Despite losing her sight gradually, she maintains an extraordinary awareness of her surroundings. The narrative highlights her ability to navigate the world with remarkable precision.
- This portrayal elevates her beyond being a passive victim of blindness; instead, she becomes a figure of resilience and heightened sensory perception, compensating for the loss of sight with other faculties.
- Her blindness also affects those around her deeply, especially her husband.
- The husband’s reaction to her blindness is poignant, he begins to wear a dark eyeshade, symbolically aligning himself with her experience of darkness, as if to share her loss or express his mourning for the light she has lost.
- The husband’s transformation is profound: his body is described metaphorically as “turning into starlight,” and when he eventually becomes blind himself, he relies on a Seeing Eye dog.
- The Seeing Eye dog, interestingly, is blind as well, yet it leads its master flawlessly, a symbolic reinforcement of the theme of navigating darkness through trust, adaptation, and interdependence.
- This shared blindness and the mutual care between the husband and wife deepen the portrayal of their relationship and the familial experience of blindness.
- Catherine’s father, too, is depicted as a figure who lived his last years in darkness, physically blind but mentally and emotionally attuned to his environment.
- He walks in the garden he planted for his blind wife, following carefully designed paths free of obstacles, suggesting both his love and his protective role.
- His actions, closing his eyes to sense flowers by texture and odor, reflect a profound adaptation to blindness and an intimate connection with the sensory world beyond vision.
- His death, alongside that of the old Seeing Eye dog, symbolizes the closing of a chapter marked by darkness but also by dignity and acceptance.

Research: Themes

Reality and Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality

- Catherine inhabits a world where dreams and hallucinations are often more “real” than the tangible world.
- The novel blurs boundaries between waking life and the dream state, questioning the nature of existence.
- Catherine’s perception that the real is the dream and the dream is the real reflects a universal human tendency to escape disappointing reality.

Life and Death / Suspension between States

See: Death and Mortality

- Catherine is described as a living corpse, suspended between life and death, awake and asleep.
- Her physical body is motionless, yet her mind roams freely through time, space, and memory.
- Death is never final. There are multiple selves, many dead canaries, and visitors from the spirit world.

Memory and Forgetting

See: Memory and the Past

- Catherine’s memories are fragmented, clouded, and often replaced by fantasy.
- Mr. Spitzer’s forgetfulness contrasts with her photographic recall of his movements and lost incidents.
- The past is both a refuge and a source of pain since she relives moments that never fully happened.

Madness and Sanity

See: Madness and Sanity

- Catherine’s mental state is ambiguous; she is at times lucid, at times delusional.
- Opium and drugs regulate her condition, creating a “scheduled madness” that preserves her life.
- Her madness is a form of self-preservation and rebellion against a brutal world.

Isolation and Dependency

See: Isolation and Connection

- Catherine is socially and physically isolated, confined to her bed.
- She depends on a select few (Mr. Spitzer, the canary, James in her imagination) for companionship.

- The household staff is largely dismissed or feared, emphasizing her detachment from ordinary life.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Birthmark on the Left Cheek

See: Pregnancy, Birth, and Children

- Invisible to others but deeply significant to Catherine.
- Represents hidden imperfection, shame, or a source of self-alienation.

Jewels and Pearls

See: Pearls and Jewels

- Pearls run through her fingers, symbolizing beauty, fragility, and the passage of time.
- Jewelry also symbolizes wealth and burden, hinting at Catherine’s inheritance and social position.

The Canary

See: Birds

- Life and hope in a cage; fragile and drugged, paralleling Catherine’s own condition.
- Symbolic of the precariousness of existence and the illusion of continuity.

The Egyptian Sailor

- A visitor representing death, memory, and the unknowable journey of life.
- His presence blurs the line between reality and fantasy.

The House and Its Rooms

See: The House

- Described as a shifting, labyrinthine space full of illusions, secret doors, and changing places.
- Symbolizes Catherine’s mind and the shifting nature of reality.

The Sea and Water Imagery

See: The Sea and Water

- Catherine is often associated with water, tides, and drowning.
- Symbolizes her immersion in dreams, unconsciousness, and the fluidity of existence.

The Clock and Time

See: Clocks and Watches · Keys, Doors, and Locks

- The twelve goblets and chairs represent the passage of time and the ritualized nature of existence.
- Time is both suspended and fragmented in Catherine's world.

Two Sister Ravens

See: Birds · Twins and Doubles

- The ravens appear symbolically and thematically as mysterious, almost otherworldly figures that contribute to the surreal, dreamlike atmosphere surrounding Catherine and her suspended existence between life and death.
- The ravens are described as "two sister ravens who had created the universe." This description situates the ravens not merely as birds but as powerful, almost divine entities involved in cosmic creation and the shaping of reality itself.
- Their role emphasizes Catherine's immersion in a realm where boundaries between reality and illusion, life and death, are blurred.
- The ravens, linked with creation, suggest a world that is constantly in flux, shaped by mysterious forces beyond ordinary human perception.
- The ravens belong to the same inverted world in which Catherine asks whether, if servants were known as she was known, their lives would not appear "more monstrous than hers and terribly extra-human."
- Their presence as mythic creators contrasts with Catherine's physical stasis and withdrawal, underlining the tension between dynamic cosmic forces and her horizontal, dream-bound existence.
- Ravens traditionally symbolize mystery, death, and prophecy in literature and myth, fitting well with Catherine's liminal state caught between life and death, and her visions of phantoms, spirits, and the dead.
- Their "sister" relationship may also suggest duality and companionship in a lonely, spectral world where Catherine resides, further personifying the enigmatic and haunting nature of her dreams.

Research: Resources

- Catherine comes from the Greek Aikaterine, a name of uncertain origin. From early times it was linked with the Greek katharos, "pure," which is why it is often glossed as "pure" or "innocent." See On the names (Ch 2).
- Helena, Catherine's middle name, is the Latin form of the Greek Helen, often glossed as "torch" or "the bright one." It is the name of Helen of Troy.
- Snowden, Catherine's maiden name, comes from the Old English for "snow hill."

- Cartwheel, the wheel of a cart, is an English word from the late fourteenth century. The acrobat's sideways handspring is recorded from 1861, and cartwheel as a verb from 1907.
- "the prosaic, fusty, busty old nursemaid": In the opium lady's house Young was the prosaic one. Offered opium every evening, she always refused, and Weissenbach called her "the prosaic sprite… because I didn't need drugs to dream" (Marguerite Young, interview with Charles Ruas, WBAI radio, New York). See Catherine Cartwheel.
- "her red, marcelled hair": Marcelled hair is a hair styling technique using hot curling tongs to make deep, regular waves. The Paris hairdresser François Marcel Grateau introduced the method in 1872. It was a popular style for women's hair in the 1920s often used with a bob cut.
    - Miss MacIntosh "is made up of three or four spinsters in Indianapolis" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). "One of them wore a wig. When I was a little girl, she fascinated us all with her wig and her spare wig. She had two wigs," and "Ethel Barrymore sort of influenced my idea of the way Miss McIntosh walked" (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). Susan Neville records a woman in Young's Indianapolis house who "wore a spare wig to keep her head warm, like Miss MacIntosh" (Susan Neville, "Where the Landscape Moved Like Waves," in Sailing the Inland Sea, Indiana University Press, 2007).
- "by anything protean": Proteus is the shape-shifting old man of the sea in Homer's Odyssey, who turns into a lion, a serpent, a leopard, a boar, running water, and a tree to escape Menelaus. From him comes the word protean, "ever-changing." Catherine expects "that all forms must change their shapes." See Homer's Epics.
- "for the opium dreams surrounding her had provided no pillars of strength": Catherine Cartwheel was drawn from a woman Young knew, Minna K. Weissenbach, "the opium lady of Hyde Park" (David O. Dowling, "The Guru," in A Delicate Aggression: Savagery and Survival in the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Yale University Press, 2019). As a Depression student at the University of Chicago, Young was sent to Billings Hospital to read Shakespeare aloud to her, and she read to her for two years, "often during her opium dreams." Weissenbach had been a patron of Hull House and of Poetry magazine and a friend of Harriet Monroe and Thornton Wilder, and Young dedicated Moderate Fable to her (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). She was addicted "not through choice, but through medication" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). When Young told Wilder she was writing about her, he answered, "as a way of revealing the unconscious." Only near the end of the book did Young see that the opium lady was also, "in a way," her own mother, "a kind of Titania-like dreamer" (Marguerite Young, interview with Charles Ruas, WBAI radio, New York). See Catherine Cartwheel and The History of Opium.
- "Heavily laden with jewels as a Greek corpse": The ancient Greeks often buried their dead with jewelry, and the richest graves are famous for it. At Mycenae in 1876

Heinrich Schliemann opened royal shaft graves where the bodies lay covered in gold diadems, cups, and death masks, among them the so-called Mask of Agamemnon.

- “as filled with visitors as the Grand Central Station”: Grand Central Terminal in New York City opened in 1913, replacing the earlier Grand Central Depot and Grand Central Station, and the old name stuck. It is often said that some 750,000 people pass through it each day, and “like Grand Central Station” became the stock phrase for a crowded place.
- “some from the shores of Hades, voices of the dead”: In Greek mythology the underworld was ruled by Hades, god of the dead and a son of Cronus and Rhea. The dead had to cross the river Styx or Acheron to reach his realm. See Greek Mythology.
- “faded movie stars of the silent flicker films”: Silent films, made from the 1890s until sound arrived in the late 1920s, had no synchronized recorded sound or dialogue. Early projection flickered on the screen, so the movies were called “flickers,” later “flicks.” They were accompanied by live music.
- “imaginary telephone operators plugging in at imaginary switchboards”: A telephone switchboard was a vertical panel of jacks. Operators, most of them young women, connected each call by hand, plugging a cord into the right jack.
- “drowned pearl-divers”: Pearl-divers recover pearls from wild mollusks (oysters or mussels) in the sea or fresh water, holding their breath on long dives. Pearls and pearl-divers return throughout the chapter in Catherine’s “numberless pearls.”
- Oedipus was a mythical Greek king of Thebes. He unknowingly fulfilled the prophecy that he would kill his father and marry his mother, bringing disaster to his city and family. His story is best known from Sophocles’ Oedipus the King, and Freud named the “Oedipus complex” after him.
- Troy was the city in Asia Minor that the Greeks, led by King Agamemnon, besieged for ten years. Homer’s Iliad tells of part of the tenth year of the war, and the city’s fall is told in the Odyssey and in Virgil’s Aeneid. See Homer’s Epics.
- “New England spinsters with faces checkered like chessboards”: New England spinsters like Susan B. Anthony and Louisa May Alcott were famous. Spinster first named a woman who spun wool or flax for a living, and from the seventeenth century it became the legal term for an unmarried woman. In nineteenth-century New England, many unmarried women were regarded as “highly moral and fully womanly creatures,” and many wrote in their journals that they “remained unmarried not because of individual shortcomings but because they didn’t find the one ‘who could be all things to the heart.’” (Wikipedia) See Women’s Suffrage.
- “a blemish, a stain, a birthmark”: Birthmarks have been called everything from an Angel Kiss to a Mark of the Devil. They have been feared and also seen as lucky omens with special meaning. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s story “The Birth-Mark” (1843) tells of a scientist who cannot bear the small mark on his beautiful wife’s cheek and kills her trying to remove it. See American Writers.

    - The birthmark was Weissenbach's: "One was that she had an almost invisible birthmark, and this Chicago lady did, and she always said that she turned her cheek toward the shadow. She would never allow that part of her face to be seen. Although I never saw the birthmark" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965).
- "fine white rice powder": Face powder made from finely ground rice was used for centuries, from the white makeup of Japanese geisha to the drawing rooms of Europe, to give the skin a pale, even finish.
- "numberless pearls running through her ivory-colored fingers": The pearl is the only gem made by a living creature, layered around a wound or irritant, and Catherine, who hides her own blemish, runs "numberless pearls" through her fingers all through the chapter. Pearls symbolize wisdom acquired through experience, purity, generosity, integrity, and loyalty. They are believed to attract wealth and luck as well as offer protection. See Pearls and Jewels.
- "her lunar hysteria": The phrase joins two old beliefs about women. Hysteria comes from the Greek hystera, "womb," because doctors long blamed women's nervous disorders on the womb, and the moon was thought to rule the womb's monthly cycle. No reliable lunar effects on human behavior are known, though the moon's cycle does govern the spawning of many sea animals, such as corals. Some studies suggest that around 30% of women may start their period near the new moon, but this is likely due to random chance, as statistically, a certain percentage of cycles would be expected to coincide with any given phase of the moon. The idea of a connection between the moon and menstruation is an old one, potentially stemming from the fact that the terms "menstruation" and "menses" are derived from words meaning month and moon, respectively. While a direct link between lunar phases and menstruation is not supported by current research, some studies suggest the moon may have an indirect influence on sleep and mood, which could indirectly affect the menstrual cycle for some individuals.
- The idea of the moon influencing human behavior has been around for centuries and is deeply ingrained in many cultures. There is no scientific evidence to support the idea of lunar hysteria, also known as lunacy or the belief that the full moon causes erratic behavior or mental instability. While the term "lunacy" is derived from the Latin word "luna" for moon, and the belief in a lunar effect on human behavior is ancient, numerous studies have debunked this connection.
- "the needle pits in her arm, the opium dosages": The hypodermic syringe was developed in the 1850s by Alexander Wood in Scotland and Charles Pravaz in France. Injected morphine, the chief alkaloid of opium, soon became a common treatment for pain and "nerves," and the marks of the needle a sign of addiction.
- Opium and its derivatives, such as laudanum and morphine, were sold freely in America throughout the nineteenth century in patent medicines and on prescription. By the late 1800s women made up about sixty percent of American opiate addicts, many of them introduced to the drug by doctors treating "female complaints." The Harrison

Narcotics Act of 1914 brought the sale of opiates under federal control. See On opium (Ch 2), Opium, and The History of Opium.

- “the life-sized chessmen moving in the garden”: Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking-Glass (1871) turns a whole countryside into a chessboard, where Alice becomes a pawn and the chess pieces walk and talk. Catherine’s house has “magnified chessmen,” and Mr. Spitzer finds himself moved about like a piece in her game. See Alice in Wonderland.
- “two sister ravens who had created the universe”: Ravens are creators in several mythologies. In the stories of the Haida, Tlingit, and other peoples of the Pacific Northwest, Raven brings light to the world by stealing the sun, moon, and stars. In Norse myth, Odin’s two ravens, Huginn and Muninn, “Thought” and “Memory,” fly over the world each day and return to tell him everything they have seen. See Birds.
- Edgar Allan Poe wrote the poem, The Raven, as a narrative, without intentional allegory or didacticism. The main theme of the poem is one of undying devotion. The scholar experiences a perverse conflict between desire to forget and desire to remember. He seems to get some pleasure from focusing on loss. He assumes that the word “Nevermore” is the raven’s “only stock and store,” and yet he continues to ask it questions, knowing what the answer will be. His questions, then, are purposely self-deprecating and further incite his feelings of loss. Poe leaves it unclear whether the raven actually knows what it is saying or whether it really intends to cause a reaction in the poem’s narrator. The scholar begins as “weak and weary,” becomes regretful and grief-stricken, before passing into a frenzy and, finally, madness. Christopher F. S. Maligec suggests the poem is a type of elegiac paraclausithyron, an ancient Greek and Roman poetic form consisting of the lament of an excluded, locked-out lover at the sealed door of his beloved. (Wikipedia) See Edgar Allan Poe.
- In traditional women’s roles the daughter passed from the protection of her father’s family to the husband. Jock, “a professional ne’er-do-well,” did not honor this tradition, and Catherine paid him a fortune to disappear.
- “Scaling the Jungfrau or Matterhorn”: The Jungfrau, “the Maiden,” is a peak in the Bernese Alps of Switzerland, first climbed in 1811. The saddle below it, the Jungfraujoch, has been reached by railway since 1912.
- Matterhorn is on the border between Switzerland and Italy. It was the last great Alpine peak to be climbed. On the first ascent in 1865, four of Edward Whymper’s party fell to their deaths on the way down, and the body of one was never found.
- “some fairy grotto of rock crystal chandeliers and musical stalactites”: Stalactites ring like bells when struck. In the 1950s, at Luray Caverns in Virginia, an inventor fitted the cave with the Great Stalacpipe Organ, which plays tunes by tapping the stalactites with rubber-tipped mallets.
- “wearing a white rose on his coat lapel”: The rose has significant meaning in various folk cultures and traditions, and each color of the rose can have different meanings. White: Purity, innocence, new beginnings, reverence, and remembrance. Jock

vanishes into the snow wearing the flower of remembrance, “so should be easily recognized.” See Roses and Flowers.

- The Dolomites are a mountain range in northeastern Italy, part of the Southern Alps, known for their pale limestone peaks.
- “all the furnitures of earth and choirs of obsessed angels being also only an idea in the mind of God, and God was dead or sleeping”: Young borrows the phrase from George Berkeley, who wrote in his Principles of Human Knowledge (1710) that “all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth” have no existence apart from being perceived, and that things go on existing when no one looks because they are held in the mind of God. Nietzsche declared in The Gay Science (1882) that “God is dead.” On Mount Carmel, Elijah mocked the prophets of Baal that their god must be busy or away, “or peradventure he sleepeth” (1 Kings 18:27). If God is “dead or sleeping,” as Catherine is, nothing holds the world in being but her own dreaming mind. See Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) and Nietzsche.
- “his factories having been conducted like clockwork, wheels within wheels”: The phrase comes from the prophet Ezekiel’s vision of the heavenly chariot: “their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel” (Ezekiel 1:16). It came to mean any intricate system of hidden motives and machinery. See The Bible.
- “a place set at his table for the wanderer angel”: Hebrews 13:2 reads, “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.” The verse recalls Abraham, who fed three strangers who proved to be messengers of God (Genesis 18). At the Passover seder a place and a cup are set for the prophet Elijah. Catherine’s father “would turn no beggar away from his door for fear it might be an angel in disguise.” See Angels and Archangels.
- “an angel who had come from Tarsus”: Tarsus was the capital of the Roman province of Cilicia. It is the birthplace of Paul the Apostle, the great traveler of the early church, whose journeys are told in the Acts of the Apostles.
- “had divided the waters from the earth and had created great whales”: Genesis 1:9-10 tells how God gathered the waters together and let the dry land appear, and Genesis 1:21 reads, “And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth.” See Genesis.
- “the twelve goblets for the twelve hours in their places”: The number twelve has been significant in religions and nature. In nature there are about twelve lunar months in a solar year, and Jupiter takes about twelve years to circle the sun. The Western and Chinese zodiacs both have twelve signs. In Greek myth there are twelve Olympians and twelve Titans, and Hercules carries out twelve labors. In Aeschylus’s Eumenides, Athena calls a jury of Athenian citizens, often counted as twelve, the number still used for American trial juries. In the Bible Ishmael has twelve sons, and Jacob has twelve sons who are the ancestors of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jesus chooses twelve Apostles, the Book of Revelation returns to the number again and again, and

Christmas has its twelve days. The house also holds “twelve grand pianos,” and no one ever plays them.

- “She was the agnostic”: An agnostic is someone who believes that the existence or non-existence of a god or ultimate reality is unknown or unknowable. They neither affirm nor deny the existence of a higher power, holding that the truth about such matters is inaccessible to human understanding. Agnosticism is primarily concerned with the possibility of knowledge rather than the belief in a deity. It focuses on whether or not humans can have knowledge about the existence or nature of a god, not whether they believe in one. Agnostics typically acknowledge that there is no definitive proof either for or against the existence of God or other supernatural beings. Agnosticism doesn’t necessarily mean a lack of spirituality or belief in something greater than oneself. Some agnostics may hold spiritual beliefs or practices while still maintaining that the ultimate reality is unknowable. The word was coined by the biologist Thomas Henry Huxley in 1869.
- “the harpers harped, and the seas were turned to glass”: Both images come from the Book of Revelation, “I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps” (Revelation 14:2), and “I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire” (Revelation 15:2). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “Mr. Res Tacamah, the drug bottle”: Res is Latin for “thing,” and the Rx on a prescription stands for the Latin recipe, “take.” Tacamah is a form of tacamahac, a strong-smelling resin from the balsam poplar and certain tropical trees, used in making ointments and incense. See Mr. Res Tacamah.
- “proud Bostonians, Platonists of the period of the intellectual flowering of Athens”: Boston called itself “the Athens of America,” and Van Wyck Brooks’s The Flowering of New England (1936) told the story of its literary golden age. Ralph Waldo Emerson, who wrote that “Plato is philosophy, and philosophy, Plato,” and Bronson Alcott, a devoted Platonist who led public “Conversations,” were among its leaders.
- Platonism is the philosophy of Plato which affirms the existence of abstract objects, the Forms, which are asserted to exist in a third realm distinct from both the sensible external world and from the internal world of consciousness. It is opposed by nominalism, which holds that only individual things exist. See Plato and Platonism.
- “centaurs with lilies in their mouths”: The centaur of Greek mythology has the upper body of a human and the lower body and legs of a horse. Most centaurs were wild, but Chiron was wise and taught Achilles and Asclepius.
- “great frogs with jewels in their foreheads”: An old belief held that the toad carried a precious stone, the toadstone, in its head, a cure for poison. Shakespeare used it in As You Like It: “Sweet are the uses of adversity, / Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous, / Wears yet a precious jewel in his head.” See Shakespeare.
- “He did not believe in Fate but in self-determination”: Fate is the development of events beyond a person’s control, regarded as determined by a supernatural power. Among early Christians fate was approached in different ways. One approach is “divine omnicausality” where the assumption would be that God causes every creaturely event

that occurs and in this way exercises comprehensive control over the minutest aspects of his creatures' activities. See Fate and Chance.

- Self-determination, as Mr. Spitzer means it, is the power of a person to decide his own course, the free will that philosophers set against fate and determinism. In psychology, self-determination is concerned with the motivation behind choices people make and the degree to which an individual's behavior is self-motivated and self-determined.
- Joachim, Mr. Spitzer's first name, comes from the Hebrew Yehoyakim, "raised up by God" or "God will establish." In Christian tradition Joachim is the father of the Virgin Mary.
- Peron, the name of Mr. Spitzer's dead twin, is a form of Peter, from the Greek petros, "rock." See Peron Spitzer and Twins and Doubles.
- "a bed she imagined as a swan boat": The Swan Boats in Boston are pedal-powered pleasure boats, each with a great swan at the stern, that carry passengers around the lagoon in the Boston Public Garden. They have been run by the same family since 1877, inspired by Wagner's opera Lohengrin, in which a knight arrives in a boat drawn by a swan.
- "he had written only silent music": In the philosophy of music, idealists hold that musical works are mental entities, imaginary objects that exist in the mind of the composer or listener. John Keats wrote in "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1819), "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter." See Music, Sound, and Silence.
- "a gambler, a spender of borrowed money, a quick suicide, a four-flusher": Peron is the reckless, worldly twin, "very different from cautious Mr. Spitzer." The good and bad twin, or the twins who are mistaken for each other, run through literature from Jacob and Esau to Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors.
- Alexander Pope was an English poet of the eighteenth century, best known for The Rape of the Lock, An Essay on Man, and his translations of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. A childhood illness, probably tuberculosis of the spine, left him hunchbacked and about four and a half feet tall, and in pain for the rest of his life.
- Lady Mary Wortley Montagu was a writer who challenged the social attitudes of her time toward women and their intellectual growth. Her letters from Turkey, where her husband was ambassador, are among the classics of travel writing, and she brought the practice of smallpox inoculation to England. Pope was smitten with her and wrote her passionate letters, but she did not return his feelings, and after their quarrel he attacked her in his verse.
- Lord Byron was an English poet and leading figure in the Romantic movement of his era. He was born with a deformity of his foot which caused him to limp. In the summer of 1816, Byron, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Mary Shelley, who wrote Frankenstein that summer, were a close circle at Lake Geneva. See Romantic Poets.
- "Shelley's bright hair like a comet in the wind": Percy Bysshe Shelley, the Romantic poet of "Ode to the West Wind" and "Ozymandias," drowned when his boat went down

in a storm off the Italian coast in 1822. His body was burned on the beach, and his friend Edward Trelawny said he snatched the heart from the flames.

- “blind Milton dictating Paradise Lost to those indifferent daughters”: John Milton was completely blind by 1652 and composed Paradise Lost (1667) in his head, dictating it to whoever was at hand, including his daughters. Early biographers reported that the daughters resented the work, and that he had them read aloud to him in languages they did not understand. See Milton and Paradise Lost.
- Intertextuality is the shaping of a text’s meaning by another text, either through deliberate compositional strategies such as quotation, allusion, calque, plagiarism, translation, pastiche or parody, or by interconnections between similar or related works perceived by an audience or reader of the text. These references are sometimes made deliberately and depend on a reader’s prior knowledge and understanding of the referent, but the effect of intertextuality is not always intentional and is sometimes inadvertent. Often associated with strategies employed by writers working in imaginative registers (fiction, poetry, and drama and even non-written texts like performance art and digital media), intertextuality may now be understood as intrinsic to any text. (Wikipedia) Catherine’s bedroom, crowded with Pope, Byron, Shelley, and Milton, is a small instance of Young’s method. See Catherine Cartwheel in Intertextuality in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling.
- “the Boston South Station”: South Station, opened in 1899, was the busiest railroad station in the world in the early twentieth century, the terminal for trains to New York and the south.
- “ski trains of the vanished skiers”: In 1931 the Boston and Maine Railroad began running “snow trains” that carried skiers out of Boston to the hills of New Hampshire, a fashion that lasted into the 1950s.
- “her in the seventh crystal drawing room”: Seven has many cultural and religious meanings: it is a significant number in almost every major religion (Christianity, God rested on the seventh day; seven symbolizes the unity of the four corners of the Earth with the Holy Trinity; it is repeated in the Book of Revelation); it is associated with luck and magical properties. See On the number seven (Ch 2). Catherine’s seventh drawing room joins the chapter’s other sevens, Mr. Chandelier’s “seven lighted candles in his seven crystal hands” and the octopus “wearing seven ruby crowns.”
- “is there or is there not an invisible elephant in the corridor”: The elephant is famous for its memory, as in the proverb “an elephant never forgets,” and Catherine’s elephant can “remember everything.” In Ivan Krylov’s fable “The Inquisitive Man” (1814), a visitor to a museum describes every tiny insect but never notices the elephant, a story often named as a forerunner of “the elephant in the room.”
    - The elephant was Weissenbach’s too. “I was with her when she entertained an imaginary elephant,” Young said, an elephant “in the hallway,” and when Adlai Stevenson spoke in a campaign of an invisible elephant, she wrote to tell him about it (Marguerite Young, interview with Charles Ruas, WBAI radio, New York).

- “But the burden of proof, Mr. Spitzer had always hesitantly maintained”: In law, the burden of proof lies with the party who makes a claim, and the old maxim says that the one who asserts must prove. Mr. Spitzer, the lawyer, places it on Catherine, “who had seen the invisible.” The phrase echoes Hebrews 11:27, where Moses “endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”
- “the decapitated, bleeding head of John the Baptist”: John the Baptist was an itinerant preacher and revered as a major religious figure. The gospels portray John as the precursor of Jesus in Christianity. Herod had him beheaded at the request of Salome, the daughter of Herodias, and his head was brought “in a charger” (Matthew 14:8). See The Bible.
    - “I was literally with her when she had a long conversation with the head of John the Baptist” (Marguerite Young, interview with Charles Ruas, WBAI radio, New York).
- “Her foot was but the monument in a desert”: The image recalls Shelley’s “Ozymandias” (1818), where a traveler finds “Two vast and trunkless legs of stone / Stand in the desert,” all that is left of a king’s statue. See Romantic Poets.
- “treeless campagna”: The Campagna is a low-lying area surrounding Rome in the Lazio region of central Italy, once a famously empty, malarial plain dotted with the ruins of Roman tombs and aqueducts.
- “snakes and headless horsemen”: The headless horseman has appeared in folklore around the world since the Middle Ages. The best-known American version is Washington Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820), where the horseman chases the schoolmaster Ichabod Crane. See American Writers.
- “the burning of unbaptized babes and of green leaves in Purgatory”: The Irish maid mixes two teachings. In Catholic belief, Purgatory is the temporary state where the souls of the saved are purified before heaven. Unbaptized infants were not sent there. Augustine held that they shared the mildest punishment of the damned, and later theologians placed them in Limbo, a place of natural happiness without the sight of God. See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “a game of chance, a number’s racket, a baseball game of which the score was already known”: In 1919 eight players of the Chicago White Sox took money from gamblers to lose the World Series, the “Black Sox” scandal, a baseball game whose score was known before it was played.
- Mr. Spitzer wears “his brother’s blue-stoned ring” on his finger, and elsewhere in the novel he wears other articles of clothing and accessories that belonged to his dead brother Peron and to Jock Cartwheel.
- “the Boston Public Garden”: The Boston Public Garden, established in 1837, is a park in the heart of Boston, next to Boston Common, and the first public botanical garden in America. Together with the Common it is the first link in the Emerald Necklace, the chain of Boston parks completed by Frederick Law Olmsted.
- “a woman all in white, her face shrouded by a white umbrella”: In legend, a woman in white often foretells a tragedy or impending death, unrequited love, or betrayal by a

husband or fiancé. The white dress symbolizes purity and also loss.

- The Woman in White is Wilkie Collins's fifth published novel, published in 1860 and set from 1849 to 1850. It is a mystery novel and falls under the genre of "sensation novels." A theme of the story is the unequal position of married women in law at the time. Laura Glyde's interests have been neglected by her uncle, and her fortune of £20,000 (then an enormous sum of money) by default falls to her husband on her death. Collins dedicated this novel to Bryan Procter, poet and Commissioner for Lunacy, and was inspired by the case of Louisa Nottidge, who was abducted and imprisoned for the monetary convenience of her family. Women could be imprisoned in "lunatic asylums" if they became embarrassing or inconvenient to their husbands or fathers. In addition, before the passage of the Married Women's Property Act 1882, all of a wife's assets passed automatically to her husband. William Wilkie Collins criticized the institution of marriage. He had relationships with two women: the widow Caroline Graves, with whom he lived for most of his life, treating her daughter as his own, and the younger Martha Rudd, with whom he had three children. (Wikipedia) See On the Woman in White (Ch 2).
- "Perhaps the woman was the swan": In Greek myth, Zeus came to Leda in the form of a swan, and in folk tales across Europe swan maidens shed their feathered skins to become women, the story behind Tchaikovsky's ballet Swan Lake (1877). The woman in white on the swan boat may be the swan herself, another of the chapter's shifting forms.
- "stopped at the top of a rusted ferris wheel": The engineer George Ferris built the first Ferris wheel for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893. It stood 264 feet high, and its cars each held sixty people.
- "Oblivion was his brother": In Hesiod's Theogony, Sleep (Hypnos) and Death (Thanatos) are twin brothers, the sons of Night. The river Lethe, "forgetfulness," flows through the underworld, and the dead drink from it to forget their lives. Mr. Spitzer, whose twin is dead, has oblivion for a brother. See Greek Mythology.
- "a secret detective to trace him, a shadow, a private eye, a gumshoe": The Pinkerton National Detective Agency, founded in Chicago in 1850, took as its emblem an open eye with the motto "We Never Sleep," and the phrase "private eye" is often traced to it. Gumshoe comes from the soft rubber-soled shoes that let a detective follow without a sound. See The Chicago Detective.
- "upon which boxer would triumph, the black or the white": In 1908 Jack Johnson became the first Black heavyweight champion of the world, and white promoters spent years searching for a "Great White Hope" to beat him. When Johnson defeated the former champion James J. Jeffries in 1910, riots broke out in cities across the country. Mr. Spitzer lays "his bet on the black man." See Society, Class, and Race.
- "on the black rooster in the black night": The rooster is symbolic in many different religions. In Christianity it is admired for courage and perseverance. It was used for ceremony and sacrifice. The cock's crow announces the dawn, and here "the golden feathers of light had streamed through the window" and the bet was lost. In the

Gospels Peter denies Jesus three times before the cock crows. See Gambling and Playing Cards.

- “a lead nickel into an old-time player piano”: A lead nickel was a counterfeit or slug, a worthless coin. Coin-operated player pianos and orchestrions, which played piano, drums, and pipes all at once, filled saloons and amusement halls from the 1890s through the 1920s, “one no doubt playing an entire orchestra.”
- “like some old Pan among the silver reeds”: In Ovid’s Metamorphoses, the nymph Syrinx flees the goat-god Pan and is turned into reeds, and Pan makes his pipes from them. Elizabeth Barrett Browning retold the story in “A Musical Instrument”: “What was he doing, the great god Pan, / Down in the reeds by the river?” See Greek Mythology.
- “such as a dusty sparrow falling”: Jesus says of the sparrows, “one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (Matthew 10:29), and Hamlet answers his friend’s fears with “There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow.” Catherine later counts “falling sparrows, falling leaves, drops of water, grains of sand.” See Shakespeare.
- “his trust in law of which he knew no jot”: Jesus says in Matthew 5:18, “Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law.” A jot is the Greek iota, the smallest letter, so Mr. Spitzer knows not even the smallest letter of the law he trusts.
- Solipsism is a philosophical theory that posits the only thing a person can be sure exists is their own mind and consciousness. It suggests that the external world, other people, and even one’s own body might be mere illusions or figments of the imagination. Solipsism is an extreme form of subjective idealism, meaning it focuses primarily on the individual’s own subjective experience. Solipsism argues that knowledge of anything outside one’s own mind is uncertain or impossible. A central question in solipsism is the problem of other minds, which asks how anyone can know for sure that other people have minds and experiences like their own. Solipsism contrasts the certainty of one’s own mental state (thoughts, feelings, memories) with the uncertainty of anything outside of it, like the physical world or other conscious beings. There can be different interpretations of solipsism, including metaphysical solipsism (where only one’s own mind is real), epistemological solipsism (where nothing outside one’s own mind can be proved to exist), and methodological solipsism (where the self is the starting point for understanding reality). While the term solipsism can sometimes be used in a psychological context, it should be distinguished from the formal philosophical idea. “Solipsism syndrome” is a term used to describe a feeling of isolation and detachment from the outside world, which may be related to solipsistic thinking but is not a diagnosed condition.
- “that she had not been artfully tricked into believing that she lived when she was already dead”: In the first of his Meditations (1641), René Descartes imagines “some malicious demon of the utmost power and cunning” who has employed all his energies to deceive him, so that the sky, the earth, and his own body are only delusions. Catherine’s world is “this deception played upon her.” See Descartes and Dualism.

- “How did she know that they were not both dead”: Catherine asks whether she and Mr. Spitzer are both dead and whether anyone could “determine whether she had ever lived at all.” The question of what exists apart from an observer takes up one of the strangest aspects of modern physics. In quantum mechanics, the act of observation affects what is observed at the most fundamental levels. In 1935 Erwin Schrödinger imagined a cat sealed in a box with a poison triggered by chance, which by the rules of the theory is both alive and dead until someone opens the box. See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory.
- “ephemeral as the Dog star”: The Dog Star, Sirius, is the brightest star in the night sky. Its name comes from the Greek seirios, “glowing” or “scorching,” and it rises with the sun in the “dog days” of late summer. See Moon and Stars.
- “these great balloon fishes trailing their negligee streamers”: Weissenbach saw them as well: “Balloon fish would be, you know, floating over her bed” (Marguerite Young, interview with Charles Ruas, WBAI radio, New York), “the visitations of the elephant or balloon fish swimming over her bed” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). See Catherine Cartwheel.
- “these drowned Medusas”: In Greek mythology Medusa, whose name means “guardian” or “protectress,” is the most famous of the monster figures known as Gorgons, whose look turned people to stone. Because a jellyfish trails its tentacles like snaky hair, naturalists call its bell-shaped swimming form a medusa, which suits Catherine’s undersea vision of “balloon fishes” and “giant crabs.”
- “these old apostles walking around the town clock and striking a bell”: The Prague astronomical clock is a medieval astronomical clock located in Prague. The clock was first installed in 1410 and is the oldest astronomical clock still operating. Its moving figures of the Apostles, added in 1787 to 1791, file past two small windows every hour, the “Walk of the Apostles.”
- “Mr. Spitzer with his Inverness, the great cape sloping from his shoulders”: An Inverness is a man’s overcoat with a long cape over the shoulders, worn in the late nineteenth century and best known now from pictures of Sherlock Holmes. It is named for Inverness, the chief town of the Scottish Highlands.
- “the inscrutable stars without principle or steersman or dead steersman”: The phrase calls back to Chapter 1, where Vera names Miss MacIntosh “the dead steersman,” after Palinurus, the helmsman of Aeneas who fell asleep and was lost overboard. In Catherine’s universe no one steers at all. See the Chapter 1 resources.
- “the rich who dreamed they were poor, the poor yearning for unjust wealth”: Catherine’s list sets the rich who play at poverty, as Marie Antoinette played milkmaid in her toy village at Versailles, beside the poor who dream of riches. People dream or fantasize and strive for something more than themselves or their present circumstances. Even if people seem to have it all there is still something else out there that they imagine would make it better. For the poor this may be the only way to break free of their poverty and lack of access.

- “the left-wing political movement”: Left-wing politics supports social equality and egalitarianism often in opposition to social hierarchy. The terms left and right date from the French Revolution, when supporters of the king sat on the right of the assembly and his opponents on the left.
- “the right wing of the dove”: Young turns the political right wing back into a bird’s wing. The dove is the bird of peace that returned to Noah’s ark with an olive leaf (Genesis 8:11) and the form in which the Holy Spirit descended at Jesus’s baptism (Matthew 3:16), so the phrase sets the politics of left and right beside a wing of peace.
- “the rose petals which were falling on the other side of the world and which should make a loud noise in an empty room”: One reading takes the falling rose petals as bombs falling on another country.
- The image also anticipates the butterfly effect. That idea from chaos theory describes how a small change in initial conditions can lead to drastically different outcomes in a complex system. It highlights the interconnectedness of events, suggesting that seemingly insignificant actions can trigger large, unpredictable consequences. The meteorologist Edward Lorenz described the effect in 1963 and named it in a 1972 talk, “Does the Flap of a Butterfly’s Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?” Ray Bradbury had already told such a story in “A Sound of Thunder” (1952), where a time traveler steps on a prehistoric butterfly and changes the future.
- “Brooklyn Bridge like a purple lace glove reaching through the darkness”: The Brooklyn Bridge, designed by John A. Roebling, finished by his son Washington and Washington’s wife, Emily, and opened in 1883, is a hybrid cable-stayed suspension bridge in New York City that connects the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn. Hart Crane made it the central symbol of his long poem The Bridge (1930). Catherine and James are “always crossing Brooklyn Bridge” later in the chapter. See American Writers.
- “Times Square lighted with a thousand lights”: Times Square is a major commercial intersection, tourist destination, entertainment center, and neighborhood in the Midtown Manhattan section of New York City. It took its name in 1904 from The New York Times, and its electric signs made it “the Great White Way.”
- “Roman fountains splashing in lonely court yards”: Rome has fifty monumental fountains and hundreds of smaller fountains with over 2,000 fountains in all, more than any other city in the world.
- “obelisks and domes”: Obelisks are tall, four-sided, narrow tapering monuments which end in a pyramid-like shape at the top. The ancient Egyptians raised them at temple gates as symbols of the sun god. Rome holds thirteen ancient obelisks, the most of any city, eight of them carried from Egypt.
- Domes are an architectural element that resembles the hollow upper half of a sphere. They have crowned tombs, temples, and seats of government, and the dome of the Pantheon in Rome, completed about 125 A.D., was long the largest in the world.
- “the rabbits dreaming of the rabbit god”: In Chinese folk religion, Tu’er Shen, the Rabbit God, is the patron of love between men, first described in an eighteenth-century tale by

Yuan Mei. Chinese legend also places a Jade Rabbit on the moon, pounding the elixir of immortality.

- “perfume of Oriental hanging gardens where hung the housemaids”: The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, said to have been built by King Nebuchadnezzar II, were one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, though no trace of them has been found. Young turns the wonder into a grim pun.
- “luna moths and glow-worms”: The luna moth is a large, pale green North American moth with long trailing tails on its hind wings. The adult has no mouth and lives only about a week. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “Why had her father not allowed to any woman in his house a higher education”: Colleges for women were still new in the nineteenth century. Mount Holyoke opened as a seminary in 1837, Vassar in 1861, and Wellesley and Smith in 1875, and Radcliffe began as the Harvard Annex in 1879. Instead Catherine was given “walking, dancing, surf-riding, horsemanship, harp-playing, tennis.” See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “an octopus wearing seven ruby crowns or only old, moving Mr. Chandelier with seven lighted candles in his seven crystal hands”: The Book of Revelation shows “a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads” (Revelation 12:3), and a vision of the Son of Man standing among “seven golden candlesticks,” holding “in his right hand seven stars” (Revelation 1:12-16). See Mr. Chandelier and Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “charted as on a mariner’s chart which shows the course of a voyage through waters which remain unknown”: Old sea charts filled their unknown waters with monsters and whirlpools. The Carta Marina of Olaus Magnus (1539) shows sea serpents and whales attacking ships off Scandinavia, and the Hunt-Lenox Globe of about 1510 carries the Latin warning “HC SVNT DRACONES,” “here are dragons.”
- “the sum of all the parts exceeded the sum, though there had been no mistake in addition”: The saying that “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” is a paraphrase of Aristotle, who wrote in the Metaphysics that a whole is something beside its parts. Catherine, who can only “multiply, divide,” keeps her own arithmetic. See Aristotle.
- “this and its counterpart, a dark star, the other”: The Pythagorean philosopher Philolaus, in the fifth century B.C., taught that the earth circles a central fire along with a hidden Counter-Earth, the Antichthon, which no one can see because it always lies on the far side. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres.
- “a drowned Egyptian sailor, gold-turbaned”: The Egyptian may recall the “Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor,” a Middle Kingdom story preserved on a single papyrus now in the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg. In it a shipwrecked traveler, cast up on an enchanted island, meets a primordial god in the form of a great serpent, who gives him a gift of moral vision to carry home to Egypt. Further, Richard Mathews writes that this “oldest fantasy text contains archetypal narrative of the genre: an uninitiated hero on a sea journey is thrown off course by a storm, encounters an enchanted island, confronts a monster, and survives, wiser for the experience. . . .” The tale itself begins with a

framing device in which an attendant (“follower” or “the sailor”) tries to comfort his master, who is returning from an apparently failed expedition and is anxious about how the king will receive him. (Wikipedia) (The serpent calls himself the lord of Punt. The Land of Punt was an ancient kingdom, likely located in the Horn of Africa, that traded extensively with ancient Egypt. It was a source of valuable goods like gold, ebony, ivory, and aromatic resins, which were highly sought after by the Egyptians. While the exact location remains debated, current evidence points towards a coastal region encompassing parts of present-day Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, and northeast Sudan. The kingdom’s existence is primarily known through Egyptian records and depictions, particularly from the Middle and New Kingdom periods.) An attendant reassures him, advising him on how to behave before the king, and repeating the proverb, “The mouth of a man saves him.” To encourage his master, he tells a tale of a previous voyage of his in which he overcame disaster, including meeting with a god and the king. The tale ends with the master saying, “Do not make the excellent (that is, do not act arrogantly) my friend; why give water to a goose (literally, bird) at dawn before its slaughtering in the morning?” Young’s sailor is lost too, “not knowing his path,” his captain having misread “the rotations of the antique stars.” See On the Egyptian sailor (Ch 2), The Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor, and Ancient Egypt.
    - Young told Studs Terkel where the sailor began: “there was a boat which reached New York Harbor, and the captain of the crew thought that he should be in Boston Harbor. He had misread some of the signs, and I simply used that incident to bring in my own imagination about a drowned Egyptian sailor” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965).
- “a table of the second empire, a bishop’s stone chair”: The Second Empire was the reign of Napoleon III in France (1852 to 1870), whose heavy, gilded, richly upholstered style filled fashionable houses. A bishop’s chair is a cathedra, and the church that holds it is therefore a cathedral.
- “the auguries of soothsayers and of birds and of horses’ heads”: The Roman augurs read the will of the gods in the flight and feeding of birds. The historian Tacitus wrote in his Germania that the Germanic tribes kept sacred white horses and read omens in their neighing and snorting.
- “colder than Lapland in the celestial furies of winter”: Lapland is the northernmost region of Finland and also a province of Sweden. Both lie within Sápmi, the homeland of the Sámi people, which stretches across northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia’s Kola Peninsula, much of it above the Arctic Circle.
- “the schools of faceless dolphins which should follow in his wake, the great birds with teeth”: Birds with teeth once existed. In the 1870s the paleontologist Othniel Charles Marsh described Hesperornis and Ichthyornis, toothed seabirds of the Cretaceous, from fossils found in Kansas.
- “He should not be afraid of the minotaur”: The Minotaur is a mythical creature with the head and tail of a bull and body of a man. King Minos kept him in the Labyrinth built by Daedalus, and Theseus killed him and found his way out by following the thread

Ariadne gave him. Catherine's directions through her house, "turn to the right, turn to the left, circle back," are a labyrinth without a thread. See Greek Mythology.

- "a gramophone with Edison's first record": Thomas Edison invented the phonograph in 1877, and the first words he recorded, on a cylinder wrapped in tinfoil, were "Mary had a little lamb." Emile Berliner's gramophone of 1887 played flat discs instead of cylinders, so, strictly speaking, Edison's first record could not have played on a gramophone, one of the impossibilities of Catherine's house.
- "L'Illustration of a decade ago": L'Illustration was a weekly French newspaper published in Paris from 1843 to 1944. Catherine's copy lies open at the seventh page, covered with dust.
- "an ancient, mummified pharaoh wrapped in cloth of gold": Howard Carter's opening of the tomb of Tutankhamun in 1922 made the mummified pharaoh in his gold coffins a worldwide sensation and set off a fashion for all things Egyptian.
- "her bicycle built for two": The phrase comes from the song "Daisy Bell" (1892) by Harry Dacre: "But you'll look sweet upon the seat / Of a bicycle built for two."
- "the chauffeur whose uniform might well be that of a Hussar": Hussars were light cavalry that began in fifteenth-century Hungary and spread across Europe, famous for their braided jackets and fur-trimmed pelisses. Their dress became shorthand for military splendor, which is why a chauffeur's livery could be mistaken for one.
- "her beautiful White Steam Castle or her Packard or her Ford": The White Sewing Machine Company of Cleveland built steam-powered White automobiles from 1900 to 1911, among the finest cars of their day. President Taft used a White steamer at the White House. The company then made gasoline cars and, as the White Motor Company, trucks until 1980.
- Packard was an American luxury automobile made from 1899 to 1958. Its slogan was "Ask the Man Who Owns One." Henry Ford's Model T, made from 1908 to 1927, was its opposite, the car for everyone.
- "some old creature of the Sphinx or of the Roman Empire": The sphinx is a mythical creature with the head of a human and the body of a lion. The Great Sphinx of Giza guards the pyramids, and the Greek Sphinx of Thebes asked travelers a riddle and devoured those who failed it, until Oedipus answered.
- Mr. Spitzer guesses that the Egyptian is "some old creature of the Sphinx or of the Roman Empire," and the two belong together. Egypt became a Roman province in 30 B.C., after the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra. The Roman Empire was the period of ancient Rome after the Republic, from Augustus in 27 B.C. until the fall of the western empire in 476 A.D.
- "nothing but a race dope sheet listing those Arabian horses no longer running": Every Thoroughbred racehorse descends in the male line from three stallions brought to England in the late 1600s and early 1700s, the Byerley Turk, the Darley Arabian, and the Godolphin Arabian. The Egyptian studied "the horses' heads on tombs," and

ancient Greek funeral reliefs often show a horse's head looking in at the banquet of the dead. See Horses and Carriages.

- "painting the air with many mysterious hieroglyphs": Hieroglyphs were the picture characters of the ancient Egyptian writing system. They could not be read for some fourteen hundred years until Jean-François Champollion deciphered them in 1822, with the help of the Rosetta Stone. See Ancient Egypt.
- "he was his living brother": The evil twin, or twins who are mistaken for each other, has been featured in many fictional genres. Here the mistake runs the other way: the Egyptian takes the cautious, living twin for the dead gambler, and Mr. Spitzer must argue that he is not his brother. See Twins and Doubles.
- "party of the second part": Legal contracts named the two sides "the party of the first part" and "the party of the second part." The Marx Brothers made the phrases a joke in A Night at the Opera (1935), tearing a contract apart clause by clause.
- "My mother pretended that the real was the dream, that the dream was the real": The Chinese philosopher Zhuangzi dreamed he was a butterfly and, on waking, could not tell whether he was Zhuangzi who had dreamed of being a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was Zhuangzi. In Pedro Calderón de la Barca's play Life Is a Dream (1635), Prince Segismundo concludes that "all life is a dream, and dreams are dreams." See Taoism and Zhuangzi and Life Is a Dream.
- "that contingent world one might have experienced by taking the other train through the other landscape": The thought is close to Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" (1916): "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, / I took the one less traveled by." Trains also run through Chapter 1, and Young explained that she sent Vera by bus rather than by train because a bus "does not go on a rail." See American Writers.
- "If ears could see, if eyes could hear": Bottom wakes from his enchanted night in A Midsummer Night's Dream with the senses mixed up: "The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was." Bottom is parodying 1 Corinthians 2:9. See Shakespeare.
- "the bloody head of Alcibiades staring through an upper window": Alcibiades was an Athenian statesman, orator, and general. According to Plutarch, assassins set fire to his house in Phrygia in 404 B.C., and when he rushed out, sword in hand, they killed him with javelins and arrows. Plutarch adds that his body was dressed and buried by his mistress.
- "hospital nuns like great, snowy birds": The Daughters of Charity of Saint Vincent de Paul, who ran many hospitals, wore the cornette, a starched white headdress with two great wings, until 1964. Its likeness to a bird or a sailboat was the subject of many jokes and stories.
- "scattered hearts like motes dancing in a sunbeam": The Roman poet Lucretius, in On the Nature of Things, pointed to the specks of dust that dance in a sunbeam in a darkened room as a picture of the atoms, always moving, colliding, and scattering in the void. See Epicureanism.

- “Who were all these demidryads?”: Dryads are the tree nymphs of Greek mythology, first the nymphs of the oak, from drys, “oak.” A hamadryad lived and died with her tree. Young’s demidryads are half-nymphs.
- “Medusas with white owls perched upon their livid locks”: The owl was the bird of Athena, goddess of wisdom, and after Perseus killed Medusa, Athena set the Gorgon’s head upon her aegis, her goatskin shield. Young perches Athena’s owl on Medusa’s snakes.
- Ben Jonson was an English playwright and poet. He is best known for his satirical plays Volpone and The Alchemist and for the song “Drink to me only with thine eyes.” His tribute to Shakespeare calls him “not of an age, but for all time.” Jonson is buried upright in Westminster Abbey.
- “a great frog prince sitting at the foot of the bed”: “The Frog King,” the first tale in the Grimm brothers’ collection of 1812, tells of a princess who must let a frog eat from her plate and sleep in her bed. In the original she throws him against the wall, and he turns into a prince. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “the lonely great auk who had no mate”: The great auk was a species of flightless bird that became extinct in the mid-nineteenth century. The last known pair was killed on the island of Eldey, off Iceland, in 1844. See Birds.
- Molyneux’s problem, posed by the Irish scientist William Molyneux in a letter to John Locke in 1688, asked whether a man who had been born blind and who learned to distinguish and name a globe and a cube by touch, would be able to distinguish and name these objects simply by sight, once he had been enabled to see. (Wikipedia) Catherine’s blind mother keeps the world of sight in her mind and speaks “of the appearances, the visions, the beautiful world of light.” See Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) and Eyes and Blindness.
- “he had gotten a Seeing Eye dog”: The Seeing Eye, the first guide dog school in the United States, was founded in Nashville in 1929 by Dorothy Harrison Eustis and Morris Frank, a blind young man whose German shepherd, Buddy, became the first guide dog in America. See Dogs.
- “the mirages, the maelstroms, the whirlwinds”: The Maelstrom, Moskstraumen in Norwegian, is a system of powerful tidal whirlpools off the Lofoten Islands of Norway. Poe’s story “A Descent into the Maelström” (1841) tells of a fisherman who survives being drawn into it. See Edgar Allan Poe.
- “She had stayed under earth for six months at a time”: Persephone, the daughter of the harvest goddess Demeter, was carried off by Hades to the underworld. Because she had eaten pomegranate seeds there, she must return to him for part of every year, often told as six months, and the earth lies barren while she is gone. See Greek Mythology.
- “the golden apples of Hesperides, those which had turned to dust in her mouth”: The Hesperides are the nymphs of the evening and the golden light of sunset. They tended a garden at the western edge of the world where golden apples grew, and stealing the apples was one of the labors of Heracles. Apples that turn to dust and ashes in the

mouth are the apples of Sodom, which the historian Josephus described as fair to look at but full of ash.

- “had climbed Jacob’s ladder to heaven”: Jacob’s ladder is a ladder leading to heaven that was featured in a dream the biblical Patriarch Jacob had during his flight from his brother Esau in the Book of Genesis. See Genesis.
- The philosophy of self is the study of the many conditions of identity that make one subject of experience distinct from other experiences. The self is sometimes understood as a unified being essentially connected to consciousness, awareness, and agency. (Wikipedia) The philosopher John Mbiti summed up an African understanding of the self: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.” Mikhail Bakhtin believed that people need others in order to evaluate their own existence and construct a coherent self-image. Charles Horton Cooley called this the “looking-glass self” in Human Nature and the Social Order (1902): a person imagines how they appear to others and takes their own self-image from that imagined judgment. The saying “I am not what I think I am, and I am not what you think I am. I am what I think you think I am” is often attributed to Cooley as a summary of the idea. René Descartes began instead from the solitary thinker: “I think, therefore I am” (Discourse on Method, 1637). Catherine has “been herself only as she had been projected upon the consciousness of others.” See Identity and the Self.
- “those old, vague archery tournaments”: Archery was one of the first sports thought proper for women, and in the nineteenth century archery clubs in England and America held tournaments where women competed in long skirts and veiled hats. Women’s archery was among the first women’s events at the Olympic Games, in 1904 and 1908.
- “her preference was always his brother’s wild, worldly, mercurial spirit”: Mercurial comes from Mercury, the quick Roman messenger god of travelers, merchants, thieves, and gamblers, a fitting god for Peron the gambler. One study concluded that women may be drawn to “bad boys” who demonstrate confidence, stubbornness, and risk-taking tendencies or a man’s ability to “sell themselves.”
- “they were going to Alaska, that cold place”: The United States bought Alaska from Russia in 1867 for $7.2 million, a purchase mocked as “Seward’s Folly,” and it became a state in 1959. In its far north the summer sun barely sets, “the sun dipping below the horizon and immediately arising again,” and in winter it barely rises. See Snow, Ice, and Winter.
- “Home, James”: The order to a coachman, and later a chauffeur, comes from the old catchphrase “Home, James, and don’t spare the horses,” which became the title of a popular song in the 1930s. In Catherine’s mouth it becomes a question: “for where is home?”
- “this same barber pole”: The red and white stripes of the barber pole go back to the barber-surgeons of the Middle Ages, who let blood as well as cut hair. The pole stood for the staff a patient gripped, and the stripes for the bandages.
- “served an unjust sentence breaking rocks for a state highway”: Into the twentieth century, convicts in many American states, especially in the South, were chained

together in gangs to quarry stone and build and repair roads.

- “only a yellow canary with a glassy eye and ruffled wing”: The canary is a finch from the Canary Islands, the Azores, and Madeira, kept as a caged songbird since the 1600s. Coal miners carried canaries underground, since the birds would sicken from poison gas before the men did, and British mines used them until 1986. Catherine’s canary, “all that had ever stood between her and tides of death,” is a miner’s canary in reverse. See Birds.
- Juniper, Tulip, Cellini, Solomon, Methuselah, Marco Polo, Admiral Peary, Shackleton, Dante: Catherine names her canary “depending on her moods and her position in space,” as when she is “voyaging between two stars,” and the names run from plants to kings, long life, artists, poets, and the great explorers of the earth’s far ends.
  - Benvenuto Cellini was an Italian goldsmith and sculptor of the sixteenth century, known for his bronze Perseus with the Head of Medusa in Florence, his golden saltcellar for King Francis I, and his boastful autobiography.
  - Solomon was the wise king of Israel who succeeded his father, King David, and built the first Temple in Jerusalem.
  - Methuselah was a biblical patriarch and said to have lived 969 years. His name is synonymous with longevity (Genesis 5:27).
  - Marco Polo was an Italian explorer who traveled through Asia along the Silk Road between 1271 and 1295, and spent years at the court of Kublai Khan.
  - Admiral Robert Peary was an American explorer and US Navy officer who made several expeditions to the Arctic. He claimed to have reached the North Pole in April 1909, a claim still disputed. See Exploration and the Poles.
  - Sir Ernest Shackleton was an Anglo-Irish Antarctic explorer, born in County Kildare in 1874. When his ship Endurance was crushed by the ice in 1915, he led all twenty-eight of his men to safety.
  - Dante Alighieri was an Italian poet who wrote the Divine Comedy. See Dante.
- “a hurricane blowing off the Canary Islands”: The Canary Islands, off the northwest coast of Africa, were not named for the birds. The Roman writer Pliny the Elder said the name came from the Latin canis, “dog,” for the large dogs found there, and the birds were later named for the islands.

Vocabulary

Abscond

To leave secretly and in a hurry, often to escape the law or to make off with something.

Abstruse

Hard to understand; obscure.

Adagio

In music, a slow, leisurely tempo, or a piece played that way.

Adventitious

Happening by chance; not essential or built in.

Ambivalently

With mixed or contradictory feelings or meanings.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Arabesque

An ornament of intertwined flowing lines, leaves, and tendrils.

Athwart

Across, from side to side; also, against.

Attaché case

A slim, hard-sided briefcase.

Augury

A sign or omen of what is to come, or the art of reading such signs.

Auk

A diving seabird of northern seas. The great auk, a large flightless species, became extinct in 1844.

Balloon fish

A pufferfish, which swallows water to swell its body into a spiny ball when threatened.

Bang-tail

Slang for a racehorse, from the custom of cutting a horse’s tail straight across.

Barometer

An instrument that measures air pressure, used to forecast the weather.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Burro

A small donkey.

Camphor

A strong-smelling white substance from the camphor tree, used in medicines and to keep moths from clothes.

Carrozza

Italian for a carriage.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Chagrin

Distress or annoyance at having failed or been humiliated.

Chameleon

A lizard that can change the color of its skin.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Clapper

The hanging metal tongue inside a bell that strikes it to make it ring.

Colloquy

A conversation or formal discussion. Young writes “colloquies of angels.”

Conformation

The shape and proportions of an animal’s body, especially a horse’s.

Contiguous

Touching or next to one another.

Corpuscle

A blood cell.

Counterpane

A bedspread.

Couturier

A designer and maker of fine clothes for women.

Coverlet

A bedspread, usually a light one.

Crepuscular

Of twilight; dim.

Cubit

An ancient measure of length, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, about eighteen inches.

Defunct

No longer living or in existence.

Delusive

Misleading; giving a false impression.

Denizen

An inhabitant of a place.

Desultory

Done without purpose or plan; halfhearted.

Discrown

To take the crown from; to depose a king.

Dope sheet

A racing sheet giving information and tips on the horses running.

Effaced

Erased; wiped out.

Effigy

A sculpture or model of a person, especially one lying on a tomb.

Egregiously

Outstandingly; shockingly.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Emanation

Something that flows out from a source.

Ephemeral

Lasting a very short time.

Equipoise

A state of balance.

Ermine

The white winter fur of the stoat, used to trim the robes of kings and nobles.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Euchred

Outwitted or cheated, from the card game euchre.

Evanescent

Quickly fading or vanishing.

Excrescence

An abnormal outgrowth, such as a wart; anything ugly that sticks out.

Eyeshade

A visor worn to shield the eyes from light.

Fatuous

Silly and pointless; foolishly self-satisfied.

Fichu

A triangular scarf of lace or muslin worn over the shoulders and knotted at the breast.

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Four-flusher

A bluffer or cheat. In poker, a four flush is a worthless hand of four cards of one suit passed off as five.

Fusty

Old-fashioned and musty.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Gate-leg table

A table with hinged leaves held up by legs that swing out like gates.

Gauze

A thin, transparent fabric.

Glow-worm

A beetle whose wingless female and larvae give off a greenish light.

Griffin

A mythical beast with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.

Gumshoe

Slang for a detective, from the soft rubber-soled shoes that let one follow quietly.

Hanging gardens

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: terraced gardens said to have been built by King Nebuchadnezzar II. No trace of them has ever been found.

Heraldic

Of heraldry, the coats of arms and emblems of noble families.

Imploring

Begging earnestly.

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Inexactitude

Lack of exactness.

Infinitesimal

Extremely small.

Inner sanctum

A private, secret room; originally, the holiest room of a temple.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Insouciant

Carefree; unconcerned.

Ketch

A two-masted sailboat with the smaller mast set behind the main mast.

Labyrinthine

Like a labyrinth; intricate and confusing.

Laundress

A woman who washes and irons clothes for a living.

Listlessly

Without energy or interest.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Lorgnette

A pair of eyeglasses held up to the eyes by a long handle.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Maelstrom

A powerful whirlpool; any violent, confused situation.

Malingering

Pretending to be ill to avoid work.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Mercantile

Of merchants and trade; commercial.

Mercurial

Quick and changeable in mood. From the swift Roman messenger god Mercury and the liquid metal named for him.

Mesa

A flat-topped hill with steep sides. Young writes of a “mesa of snow.”

Metropolitan

In the Orthodox churches, a bishop who presides over the other bishops of a province.

Milliner

A maker or seller of women’s hats.

Minuscular

Tiny. Young’s form of minuscule.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Modicum

A small amount.

Moleskin

A heavy cotton fabric with a soft, short nap like the fur of a mole.

Morosely

Gloomily, sullenly.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Motor veil

A long veil tied over a woman’s hat and face to keep off dust in an open automobile.

Mush

To travel by dogsled; also the command that starts sled dogs running.

Nag

An old or worn-out horse.

Ne’er-do-well

A lazy, worthless person.

Negligee

A woman’s light, flowing dressing gown.

Numbers racket

An illegal lottery in which bettors pick numbers, usually run by organized crime. Young writes “a number’s racket.”

Nuncio

An ambassador of the Pope; any messenger.

Obfuscation

The act of making something unclear or obscure.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Octogenarian

A person in their eighties.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Palpable

Able to be touched or felt; plain to see.

Papyrus

Writing material the ancient Egyptians made from the stems of the papyrus reed.

Parasol

A light umbrella carried for shade from the sun.

Phantasmagoric

Like a phantasmagoria, a shifting series of dreamlike or nightmarish images. A phantasmagoria was an eighteenth-century magic-lantern ghost show.

Piebald

Of a horse: with irregular patches of two colors, usually black and white.

Promontory

A high point of land jutting out into the sea.

Protean

Able to change shape or form readily, like the sea god Proteus.

Rabbit warren

A network of rabbit burrows. Figuratively, a crowded building full of small, maze-like rooms.

Refulgent

Shining brightly; radiant.

Regatta

A series of boat races.

Rice powder

A fine face powder made from rice, used to whiten the skin.

Riding habit

A woman’s outfit for riding horseback.

Ritualist

One devoted to the strict observance of rituals.

Roan

Of a horse: with a solid-colored coat sprinkled with white hairs.

Roseate

Rose-colored. Also hopeful or overly optimistic.

Sarcophagus

A stone coffin, often carved, placed above ground. The plural is sarcophagi.

Sentient

Able to feel and perceive.

Sexton

A church officer who looks after the building and churchyard and often digs the graves.

Shade

A ghost; the spirit of a dead person. The underworld is “that dark abode of shades.”

Sloop

A sailboat with one mast.

Smelling salts

A strong-smelling mixture, chiefly ammonium carbonate, sniffed to revive someone who feels faint.

Soothsayer

One who claims to foretell the future.

Spinster

An unmarried woman, especially an older one. The word first meant a woman who spun thread.

Stalactite

An icicle-shaped formation of minerals hanging from the roof of a cave.

Subterfuge

A trick or deception used to hide something.

Supposititiously

Supposedly, by supposition; also, falsely.

Surreptitiously

Secretly, by stealth.

Taciturn

Habitually silent; saying little.

Tenement

A crowded, run-down apartment building.

Transom

A small window above a door, often hinged to open.

Trihedron

A figure formed by three planes meeting at a point, like the corner of a box.

Tureen

A deep covered dish for serving soup.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Untrammeled

Not restricted or hampered.

Vapid

Dull and empty of life or interest.

Chapter 3

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

After Catherine took to her bed, Mr. Spitzer hired Miss Georgia MacIntosh of What Cheer, Iowa, to raise Vera. Vera paints her in full: marcelled red hair, a broken nose, a black umbrella, a tight corset, sensible shoes, long walks along the shore in any weather, strict schedules, and a deep suspicion of anything imaginary. She is everything Catherine is not, the practical Middle West in one person. Vera recalls how Miss MacIntosh dealt with an Australian bushman, a head-hunter who visited Catherine's bedside and was obsessed with the nursemaid's head, and she mentions Miss MacIntosh's brother, a missionary bishop lost among the islands. Then Vera returns to the loss. Miss MacIntosh's clothes were found on the beach and her purse held two pennies. Her body was never found, and Vera blames herself. Mr. Spitzer always insists that she was a good and dependable woman who never wavered.

Characters present

Miss MacIntosh · Vera Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Light and Darkness · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · Society, Class, and Race

Symbols: Birds · Cards, Games, and Chance · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Fireflies · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Freud and Jung · Heraclitus and Flux · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Plato and Platonism · William James and Pragmatism

Allusions: American Religious Movements · American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Milton · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Civil War · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- Miss MacIntosh is described as a "truer than the North star" guide to the bewildered child, Vera, someone who is steadfast in her moral principles and practical in her approach to life. She rejects fantasies, illusions, and the "phantoms thickening in the

air” around others, especially Vera’s mother, Catherine’s hallucinatory environment. Her quick temper and no-nonsense attitude symbolize a force that dispels the fanciful and unreal.

- The detailed imagery of Miss MacIntosh’s red hair shining like fire or sparks, her robust health sustained by sunlight and physical exercise, and her preference for outdoor life even in inclement weather emphasize her grounded, vigorous nature. She uses physical activity and connection with natural elements to keep herself strong and unclouded by fantasy or despair. This connection also reflects her philosophy that life is about facing realities, not escaping them.
- Miss MacIntosh disdains fanciful dreams, luxury, and illusions such as the “golden apples” or “pearls” that Catherine dreams of. She insists on simplicity, honesty, and the acceptance of life’s hardships: “Life was made up, in short, of the necessary deprivations.” She believes in fulfilling one’s duties, avoiding self-pity, and not chasing impossible ideals. Her practical mindset is embodied in her tasks like mending clothes, preparing meals, and maintaining order.
- Miss MacIntosh holds a stark, unromantic view of death as a final, dreamless sleep without illusions of heaven or afterlife grandeur. She rejects “six-winged seraphim” and “golden towers” as fanciful nonsense, insisting that if there is a heaven, it should be plain and unfurnished. This reflects her consistent rejection of fantasy and her focus on the tangible realities of mortal life.
- Miss MacIntosh is brusque, solitary, and does not encourage intimacy or pity. Her past is largely unknown, and she has no friends, embodying a figure who compensates for others’ losses in a practical way. She has little patience for mental or emotional sorrows that lack physical cause, emphasizing courage in the face of actual trials. Her interactions with the Australian head-hunter highlight her disdain for affectation and false pretenses.
- The Australian head-hunter serves as a foil to Miss MacIntosh’s grounded realism. She despises his semi-civilized, erratic behavior, his ambitions, and his inappropriate intimacy, seeing him as a symbol of confused and corrupt aspirations that contrast with her straightforward, honest life. Her reactions to him underscore her rejection of fantasy, deceit, and social pretense.
- The chapter ends with the mystery of Miss MacIntosh’s disappearance, leaving behind her clothes and personal effects on the beach as if she had walked into the sea. Mr. Spitzer’s reflections underscore her enigmatic presence and the lasting impact she had on those around her. Despite her ordinariness, she was a “pearl of light” in a world of shadows and illusions, and her absence leaves an unresolved question about her fate.
- Miss MacIntosh believes in honest work, self-discipline, and the acceptance of life’s hardships. She foresees a necessary revolution to overthrow the “powers of darkness” and strip away illusions and luxury. Her philosophy is one of immediate action and responsibility to others, emphasizing that life is short and should not be wasted in “the vain expectation of that which might never happen” or on “graven images.” This reflects a deep existential and moral seriousness.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- The chapter opens with adults “like the shadows of grotesque puppets dancing on a wall,” and “The puppeteer they dreamed of did not exist although he moved the strings.” How does this image prepare for a nursemaid who believes only in what she can see?
- Miss MacIntosh “could endure nothing that took its time,” and her days are filled with mending, hammering, sweeping, and running. What is she outrunning?
- She and Vera “swept our footprints away from the sands before the waters crept over” them. Why might someone so committed to the present want to leave no trace?
- Miss MacIntosh makes a lamp of fireflies when they are lost in the dark, “carrying the lamp up high like a lighthouse.” How does this moment complicate her refusal of anything fanciful?

Characters

- Miss MacIntosh is “so usual” that her ordinariness becomes strange in Catherine’s house. Yet she has a broken nose, a receding brow, a past no one knows, and a cheek that throbs when her hand is touched. What clues does the chapter plant that she is not what she seems?
- Mr. Spitzer remembers hiring “the shawled figure” he took for a brunette, whose “eyebrows were dark and beetling cliffs.” Why might the novel let him misremember the one person he chose so quickly?
- The head-hunter tells Miss MacIntosh that she “had a greater imagination than anyone who lived.” Why does this compliment offend her more than any insult?
- Miss MacIntosh preaches common sense, but her own sayings are full of contradictions: there is no heaven, yet God is a harness-maker; the sins committed are worse than those of omission, yet God has forgotten things. How does she hold her faith together?

Connections

- In Chapter 2 Catherine lives only in dreams. In Chapter 3 Miss MacIntosh insists “If she dreamed, she would dream that she was running.” What does Vera inherit from each of these two mothers?
- Miss MacIntosh believes in revolution, “the whole bird,” not the left wing or the right. How do her politics grow out of her years in “the dregs of the city”?
- The chapter ends with clothes on the beach, two pennies under a rock, and a body never found. How does this loss reshape everything Vera has said about Miss

MacIntosh up to that point? See The Search for Life, for Love, for Truth That Does Not Fail.

Reflection

- “Who but I had killed her?” Vera asks. Why do children so often blame themselves for the losses of the adults around them?
- Miss MacIntosh says “we knew now all we would ever know . . . of misery or happiness.” Is living wholly in the present a kind of courage, a kind of hiding, or both?

Research: Characters

Miss (Georgia) MacIntosh

- A nursemaid who embodies practicality, common sense, and moral certainty.
- Described physically with “marcelled red hair,” “greyish, greenish eyes,” and a robust constitution.
- She is a symbol of stability, reality, and groundedness amidst chaos and confusion.
- Rejects illusions, fantasies, and idle dreams; values labor, discipline, and the present moment.
- Wears simple, durable clothing; disdains luxury and extravagance.
- Has a brusque, rough demeanor, often compared to an old sailor.
- She is industrious, always busy, and advocates physical exercise and self-forgetfulness.
- Holds a strict moral code, emphasizing honesty, self-control, and acceptance of life’s hardships.
- Originates from What Cheer, Iowa, a simple town, and contrasts sharply with the opulent, dreamlike environment of the household.
- Maintains distance from others, avoids intimacy, and does not indulge in self-pity.
- Ultimately disappears under mysterious circumstances, leaving behind only her clothes and belongings on the beach.
- Mentions her brother, who went out as a missionary bishop to the Easter Islands and never returned.

Vera Cartwheel

- A child who has escaped from her mother’s “opium paradise.”
- Looks up to Miss MacIntosh as a guide and protector.
- Observes and reflects on the strange atmosphere and characters around her.

Mr. Spitzer

- Employer who hired Miss MacIntosh without much inquiry.
- Holds a fondness and respect for her practical nature.
- Believes Miss MacIntosh might have returned to the city's "dregs" after disappearance.
- Is uncertain about her fate but respects her memory and legacy.

The Head-Hunter (Australian Bushman)

- An unwelcome visitor who comes each afternoon in a black-curtained cab to sit at Catherine's bedside.
- Seen by Miss MacIntosh as deceitful, semi-civilized, and culturally alien.
- His presence and behavior clash sharply with Miss MacIntosh's values.
- Fascinated by Miss MacIntosh's head, which he wants to sculpt, but she rejects his advances.

Catherine Cartwheel

- Living in a surreal, opium-induced environment with grand illusions and fantasies.
- Contrasted with Miss MacIntosh's grounded reality.

Research: Themes

Reality and Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality

- Miss MacIntosh represents the harsh reality of life, while Catherine's world is filled with dreams, illusions, and hallucinations.
- The nursemaid's disdain for luxury, fantasy, and self-pity underscores the value of facing life's truths directly.

Discipline, Labor, and Practicality

See: Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- Life is portrayed as a testing ground requiring discipline, hard work, and acceptance of necessary deprivations.
- Miss MacIntosh's emphasis on practical tasks (mending clothes, building fires) and physical exercise reflect this ethos.

Mortality and Transience

See: Death and Mortality

- Frequent imagery of time running low, life's brevity, and the inevitability of death.
- The nursemaid's disappearance and the uncertainty surrounding her fate emphasize the fragile nature of existence.

Isolation and Independence

See: Isolation and Connection

- Miss MacIntosh is a solitary figure who keeps to herself, avoids intimacy, and values self-reliance.
- Her rejection of social pretenses and false hopes highlights her independence.

Nature and the Elements

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- The natural world (sea, wind, light, sand) is a constant presence and source of strength for Miss MacIntosh.
- She prefers exposure to natural elements over sheltered luxury or confinement.

Social Order and Class

See: Society, Class, and Race · Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- Miss MacIntosh rejects aristocratic airs and illusions of grandeur.
- She advocates for the dignity of simple people and honest labor.

Faith and Doubt

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- While Miss MacIntosh acknowledges God, she does not believe in extravagant religious fantasies or promises of an afterlife.
- She sees life itself as a sufficient test and believes in accepting one's lot without illusions.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Black Umbrella

See: The Umbrella

- Miss MacIntosh's shield and sword against the elements and the unknown.
- Represents her protection from illusions and external threats.

Fireflies in a Jar

See: Fireflies

- Symbolize hope and guidance in darkness.
- The moment when Miss MacIntosh uses them as a lamp suggests her role as a beacon of reason amid confusion.

Sea and Surf

See: The Sea and Water

- Represent the uncontrollable forces of nature and time.
- The beach is the boundary between worlds and the place where Miss MacIntosh's disappearance occurs.

Two Pennies

See: Cards, Games, and Chance · Twins and Doubles

- Found in her purse, symbolizes her humility and the little she possessed.
- Also a poignant reminder of her mortality and disappearance.

Corset

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Represents discipline and the necessary constraints of life.
- Miss MacIntosh's tight corset is a physical embodiment of her moral and mental self-control.

Research: Resources

- "like the shadows of grotesque puppets dancing on a wall": In the allegory of the cave in Plato's Republic, prisoners chained in the dark see only shadows thrown on a wall by figures carried past a fire, like a puppet show, and take the shadows for the whole of reality. Vera's adults are the shadows, and "The puppeteer they dreamed of did not exist although he moved the strings." See Plato and Platonism.
- "Miss MacIntosh, my darling, truer than the North star": Polaris, the North Star, stays nearly fixed above the North Pole while the other stars wheel around it, so sailors steered by it. Shakespeare's Julius Caesar boasts, "I am constant as the northern star." In Chapter 1 she was "the dead steersman." See Moon and Stars.
- "not even a game of chess as chess was the game of kings": Chess has long been called "the royal game" and "the game of kings." Its pieces are a feudal court, with the king who must be protected at all costs and the pawns who are sacrificed, which is why Miss MacIntosh finds the game undemocratic.
- "her marcelled red hair fitting close like a helmet": Marcelled hair is set in deep, regular waves with heated tongs, a method introduced by the Paris hairdresser Marcel Grateau in 1872 and most fashionable in the 1920s. See Marcelled hair (Ch 3).

- “imaginary nightingales or turrets of ivory”: The Song of Solomon says, “Thy neck is as a tower of ivory” (7:4), and “Tower of Ivory” became a title of the Virgin Mary. By the nineteenth century an ivory tower meant a place of dreamy retreat from the world, which Miss MacIntosh will not allow. The nightingale is the bird of the Romantic poets, as in Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale.”
- “flower-crowned satyrs and moon-eyed minotaurs”: A satyr is a male nature spirit of Greek myth with the ears and tail of a horse, a follower of Dionysus given to wine, music, and dancing. Later Roman art gave satyrs the legs of goats, like Pan.
- “giant periwinkle shells filled with mystic roarings”: The roar heard when a shell is held to the ear is not the sea but the sounds of the room around it, caught and amplified as they echo inside the shell’s spiral.
- The problem with God and his attributes of omniscience (God’s complete and perfect knowledge, knowing everything past, present, and future), omnipotence (God’s unlimited power and ability to do anything), omnipresence (God is present everywhere at all times, not limited by space or time), and also added by some omnibenevolence (God has perfect or unlimited goodness) are that they create fallacies: god cannot be omnibenevolent and omnipotent in a universe in which evil exists (i.e., his creation suffers). Can god not prevent evil? Then he is not omnipotent. Does he not want to prevent evil? Then he is not omnibenevolent. If god can prevent evil, and god wants to prevent evil, then evil would not exist. Can god defy the laws of physics (create a rock so heavy even he can’t lift it? destroy himself? create a square circle? make himself not omnipotent?) If god is omniscient, then he has always known every single choice every human has ever and will ever make. Therefore, from his perspective, free will is impossible because there was only ever one choice any person who has ever or will ever exist could make. Any argument made from free will with an omniscient god is logically unsound. Any god that forces his followers to adopt illogical arguments to defend his existence in a universe very clearly explicable by logic is a malicious god, not a benevolent god.
- “God had been her harness-maker, that He had hung her harness with tinkling bells so that it might always be known where she was”: The robe of the Hebrew high priest was hung at its hem with golden bells and pomegranates, “and his sound shall be heard when he goeth in unto the holy place” (Exodus 28:33-35). Miss MacIntosh’s bells ring on through the chapter: “her bells ringing so that I might know, through fog and mist and darkness, where she was.”
- “labor was man’s lot upon this earth”: The Protestant work ethic, the Calvinist Work Ethic, or the Puritan Work Ethic is a work ethic concept in theology, sociology, economics and history that emphasizes that hard work, discipline, and frugality are a result of a person’s subscription to the values espoused by the Protestant faith, particularly Calvinism. The phrase was coined by the sociologist Max Weber in his book The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (1904 to 1905). Weber asserted that Protestant ethics and values along with the Calvinist doctrine of asceticism and predestination gave birth to capitalism. (Wikipedia) See The Protestant Work Ethic (Ch 3) and The Protestant Ethic.

- “If at night I heard the wings of time like angelic wings roaring faster and faster”: Andrew Marvell’s “To His Coy Mistress” says, “But at my back I always hear / Time’s wingèd chariot hurrying near.”
- “the sleep of the innocent should be deep and dreamless”: Macbeth, after murdering the sleeping king, thinks he hears a voice cry that he has murdered sleep, “the innocent sleep, / Sleep that knits up the ravell’d sleave of care.” See Shakespeare.
- “almost Tyrian purple in certain lights”: Tyrian purple is a reddish-purple dye made from the glands of murex sea snails, first in the Phoenician city of Tyre. Thousands of snails were needed for a single garment, so the color was worth more than gold, and in Rome it was reserved for emperors.
- “knocking down ninepins and the old kingpin who should be leveled like the old king of Bulgaria”: Ninepins, the old form of bowling, is the game the ghostly crew plays in the mountains in Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle.” The kingpin stands at the center. Bulgaria’s kings fell one by one: Tsar Ferdinand abdicated after defeat in the First World War in 1918, his son Boris III died suddenly in 1943, and in 1946 the monarchy was abolished and the boy king Simeon II sent into exile.
- “no hawk’s-wing sea shell with a broken wing or broken great keyhole limpet or star sea shell dragging its broken foot”: Limpets are sea snails with simple cone-shaped shells that cling to rocks. The keyhole limpet has a small opening at the top of its shell, and the hawk-wing conch and star shells are other sea snails of warm waters. Miss MacIntosh “could endure nothing that took its time.”
- “not venturing to do what the wisest man had failed to do”: When the oracle at Delphi said that no one was wiser than Socrates, Socrates concluded that his only wisdom was knowing that he knew nothing (Plato, Apology). The wisest man in the Bible, Solomon, ends Ecclesiastes with the same humility: “of making many books there is no end.”
- “I should make a useful contribution to human society, which was composed of simple people”: The Greek word aretē means excellence or virtue, the fulfillment of something’s purpose, and for people the act of living up to one’s full potential. For Miss MacIntosh excellence means usefulness: a person lives up to her potential by serving “simple people.”
- Miss MacIntosh’s philosophy could be compared to the Amish, Quakers, or Shakers. The Amish have a significant population in the Middle West and are known for simple living, plain dress, and reluctance to adopt many conveniences of modern technology. They educate their children up to the eighth grade and then they are apprenticed to work.
- “these unusual luxuries which tempted no honest face”: The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899) is a treatise on economics and a detailed, social critique of conspicuous consumption. Its author, Thorstein Veblen, coined the phrase “conspicuous consumption” for the spending of money on and acquiring of luxury goods and services to publicly display economic power in order to attain or maintain social status.

- “as if she were trying to placate it”: An old story told by the chronicler Henry of Huntingdon has King Canute set his throne on the shore and command the tide to stop, to show his flattering courtiers that even a king cannot rule the sea.
- “rolling pea-souper”: A pea-souper was a thick, yellowish fog, named for its likeness to pea soup, especially the coal-smoke fogs of London. See Fog and Mist.
- “wearing her salt-streaked mackintosh of almost faded plaids”: The mackintosh, the rubberized raincoat, is named for the Scottish chemist Charles Macintosh, who patented his waterproofing process in 1823, and Miss MacIntosh wears her name. See Charles MacIntosh (Ch 3).
- “useful work for the benefit of others and strenuous physical exercise and self-forgetfulness prolonged one’s useful life”: In his speech “The Strenuous Life,” given in Chicago on April 10, 1899, Theodore Roosevelt said, “I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life.” He advocated for a life of effort, hardship, and struggle over ease and idleness, arguing that it was essential for both individual character and national greatness. He believed that facing challenges, whether physical or moral, was the only way to achieve true success and national power in the coming century. The speech also reflected his views on American expansionism and the “strenuous” duty of the nation to take an active role in the world. Miss MacIntosh warns against “slothful ease.”
- “on this old terra firma which was certainly no cloud”: Terra firma is Latin for “firm land,” dry ground as opposed to the sea.
- “One should mind his own knitting”: Miss MacIntosh’s answer to fate is to mind one’s own knitting: to live in the present and attend to one’s work rather than chase impossible dreams. She neither denies suffering nor yields to despair, and finds the true expression of human will in labor, self-forgetfulness, and service to others. Against this the novel sets Vera’s thought that “The individual is the one illusion,” bound by circumstance, time, and fate. See the free will entry in the Chapter 38 resources.
- “there was not much room for the individual, for those who should lift up their heads”: A Japanese proverb says, “the nail that sticks out shall get hammered down.”
- “the mischief caused by those who did not work and yet were restless”: The saying that the devil finds work for idle hands is often thought to be biblical, but it comes from Isaac Watts’s hymn for children “Against Idleness and Mischief” (1715): “For Satan finds some mischief still / For idle hands to do.” Proverbs 16:27 has a similar thought: “An ungodly man diggeth up evil.”
- “no time for the luxury of idle tears”: The phrase recalls Tennyson’s song from The Princess (1847): “Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean, / Tears from the depth of some divine despair.”
- “the dark prince charming who should carry me away and rescue me from this dark tower”: The dark prince is a symbolic figure representing an imaginary or idealized rescuer, a figure of hope and escape for Vera.

- “this dark tower”: The phrase recalls Robert Browning’s “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” (1855), whose title comes from a line in King Lear. In Chapter 30 Catherine’s search for her lost husband ends where “Childe Roland had blown his horn before a dark tower.” See Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came.
- “Like the princess, I would let down my hair, and he should climb it as if it were a rope”: The image is Rapunzel’s, from the Grimm brothers’ tale of 1812: “Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair.” The Grimms took the story from Charlotte-Rose de La Force’s French tale “Persinette” (1698). Many scholars have interpreted “Maiden in the Tower” stories, which Rapunzel is a part of, as a metaphor for the protection of young women from premarital relationships by overzealous guardians. Scholars have drawn comparisons of the confinement of Rapunzel in her tower to that of a convent, where women’s lives were highly controlled and they lived in exclusion from outsiders. Scholars have also noted the strong theme of love conquering all in the story, as the lovers are united after years of searching in all versions after Persinette and are ultimately happily reunited as a family. The “Maiden in the Tower” archetype has drawn comparisons to a possible lost matriarchal myth connected to the sacred marriage between the prince and the maiden and the rivalry between the maiden, representing life and spring, and the crone, representing death and winter. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “We should not nurture our grief at the breast of sorrow”: Miss MacIntosh allows no time for grief. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross later described five stages of grief in On Death and Dying (1969): denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. See Grief, Loss, and Mourning.
- “God, moving in His mysterious ways”: “God Moves in a Mysterious Way” is a Christian hymn written in 1773 by the English poet William Cowper, first titled “Light Shining out of Darkness.” The poem is the likely source for the phrase “God moves in mysterious ways,” although the first line of the poem actually runs “God moves in a mysterious way.” Cowper wrote it at Olney, and it is often said to have been his last hymn, written as he felt a period of deep depression coming on. (Wikipedia)
- “Apples fell downward, not upward”: The best-known falling apple is Isaac Newton’s. Newton told his friend William Stukeley that the fall of an apple in his mother’s orchard at Woolsthorpe set him thinking about gravity, the force that keeps the moon in its orbit. Miss MacIntosh’s law of gravity is moral as well as physical: “All that fell upward were bound to fall downward.”
- “not even should there be those golden apples of which my mother dreamed”: Catherine dreamed of the golden apples of the Hesperides in Chapter 2. Miss MacIntosh sets practicality against such dreams.
- “the macintosh apple and the crab apple and the pippin and the russet”: The McIntosh apple grew from a seedling that John McIntosh found on his farm in Ontario in 1811. Pippins and russets are old English apple varieties; a russet has rough, brownish skin. The nursemaid named MacIntosh lists her own apple first.

- “the path of the brave was narrow and girt about by thorns, and it was lonely, there being great solitude, for man was seldom good”: The passage turns on Matthew 7:13-14: “wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.”
- “of fleshly pleasures and fleshpots of luxury, of dancing girls and headless men”: The fleshpots come from Exodus 16:3, where the Israelites in the wilderness long for Egypt, “when we sat by the flesh pots, and when we did eat bread to the full.” The dancing girl and the headless man recall Salome and John the Baptist from Chapter 2.
- “none finding a celestial city”: The Celestial City is the goal of the pilgrim Christian in Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, the heavenly Jerusalem at the end of his road. Miss MacIntosh’s travelers on the path of virtue never reach it.
- “chasing a will-o’-the-wisp, a false light”: The will-o’-the-wisp, or ignis fatuus, “foolish fire,” is a faint light seen at night over marshes, probably caused by burning marsh gas. In folklore it lures travelers off the path and into the bog.
- “no slug with its shell rudimentary and often buried in the mantle or wanting entirely”: The phrase reads like an entry from an old natural history or dictionary, which defined slugs as mollusks whose shell is small and hidden in the mantle or wanting altogether. Miss MacIntosh wants no child without a shell to carry.
- “my house would be well kept, and I should make my husband happy”: There has been important feminist criticism of marriage including: the effect that marriage has on individual liberty, equality between the sexes, the relation between marriage and violence, philosophical questions about how much control can a government have over its population, the amount of control a person has over another, the financial risk when measured against divorce/separation, and the questioning of the necessity to have a relationship sanctioned by government or religious authorities. There is also the emotional labor and management of the house that has been and is the unpaid work of mostly women.
- “the numbers of tons of coal mined by coal-miners in distant mines”: Coal mining labor history in the United States is marked by dangerous work, exploitation, and the struggle for workers’ rights, driven by waves of immigration, the Civil War, and industrialization. Early laborers were diverse, including enslaved and free African Americans, and later, large numbers of immigrants from Great Britain, Ireland, and Eastern and Southern Europe were drawn to the industry by recruiters. The United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) was founded in 1890 to fight for better wages, safer conditions, and benefits, leading to significant labor conflicts and hard-won reforms like the eight-hour workday and pensions. The coal industry was marked by a series of violent conflicts and massacres, often stemming from labor disputes between striking workers (many of whom were immigrants) and mine owners who hired private security forces or leveraged local law enforcement to suppress union organizing efforts.
    - Lattimer Massacre (September 10, 1897): In Lattimer, Pennsylvania, a sheriff’s posse opened fire on a march of unarmed striking immigrant anthracite miners,

mostly of Polish, Slovak, Lithuanian, and German descent. At least 19 miners were killed, and many more were wounded. The sheriff and his deputies were later tried but acquitted.

- Battle of Virden (October 12, 1898): In Virden, Illinois, a gun battle erupted when the Chicago-Virden Coal Company attempted to bring in African-American strikebreakers with armed guards. Eight striking miners and at least four guards were killed.
- Ludlow Massacre (April 20, 1914): During a major strike in Colorado, the Colorado National Guard and guards from the Colorado Fuel & Iron Company attacked a tent colony of 1,200 striking miners and their families. The assault resulted in the deaths of approximately 21 people, including women and children, many of whom were burned to death when the camp was set on fire.
- Matewan Massacre (May 19, 1920): A deadly shootout occurred in Matewan, West Virginia, between Baldwin-Felts detective agency guards (hired by mine owners to evict striking workers from company-owned housing) and local residents, including the mayor and police chief, who supported the miners. Ten people died in the clash (seven detectives, two miners, and the mayor).
- Battle of Blair Mountain (August/September 1921): The culmination of the West Virginia Mine Wars, this was the largest armed insurrection in U.S. history since the Civil War. Thousands of union miners fought against local law enforcement and company-hired forces. Federal troops were eventually sent in by President Harding to quell the uprising, which involved the use of airplanes to drop bombs. Estimates of the dead vary widely.
- Herrin Massacre (June 21-22, 1922): In Herrin, Illinois, a violent confrontation occurred between union miners and strikebreakers at a strip mine. After a gunfight and a surrender under the promise of safe passage, union miners killed the mine superintendent and 19 strikebreakers and guards, and three union miners also died. The incident is considered one of the most violent labor disputes in U.S. history.
- Columbine Mine Massacre (November 21, 1927): In Serene, Colorado, striking miners were met with machine-gun fire from the Colorado Rangers and guards from the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company during a strike, resulting in the deaths of six miners.

These events, part of the broader “Coal Wars” (roughly 1890-1930), were pivotal in the struggle for better wages, safer working conditions, and the right to unionize in the U.S. coal industry.

- “We dealt with the unjust circumstances under which Negroes were employed”: Miss MacIntosh’s lessons show her concern with social movements, the working class, and inequality, and she is repeatedly described as left-leaning. “Negro” was the standard term of the time. See Society, Class, and Race.
  - Ta-Nehisi Coates’ “The Case for Reparations” is a 2014 essay arguing that the U.S. owes African Americans compensation for centuries of systemic injustices, from slavery and Jim Crow laws to modern discrimination like redlining. The essay uses

historical examples and personal accounts, like that of Clyde Ross, to trace how a legacy of stolen labor, land, and wealth created an enduring racial wealth gap. Coates argues that acknowledging and addressing this “moral debt” is necessary for both African Americans and the nation’s spiritual and economic healing.

    - The 1619 Project reframes American history by centering the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans, arguing that the country’s founding can be understood as beginning with the arrival of enslaved people in 1619. It explores how slavery has shaped modern America, including its economy, healthcare, and music, and challenges traditional narratives of American exceptionalism. The project originated as a New York Times Magazine special issue and has since expanded into a book and podcast series.

- “the injustices done to the Africans working in diamond mines”: Diamond mining in Africa began in 1867 with the discovery of alluvial diamonds in South Africa, leading to a large-scale rush and the founding of De Beers Consolidated Mines by Cecil Rhodes in 1888. Subsequent discoveries of diamonds in kimberlite pipes enabled the transition from small-scale digging to industrial mining, which eventually consolidated into a monopoly by De Beers. Diamond mining then expanded to other countries, including Namibia, Botswana, Angola, and Sierra Leone, though its history is also marked by exploitation and conflict, such as the issue of “blood diamonds” which were sold to finance civil wars.
- “We pitied the lighthouse keepers who had no union and no organization”: Lighthouse keepers lived for months at isolated stations, keeping the lamps lit and the lenses clean through every storm. In 1939 the United States Lighthouse Service was merged into the Coast Guard, and most lights were later automated.
- The history of U.S. labor is a story of evolving unions fighting for worker rights, from the first trade unions in the late 18th century to the formation of national organizations like the National Labor Union and American Federation of Labor. Key events include the Great Railroad Strike of 1877, the Haymarket bombing, the Pullman strike, and the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire, which led to significant safety reforms. The movement saw a peak in power between the late 19th century and mid-20th century, especially with the passage of protective legislation like the National Labor Relations Act during the New Deal, but has since faced a decline in membership while new organizing efforts continue.
    - 1794: The Federal Society of Journeymen Cordwainers (shoemakers) is formed in Philadelphia, marking the start of sustained trade union organization in the U.S.
    - 1866: The National Labor Union is founded, making the first national call for an 8-hour workday.
    - 1869: The Knights of Labor is established, becoming a major force in organizing skilled and unskilled workers.
    - 1886: The American Federation of Labor (AFL) is formed, focusing on a coalition of craft unions.

    - 1892: The Homestead strike occurs at a Carnegie Steel plant, and the Pullman strike takes place in 1894, highlighting the intense conflicts between labor and big business.
    - 1909: The New York shirtwaist strike, the “Uprising of the 20,000,” highlights the role of women in the labor movement.
    - 1911: The tragic Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire leads to a national outcry and a push for significant workplace safety reforms, inspired by eyewitness accounts and activism.
    - 1914: The Ludlow Massacre is a violent confrontation between coal miners and company guards, leading to further calls for reform.
    - 1920s: The rise of new industries leads to new labor-management challenges.
    - 1932: The Norris-LaGuardia Act is passed, limiting the power of courts to block strikes and other union activities.
    - 1933: The Wagner-Peyser Act creates a nationwide system of public employment offices.
    - 1935: The National Labor Relations Act (Wagner Act) is signed into law, giving workers the right to organize, bargain collectively, and strike.
    - 1937: A sit-down strike against General Motors in Flint, Michigan, results in the company recognizing the United Auto Workers (UAW).
    - Post-WWII: Labor unions begin to see a decline in membership and political influence, though they remain powerful in some sectors.
    - Late 20th Century: Globalization and a changing economy lead to further challenges for organized labor.
    - 2014: The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 11.1 percent of U.S. wage and salary workers belonged to unions, down from 20.1 percent in 1983, the first year of comparable figures.
- “the united brotherhoods of the sleeping car porters”: The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (BSCP) was founded in 1925 by A. Philip Randolph and other porters to fight for better wages and working conditions against the Pullman Company. After a long and difficult struggle involving company opposition, the Great Depression, and internal community division, the BSCP gained recognition from the Pullman Company in 1937. It became the first African-American labor union to receive a charter from the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and went on to become a vital training ground for civil rights leaders and a significant force in the broader civil rights movement.
- “the truck-drivers driving their trucks all night long”: The history of U.S. trucking labor is marked by early exploitation and the rise of powerful unions. Early drivers faced dangerous conditions and long hours, leading to the formation of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) in 1903 to fight for better wages and conditions. In 1938 the federal government set the first limits on how many hours a truck-driver could drive, because tired drivers like the ones Miss MacIntosh pities were falling asleep at

the wheel. The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956, which created the National Interstate and Defense Highways, spurred the industry's growth.

- "The shadow created the light, but the light created the shadow": Miss MacIntosh, the practical nursemaid, sides with the light and with facts faced plainly. Vera finds her "far too clear to be seduced by the soporific luxury" of her mother's dreams, and she holds it best never to dream of "those things which the conditions of this mortal frame could not simply provide." Darkness belongs to dreams, memory, and death, the twilight where Vera's mother lives among shadows and hallucinations. Young's sentence makes each the maker of the other, so the light is never pure and the darkness is never simply absence. See Light and Darkness.
- "the light which came from within was the only light by which to steer our way": The Quakers teach that every person holds the Inner Light, the light of God within, a surer guide than any outward authority. George Fox, who founded the Society of Friends in the 1650s, spoke of "that of God in every one." See American Religious Movements.
- "made a lamp by filling it with fireflies": A firefly's light comes from a chemical reaction between luciferin and the enzyme luciferase, and nearly all its energy is given off as light rather than heat, which is why it is called cold light. See Fireflies.
- "This flat-footed Middle Westerner": "Middle Westerner" encapsulates Miss MacIntosh's essential nature as a pragmatic, strong, and no-nonsense woman, deeply rooted in the values and environment of the American Midwest. The term "Middle Westerner" emerged in the late 19th century, solidifying a regional identity for the area between the American East and West. This region, often called the "Midwest," evolved through westward expansion and the development of transportation networks, particularly railroads. It became a distinct area with its own cultural and economic characteristics, influenced by both rural and urban landscapes. The Midwest, initially known as the "Northwest," played a key role in westward expansion following the Louisiana Purchase. As the frontier moved further west, the term "Middle West" gained traction to define the area between the Northwest (Great Lakes region) and the Southwest (Oklahoma and Texas). The development of railroads significantly shaped the Midwest's growth, facilitating trade and connecting disparate areas. A literary movement in the late 19th century focused on realistic depictions of Midwestern life, particularly in small towns and rural areas. The Midwest has been a significant force in American history, contributing to movements like the Granger movement (The Granger movement, also known as the Patrons of Husbandry, was a 19th-century agrarian movement that aimed to address the economic hardships faced by farmers, particularly those related to railroad and grain elevator monopolies. Founded in 1867 by Oliver Hudson Kelley, the movement grew rapidly in the 1870s, fueled by economic instability and the perceived exploitation of farmers by powerful industries.), the Progressive movement (The Progressive Movement was a period of widespread social and political reform in the United States, spanning roughly from the 1890s to the 1920s. It aimed to address the negative consequences of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and political corruption, seeking to improve society and government through various reforms.), and the development of industries and architecture. The

Midwest uniquely combines urban industrial power with the conservatism of its rural hinterland. Miss MacIntosh's Iowa was Granger country: in the 1870s Iowa had more Granges than any other state, farmers banding together against the railroads, which fits her concern for "those who were not the children of fortune." The Midwest typically includes the following 12 states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

- "all those Romish graven images": Graven images come from the Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" (Exodus 20:4). Romish is an old, hostile Protestant word for Roman Catholic, and Miss MacIntosh distrusts the statues of saints.
- "the whirling dervishes": The whirling dervishes of the Mevlevi Order, founded by followers of the thirteenth-century poet Rumi in Konya, Turkey, are a Sufi order that practices whirling as a form of dhikr or remembrance of God.
- "those sorrows bringing our grey hairs": Jacob, fearing the loss of his youngest son, says his sons would "bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave" (Genesis 42:38). See Genesis.
- "this life being so short, so earnest, so full of woe": Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's "A Psalm of Life" (1838) declares, "Life is real! Life is earnest! / And the grave is not its goal," and promises that great lives leave "Footprints on the sands of time." Miss MacIntosh sweeps her footprints away. See American Writers.
- "one should not place his faith in earthly things": Colossians 3:2 reads, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."
- "She dismissed the insubstantial fabric of the dream": The phrase echoes Prospero in Shakespeare's The Tempest: "And, like the baseless fabric of this vision, . . . this insubstantial pageant faded, / Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff / As dreams are made on." See Shakespeare.
- "those green pearls which had been manufactured by the secretive ear oyster": The ear shell is the abalone, a sea snail named for its ear-shaped shell. Its rare pearls are green, blue, and violet like the shell's lining.
- "those pink pearls formed by the winged stromb": Strombs are the conchs, sea snails whose shells flare into a wide lip, or wing. The queen conch of the Caribbean produces rare pink pearls with a shimmering, flame-like pattern. Like all natural pearls, they form around an irritant, which is why Miss MacIntosh says they "belonged to the sick oysters."
- "pearls of greater price, a pearl as big as her head": Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a merchant who, "when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matthew 13:46). See Pearls and Jewels.
- "those already rich as Croesus for whom all things had turned to gold, even his bed and his bread": Croesus was the king of Lydia, in Asia Minor, in the sixth century B.C., renowned for his wealth. The golden bed and bread belong to another king, Midas, whose wish that everything he touched would turn to gold left him unable to eat.

Croesus is significant as a metaphor for the fragile and illusory nature of material wealth and earthly glory, reinforcing the novel's meditation on mortality, loss, and the contrast between external appearances and deeper truths.

- "coats of golden fleece": The Golden Fleece, the hide of a golden ram, was the prize Jason and the Argonauts sailed to Colchis to win. See Greek Mythology.
- "the black-winged angels of mortality falling into the burning sea": Revelation 8:8 tells how "a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea," and Revelation 12:9 how Satan and his angels were cast out of heaven. See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- "she was in the middle passage, as she would always say": Miss MacIntosh means the middle of life's voyage, the place Dante begins the Divine Comedy: "Midway upon the journey of our life" (Inferno 1.1, trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1867). The Middle Passage also named the crossing of the Atlantic by slave ships from Africa, the deadliest leg of the slave trade, a darker meaning in a chapter about injustice.
- "these end-of-the-world visions staining the atmosphere": Miss MacIntosh notes that the Bible's visions of the end "had appeared in the end and not in the beginning," in the Book of Revelation, "and they had not been intended for daily life." The philosophy of the end of the world, or "apocalyptic philosophy," explores the concept of the world's end, often involving catastrophic events, societal collapse, or human extinction, and examines its implications for ethics, meaning, and the understanding of existence. Philosophers have considered various end-of-world scenarios, from natural disasters to societal collapse, prompting reflection on human mortality, the nature of time, and the value of life.
- "The sands of time . . . were running low": The phrase "sands of time" is an idiom that refers to the passage of time, often emphasizing its relentless and irreversible nature. It originates from the imagery of an hourglass, where sand steadily flows from one chamber to another, symbolizing the continuous movement of time from past to future. The idiom is used to convey that time marches on, and moments are fleeting and irretrievable.
- "Man was but a breath, a puff of smoke, and quickly gone. Time was short, growing always shorter just like a candle burning in the wind": The Psalms say, "Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away" (Psalm 144:4), and James asks, "For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14). Macbeth cries, "Out, out, brief candle!"
- "we knew now all we would ever know, it was her opinion, of misery or happiness, all we would ever need to know. We must not waste our lives in the vain expectation of that which might never happen and had never happened and was impossible and would not be good for us if it did happen": Matthew 6:34 counsels, "Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." The passage encourages embracing what is real and immediate rather than being consumed by hopes that lead to despair or distraction.

- “To kiss the rod”: To kiss the rod means to accept punishment meekly, like a child kissing the rod that beat it. Shakespeare uses it in The Two Gentlemen of Verona.
- “than to imagine we were free and our own architects, building heaven”: In John Milton’s Paradise Lost, Satan, newly fallen into hell, declares, “The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.” The line suggests that one’s inner state can transform the worst outward circumstances. Miss MacIntosh distrusts any such architecture of the mind. See Milton.
- “We were the nestless birds”: Jesus says, “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap” (Matthew 6:26), and also, “The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head” (Matthew 8:20).
- “all these fine-feathered birds of paradise”: The birds of paradise of New Guinea reached Europe in the 1500s as trade skins with their feet removed, and naturalists concluded that they had no feet and lived their whole lives in the air, feeding on dew, until they fell to earth at death. Linnaeus named one species Paradisaea apoda, “footless.” See Birds.
- “six-winged seraphim with crowns of gold”: In Isaiah’s vision of the throne of God, “each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly” (Isaiah 6:2). See Angels and Archangels.
- “God was not a harlequin with a shaven head and a masked face and parti-colored tights and a sword of lath”: Harlequin is the acrobatic servant of the Italian commedia dell’arte, in a black half mask and a costume of colored diamonds, carrying a wooden bat or slapstick, the “sword of lath.”
- “God was rather an old harness-maker or an old harpooner or a simple carpenter”: In Mark 6:3 the people of Nazareth ask of Jesus, “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” Miss MacIntosh can imagine God only as a working man.
- “the hard way which closed behind us, which had provided no way of turning back, of walking twice in the same path, of living once again in memory”: This is a take on the saying credited to Heraclitus that no man ever steps in the same river twice, for it is not the same river and he is not the same man. See “No man ever steps in the same river twice” (Ch 3).
    - The philosophy of impermanence or becoming, panta rhei, is best known in Western philosophy from the writings of Heraclitus. Panta Rhei is translated as everything flows. Heraclitus was famous for his insistence on ever-present change as being the fundamental essence of the universe. “No man ever steps in the same river twice.” See Heraclitus and Flux.
- “we were given our opponent in order that we might struggle with him”: The struggle recalls Jacob, who wrestled through the night with a mysterious stranger and would not let him go until he was blessed (Genesis 32:24-30).
- “She believed… in accepting the plain reality as it was, not in self-indulgence and these corrupting dreams of incorruptibility”: 1 Peter 1:23 speaks of being “born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible.” The statement emphasizes Miss

MacIntosh's practical, no-nonsense approach to life that values facing facts honestly and living with integrity, rather than indulging in self-delusion or fanciful ideals that deny human frailty and mortality.

    - Philosophical realists hold that the world exists independently of anyone's mind and can be known as it is. Critics reply that even realists see through their own assumptions and biases. Miss MacIntosh's realism is closest to the common-sense philosophy of the Scottish thinker Thomas Reid, who held that ordinary people know the world directly through their senses and that common sense is the foundation of all reasoning. American colleges taught his philosophy throughout the nineteenth century. In Chapter 1 she declares, "Common sense is the finest sense." See Common Sense and American Pragmatism.

- "those who died but once, those who could not afford to die twice": Julius Caesar says in Shakespeare's play, "Cowards die many times before their deaths; / The valiant never taste of death but once." See Shakespeare.
- "these lute-players strumming in fields of asphodel above the stars": The Asphodel Meadows were the part of the ancient Greek underworld where ordinary souls were sent to live after death.
- "Her feet were too big a size, number eights, long and narrow, pointed outward": In the 1940s the average shoe size for men was size eight like Miss MacIntosh. Women's shoes were about half that size.
- "this stout Admiral Dewey corset": George Dewey was Admiral of the Navy, the only person in United States history to have held the rank. He is best known for his victory at the Battle of Manila Bay during the Spanish-American War, in 1898, where the American side lost only a single man. (Wikipedia) His name was given to streets, towns, products, and babies across the country, and Young's corset, with its "girders as of a ship made to cut the Arctic ice," is built like a battleship.
- "the glassy shore covered with comb jellyfish like a mirror": Comb jellies are not true jellyfish but ctenophores, clear sea animals that swim by beating rows of tiny hairs, the combs, which scatter light into moving rainbows.
- "the chambered nautilus": The nautilus builds its spiral shell one chamber at a time, sealing off each old room as it grows. In Oliver Wendell Holmes's poem "The Chambered Nautilus" (1858), the shell becomes a lesson for the soul: "Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul." See American Writers.
- "Woman's heart was folly": Proverbs 9:13 says, "A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing." The line can be interpreted as a recognition of the emotional vulnerability and the sometimes irrational nature of the human heart, especially as experienced through the female characters in the novel, caught between dreams and reality, love and loss.
- "This earth was the testing ground even for God, often making His own mistakes which had perhaps been unavoidable as He had wished to leave man free": Augustine, in On Free Choice of the Will, argued that God gave human beings free will, though they could misuse it, because a world with freedom is better than one without. This free-will

defense remains one of the main answers to the problem of evil. See Augustine and Christian Theology.

- “the argument as to how many angels might stand on a needle’s point”: The question of how many angels can stand on a needle’s point is a philosophical and theological one, often used to illustrate the difference between physical and spiritual beings. If angels are understood as immaterial beings, an infinite number could potentially occupy the space of a needle’s point. However, if angels are considered to have physical bodies, then the number would be limited by the physical space available. It is also used as a metaphor for wasting time, debating topics of no practical value, or questions whose answers hold no intellectual consequence, while more urgent concerns accumulate. Medieval scholastics such as Thomas Aquinas did ask whether angels occupy space, but the needle’s point seems to come from later mockery of them; the English writer William Chillingworth asked in 1638 “whether a million of angels may not sit upon a needle’s point.”
- “whether a camel shall enter through the needle’s eye or a rich man through the gates of heaven”: The image is a metaphor used in both the Bible and the Quran. It emphasizes the difficulty, or even impossibility, of a wealthy person achieving salvation through their own means. The phrase uses the image of a camel, a large animal, being unable to pass through the tiny eye of a needle to illustrate the immense challenge for a rich person to enter heaven. The saying appears in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, often in the context of Jesus speaking to a rich young man who is unwilling to give up his possessions to follow him. The Quran also uses this metaphor in Surah Al-A’raf (7:40), stating that those who reject God’s signs will not enter Paradise until a camel passes through the eye of a needle.
- “we should rather be concerned with the anatomy of the clouds”: In 1802 the English chemist Luke Howard gave the clouds the Latin names still used today, cirrus, cumulus, and stratus, and Goethe wrote a poem in his honor. See Clouds and Storms.
- “opportunity knocked but once at the door of the sleeper”: The proverb “opportunity knocks but once” was common by the nineteenth century, and John James Ingalls’s sonnet “Opportunity” gave it its best-known form: “I knock unbidden once at every gate! / If sleeping, wake.” The word “opportunity” comes from the Latin ob portum, “toward the harbor,” and the phrase uses personification to describe opportunity as something that comes to a person’s door.
- “these empty husks”: In the parable of the prodigal son, the son who has wasted his inheritance “would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat” (Luke 15:16).
- “We were to be proved, and the truth was better than the lie, even should the lie seem truer than the truth, every lie containing a seed of truth in it, no doubt, but ours was the freedom to make a choice between the truth and the lie and the truth and the truth, to do what was good and right, leaving no uncertainty”: The passage underscores that while lies may be seductive and intertwined with truth, it is the conscious choice to pursue what is good and true that defines human freedom and moral integrity. Many

cultures and thinkers have expressed the belief that, despite the potential pain or discomfort of truth, it ultimately offers a more beneficial and sustainable foundation than deception. A Swahili proverb says, “Kweli chungu si uwongo mtamu,” a bitter truth is better than a sweet lie, and a West African variant runs, “The truth may be bitter, but it lasts longer than a lie.” (Wikipedia) This highlights the idea that even if the truth is difficult to hear, it is ultimately more valuable than a comforting falsehood. Writers and thinkers like Tolstoy have emphasized the importance of truth for moral clarity and authentic relationships. They argue that while lies might offer temporary comfort, they ultimately lead to unsustainable situations and undermine trust. Miss MacIntosh, who “could not endure a bare-faced lie or even the equivocal statement hovering between two truths,” would agree.

- “a lighthouse for the blind”: The Lighthouse, founded in New York in 1905 by the sisters Winifred and Edith Holt as the New York Association for the Blind, gave its name to “lighthouses for the blind” across the country, agencies that trained blind people for work.
- “a home for old sailors on shore leave”: Sailors’ Snug Harbor on Staten Island opened in 1833 as a home for “aged, decrepit and worn-out sailors,” paid for by the estate of the shipowner Robert Richard Randall.
- “crack nuts on a rusted flatiron”: A flatiron was a heavy iron for pressing clothes, heated on the stove before electric irons. Upturned between the knees, it made a good anvil for cracking nuts.
- “passing through the garden of the blind”: The garden is the one Catherine’s father planted for his blind wife in Chapter 2, with “neat and circling paths where was no obstacle.” See Eyes and Blindness.
- “wallowing in a Slough of Despond, almost the gutter itself”: The Slough of Despond is a deep bog in John Bunyan’s allegory The Pilgrim’s Progress, into which the protagonist Christian sinks under the weight of his sins and his sense of guilt for them. It signifies a dark, painful phase in Miss MacIntosh’s life, highlighting both her resilience and the harsh realities she has faced before becoming Vera’s steadfast moral guide. See Miss MacIntosh in Intertextuality in MMMD.
- “before, at last, I knew her, before I saw her plain”: The phrase echoes Robert Browning’s “Memorabilia”: “Ah, did you once see Shelley plain, / And did he stop and speak to you?” To see someone plain is to see the person as they really are, which no one in the house has done with Miss MacIntosh.
- “a phosphorous light playing upon the darkened waters”: The glow sailors called phosphorescence in a ship’s wake is bioluminescence, light made by tiny plankton such as Noctiluca, “night light,” when the water is disturbed.
- “She was neither a high brow nor a low brow but just . . . a plain middle brow”: The terms come from phrenology, which judged intelligence by the shape of the skull. Highbrow and lowbrow were in use by the 1900s, Van Wyck Brooks wrote “Highbrow and Lowbrow” in 1915, Virginia Woolf wrote an essay, “Middlebrow,” around 1932, and Russell Lynes’s “Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow” appeared in Harper’s in 1949.

- “trying to steer her middle course between these jangling rocks”: Odysseus had to steer between Scylla, the six-headed monster, and Charybdis, the whirlpool, and the Argonauts passed through the Clashing Rocks that crushed ships between them. See Homer’s Epics.
- “her British tan oxfords, her grey fedora”: The fedora, a soft felt hat with a creased crown, took its name from Victorien Sardou’s play Fédora (1882), whose heroine wore one, and was later taken up by men. Miss MacIntosh wears the men’s hat.
- “armored always by her silver dollar watch”: Dollar watches were cheap, sturdy pocket watches. The Ingersoll company sold one for a dollar from 1896 and called it “the watch that made the dollar famous.” See Clocks and Watches.
- “she could not see the purple hairstreak moths among the evening flowers”: The purple hairstreak is in fact a small butterfly, not a moth, that lives high in the tops of oak trees, where it is easily missed. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “her good pin-striped grey serge with the shining elbows”: Serge is a type of twill fabric that has diagonal lines or ridges on both sides, made with a two-up, two-down weave. This choice of material aligns with Miss MacIntosh’s practical, no-nonsense character, emphasizing her plain, robust, and durable style of dress suited to her hardworking and sensible nature.
- “made up of the bare necessities, as she would say, and no more”: Miss MacIntosh’s wardrobe is simple living in practice, with “not even a trimming of braid or a fichu of lace or an unnecessary button, for if there were an unnecessary button, it would be only one more button to lose.” Simple living encompasses a number of different voluntary practices to simplify one’s lifestyle. These may include: reducing one’s possessions, generally referred to as minimalism, or increasing self-sufficiency. Simple living may be characterized by individuals being satisfied with what they have rather than want.
- “its pockets sagging because she had carried so many rocks, perhaps as ballast”: The novelist Virginia Woolf drowned herself in March 1941 by filling her pockets with stones and walking into the River Ouse, a few years before Young began writing this novel. See Virginia Woolf walked into the River (Ch 3) and Suicide in History and Literature.
    - “I had been inspired as to the means of Miss MacIntosh’s suicide by Virginia Woolf’s suicide,” Young said, and she learned only later that Woolf had “carried her walking stick with her clear to the tide’s edge,” as Miss MacIntosh leaves her umbrella (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965); (Marguerite Young, interview with Duncan MacDonald, Observation Point, 1965).
- “the known facts I had memorized as to the deaths of kings”: Shakespeare’s Richard II, facing his own fall, says, “For God’s sake let us sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the death of kings.” Miss MacIntosh thinks the deaths of kings “far less important than instructions in navigation.”
- “Pilgrim’s Progress which she preferred to even the Word of God”: The Pilgrim’s Progress from This World, to That Which Is to Come is a 1678 Christian allegory written by John Bunyan. It is commonly regarded as one of the most significant works

of Protestant devotional literature and of wider early modern English literature. It has been translated into more than 200 languages and has never been out of print. It appeared in Dutch in 1681, in German in 1703 and in Swedish in 1727. The first North American edition was issued in 1681. It has also been called the first novel written in English. According to literary editor Robert McCrum, “there’s no book in English, apart from the Bible, to equal Bunyan’s masterpiece for the range of its readership, or its influence on writers as diverse as William Hogarth, C. S. Lewis, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Charles Dickens, Louisa May Alcott, George Bernard Shaw, William Thackeray, Charlotte Bronte, Mark Twain, John Steinbeck and Enid Blyton.” The lyrics of the hymn “To be a Pilgrim” are based on the novel. See John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress (1678) (Ch 3) and Pilgrim’s Progress.

- “the Word of God was that which should be taken with a grain of salt”: To take something with a grain of salt, cum grano salis, goes back to Pliny the Elder, who described an antidote to poison to be taken with a grain of salt.
- “the winds and their antiphon reminding me of all who had died”: An antiphon is a short chant in Christian ritual, sung as a refrain.
- “an Arctic tern stopping upon the rocks”: The Arctic tern makes the longest migration of any animal, flying each year from its Arctic breeding grounds to the Antarctic and back, and so sees two summers and more daylight than any other creature. See Birds.
- “The sins we committed were worse than those of omission”: Christian teaching distinguishes sins of commission, wrongs done, from sins of omission, good left undone, as in the general confession of the Book of Common Prayer: “We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done.” Miss MacIntosh ranks the first as worse, yet elsewhere she speaks of “those things God in His haste had forgotten,” as if God, too, had sins of omission.
- “What is the best time to plant corn? Which part of the ship is abaft the main-mast?”: Old farm lore says to plant corn when the oak leaves are as big as a squirrel’s ear, when the soil has warmed. Abaft means toward the stern, and starboard is the right-hand side of a ship facing forward.
- “two pennies with which, she used to say, her eyes would be closed when she was dead”: Charon’s obol is the term for the coin placed in or on the mouth of a dead person before burial. Greek and Latin literary sources specify the coin as an obol, and explain it was used as a payment or bribe for Charon, the ferryman who conveyed souls across the river that divided the world of the living from the world of the dead. (Wikipedia) In later custom, coins were laid on the eyelids of the dead to keep them closed.
- “that I would see America first”: The slogan returns from Chapter 1, where Miss MacIntosh’s advice sends Vera into the Middle West. See the Chapter 1 resources.
- “better than all the principalities, all the powers of darkness”: Ephesians 6:12 reads, “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world.”

- “What Cheer, Iowa, a small town like any other”: What Cheer is a real town in Keokuk County, Iowa, of about six hundred people. Its name is an old English greeting; the Narragansett people are said to have greeted Roger Williams in 1636 with “What cheer, netop?” (“What cheer, friend?”). In an interview Young said she had no idea there was a real town by the name of What Cheer, Iowa. She thought she had made it up. See What Cheer (Ch 3) and Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “Few ever saw Miss MacIntosh”: Social invisibility here signifies the overlooked yet vital presence of Miss MacIntosh, whose plainness and refusal to engage in illusion cause her to be unseen or ignored, representing those who labor quietly and faithfully without acknowledgment in a world filled with illusions and distractions. It also emphasizes themes of isolation, unrecognized labor, and the contrast between appearance and reality. Social invisibility occurs when a group or individual is consistently overlooked or excluded from social, political, or economic participation. Catherine’s visitors “cared not to inquire who the active servant was.”
- “her admirer was a head-hunter. He was an Australian bushman”: In Australian English a bushman is someone at home in the outback, usually a white settler skilled in bush life, and the Bushmen contingents were Australian volunteers who fought in the Boer War in 1900. The word did not usually mean Aboriginal people. There is little evidence of head-hunting on the Australian mainland. He is a foil to Miss MacIntosh, who rejects him, and the chapter treats his presence in the invalid’s house as a scandal. Young gives him a “wild mien and calculated, incalculable eloquence,” a “flow of broken rhetoric” with “imitations of a lyre bird.”
    - Miss MacIntosh’s head-hunter is a mixture. He is called an Australian bushman, a “wild, half-naked man of Borneo,” and a recent arrival from New Mexico, and her brother was lost in the Easter Islands. A bushman is easily confused with a bushranger, an outlaw of the bush; the most famous, Ned Kelly, was hanged in 1880, and some saw him as a champion of poor farmers against large landowners.
    - Head-hunting was practiced in the Torres Strait Islands, between Australia and New Guinea, including on Badu, where taking heads was tied to warfare and ceremonies honoring the dead. It was also practiced by the Dayak peoples of Borneo and in New Guinea, and the Māori of New Zealand preserved the tattooed heads of ancestors and enemies.
    - Of the bushman Young said, “I was thinking of the Easter Islands and those distant places where they worshipped the great stone heads” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965).
- “his dreams . . . were that he might go over to Rome”: To “go over to Rome” was the English phrase for converting to Roman Catholicism, used of John Henry Newman and others in the Oxford Movement of the 1840s.
- “nor was he even a good Presbyterian or Free Methodist or Shouting Baptist or Jehovah’s Witness”: Miss MacIntosh lists the plain Protestant churches of the Middle West. The Free Methodist Church was founded in New York in 1860 in protest against

pew rents and slavery, and “shouting” describes the loud, ecstatic worship of revival meetings. See American Religious Movements.

- “nor did he believe in total immersion, for he believed in sprinkling”: Churches have long divided over baptism. Baptists and many revival churches baptize adults by total immersion, while Catholics, Presbyterians, and Methodists usually baptize by sprinkling or pouring. Anabaptist groups are established in Iowa, including the Amish, the Mennonites, and the Old Order River Brethren, who baptize by immersion.
    - Baptism for especially early Christians was like being buried so that a person could rise to a new life. According to Paul, full immersion under water represents the believer’s death and burial in a watery grave with Christ, and the rising out of the water represents resurrection to a new life (Romans 6:3-4). Drownings during baptism have occasionally happened, and in the 1500s drowning was used as a punishment against the Anabaptists themselves: Felix Manz was drowned in Zurich in 1527, a mocking “third baptism.”
- “as if he might even some day become the Pope wearing turrets of gold”: The papal tiara was a beehive-shaped crown of three tiers. Pope Paul VI was crowned with one in 1963 and then gave it away, and no pope since has worn it.
- “walls of bones in beautiful designs like lace”: In the Capuchin Crypt beneath the church of Santa Maria della Concezione in Rome, the bones of some 3,700 friars are arranged in arches, rosettes, and chandeliers.
- “the dead burying the dead until there were no more to bury”: Jesus tells a would-be follower who first wants to bury his father, “Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead” (Matthew 8:22).
- “the primitive Christians of great works and little faith, not of great faith and little works”: The old quarrel between faith and works runs through Christianity. James 2:17 says, “faith, if it hath not works, is dead,” and Martin Luther, who taught salvation by faith alone, called the Epistle of James “an epistle of straw.”
- “stopping to admire a broken Apollo”: Apollo is an Olympian deity in classical Greek and Roman religion and mythology.
- “a dreaming Psyche”: The story of Psyche, told by Apuleius in The Golden Ass, is about the overcoming of obstacles to the love between Psyche and Cupid/Amor. Psyche in this context embodies the spiritual and psychological dimensions of human life, the inner reality behind outward appearances, and the continual transformation inherent in the human condition.
- “a fat-stomached cupid with grapes in its hair and its nose broken when it had fallen from a Roman roof”: Roman palaces and churches lined their rooflines with stone statues of saints, gods, and cupids, so a broken cupid might well have fallen from a Roman roof. The roofs themselves were made of overlapping clay tiles, flat tegulae with curved imbrices covering the joints, a durable design still used across the Mediterranean.

- “the wooden huntresses in ruined gardens”: Diana is a goddess in Roman and Hellenistic religion primarily considered a patroness of the countryside, hunters, crossroads, and the Moon. She is equated with the Greek goddess Artemis.
- “in his native bush among bush-whackers”: In Australia a bushwhacker is someone who lives in the bush or clears it. In the United States the word meant a guerrilla fighter, especially in the Civil War. See The Civil War.
- The Catholic Church had an assimilation policy (as in many other colonized countries) which was used to break the spiritual and cultural identity of Aborigines (and indigenous cultures worldwide) by removing tens of thousands of children from their parents. They apologized to Aborigines for the “stolen generation.” Recently Canada (2008), Pope Francis (2022) and the United States (2024) have also apologized for this practice.
- “the love songs of a lyre bird who had fallen in love with an Australian spinster and had built a tower of earth to her window”: The lyrebird is a ground-dwelling Australian bird famous for mimicking natural and artificial sounds, even chainsaws and camera shutters. The male builds mounds of earth on which he dances and sings to court the female. Rural Australia also has its Bachelors and Spinsters Balls, country dances where single men and women meet.
- “an old Ritz menu . . . an Etruscan mirror and an ivory comb”: César Ritz opened the Hôtel Ritz in Paris in 1898 with the chef Auguste Escoffier, whose French menus set the standard of luxury dining. Etruscan mirrors were polished bronze hand mirrors, engraved on the back with scenes from myth.
- It is interesting that the Head-hunter focuses on her head given what follows in later chapters. This also highlights a man’s feeling that he has the right to interrupt, surprise, and corner a woman when he is interested in her no matter how the woman is feeling. In feminist literature this behavior can be identified as a man who feels he is entitled, deserving, and owed a woman’s attention regardless of her feelings. He is the “hunter,” and she is his “prey.”
- “he might still revert to the noble savage”: The phrase “noble savage” first appears in English in John Dryden’s play The Conquest of Granada (1672). It is often credited to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who never used it, though he praised humanity in a natural state.
- “the wild, half-naked man of Borneo”: “The Wild Man of Borneo” was a stock attraction of nineteenth-century freak shows, and P. T. Barnum exhibited men under that name.
- “memories of Eskimos”: Eskimos are the Indigenous peoples who have traditionally inhabited the northern region from eastern Siberia to Alaska, Canada, and Greenland. Many now prefer their own names, such as Inuit and Yupik.
- “cherubim, many-faced angels with plumes of gold”: In Ezekiel’s vision the cherubim each have four faces, of a man, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (Ezekiel 1:10).
- “Charon on his great ferry boat crossing the dark river Styx”: In Greek and Roman mythology Charon is the ferryman of Hades who carries souls of the newly deceased

across the river Styx and Acheron that divided the world of the living from the world of the dead.

- “the ghost of Cheops”: Cheops is the Greek name of the Egyptian pharaoh Khufu, who built the Great Pyramid of Giza around 2560 B.C. See Ancient Egypt.
- “St. Simeon the Stylite and what he had thought of this lower world”: St. Simeon the Stylite was a Syriac ascetic saint who achieved notability for living thirty-seven years on a small platform on top of a pillar near Aleppo. (Wikipedia)
- “Daniel encompassed by sleeping lions”: Daniel 6:22 tells how Daniel is saved from lions by the God of Israel. Symbolically, this reference typically evokes themes of courage, faith, endurance, and survival in the face of danger or adversity.
- “the Appian Way and houses of the dead”: The Appian Way, begun in 312 B.C., is one of the earliest and most important roads of the Roman Republic. Its first miles outside Rome are lined with tombs, the “houses of the dead.”
- “St. Augustine in the city of God”: The City of God is a book of Christian philosophy written in Latin by Augustine of Hippo after the sack of Rome in 410. (Wikipedia) The mention of St. Augustine’s “City of God” serves as a profound symbol of the contrast between earthly decay and spiritual aspiration, reflecting the characters’ inward struggles with faith, reality, and the hope for salvation or ultimate truth beyond the ephemeral world. See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “Georgian architecture”: Georgian architecture is the name given in most English-speaking countries to the set of architectural styles between 1714 and 1830, the reigns of the first four King Georges.
- “Spode chinaware”: Spode is the English pottery founded by Josiah Spode in Stoke-on-Trent in 1770, famous for its blue-and-white transfer-printed ware.
- “of Delft, of silver urns”: Delftware is the blue-and-white tin-glazed pottery made in the Dutch city of Delft from the seventeenth century, in imitation of Chinese porcelain.
- “He could not digest the golden steeples and streets of gold”: The heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation has gates of pearl, “and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass” (Revelation 21:21). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “these gaping cannibals”: Thomas Baker was a Methodist missionary in Fiji and is the only missionary in that country to be killed and eaten.
- “Her own dear brother had gone out as a primitive Christian bishop from Iowa”: A bishop is an ordained member of the Christian clergy who oversees other clergy. See Richard MacIntosh.
- “to convert the heathen of the Easter Islands”: Easter Island is an island and special territory of Chile in the southeastern Pacific Ocean. It is famous for its nearly 1,000 statues called moai. Its people are the Rapa Nui. Recent research has challenged the old story that an ecological collapse drove the islanders to war and cannibalism.
- “the ladies mentioned by Plutarch”: Plutarch was a Greek Middle Platonist philosopher, biographer, and essayist, and a priest at the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, best known for his Parallel Lives of famous Greeks and Romans. (Wikipedia) Plutarch functions as a

symbol of the mother's intellectual and cultural anchoring amidst her drifting consciousness, representing a link to enduring human wisdom and the complexities of love, fate, and history that permeate her visionary world.

- "the Protestant graveyard where Keats and Shelley slept and who after only one week in Rome had died of the marsh fever": Keats and Shelley are buried in Rome's Non-Catholic Cemetery near the Pyramid of Cestius. Marsh fever, or Roman fever, was malaria, whose name comes from the Italian mal aria, "bad air." In Henry James's "Daisy Miller" (1878), an American girl dies of Roman fever after a night visit to the Colosseum. See Romantic Poets.
- "the best hotel would be the Quirinale": The Quirinal Palace in Rome was a papal palace, then the royal palace, and is now the home of the president of Italy. It has housed thirty Popes, four Kings of Italy and twelve presidents of the Italian Republic. Rome also has a Hotel Quirinale, on the Via Nazionale.
- "if he should not be admitted there, then he should try the Pantheon": The Pantheon, completed about 125 A.D., was a temple to all the gods. Since 609 it has been a Catholic church, Santa Maria ad Martyres, and it holds the tombs of the painter Raphael and two kings of Italy, a strange hotel.
- "mummery and flummery and junk": Mummery is empty ritual or play-acting, from the masked mummers of folk plays. Flummery is a soft pudding, and so empty flattery or nonsense.
- "For herself, she asked nothing": Saint Teresa Margaret of the Sacred Heart, an eighteenth-century Carmelite nun of Florence, gave this counsel: "Always receive with equal contentment from God's hand either consolations or sufferings, peace or distress, health or illness. Ask nothing, refuse nothing, but always be ready to do and to suffer anything that comes from His Providence."
- "even as the canker eats the rose, as gold and silver rust": Shakespeare's Sonnet 35 says "loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud," the canker being a worm or blight. James 5:3 warns the rich, "Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you," and Matthew 6:19 speaks of treasures on earth "where moth and rust doth corrupt."
- "a dead lobster or broken hermit shell or lion's mane": The lion's mane is the largest known jellyfish, with a reddish bell and masses of long, stinging tentacles like a mane.
- "There must be, in fact, a revolution": In political science, a revolution is a fundamental and relatively sudden change in political power and political organization which occurs when the population revolts against the government, typically due to perceived oppression or political incompetence. (Wikipedia) Miss MacIntosh cannot wait for gradual change, "no more than for a glacier moving in the night," and socialists of her time argued the same question, whether society should change by slow reform or by revolution.
- "What had this Darwinian evolution ever done for anybody?": Darwinian evolution, set out in Charles Darwin's On the Origin of Species (1859), is a theory of biological evolution stating that all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural

selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce.

- "God's was the strength of the unicorn": Numbers 23:22 and 24:8 say of God that "he hath as it were the strength of an unicorn." The King James translators used "unicorn" for the Hebrew re'em, probably the wild ox. The phrase may be interpreted as a poetic way of emphasizing the ineffable, incorruptible power of the divine, which stands apart from the fragile, chaotic human condition depicted throughout the novel.
- "were we not still in Egypt, the waste-howling wilderness": Miss MacIntosh's speech is a weave of scripture. God led Israel out of Egypt, and Deuteronomy 32:10 says he found Jacob "in the waste howling wilderness." "I was shapen in iniquity" is Psalm 51:5, "the mystery of iniquity" is 2 Thessalonians 2:7, "the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment" is Job 20:5, and "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread" is Genesis 3:19. See The Bible.
- "Honesty was surely, and it had always been, the best policy": The proverb has been attributed to Sir Edwin Sandys, who used it in 1599, and it was later quoted by Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.
- "never to hide one's head in the desert sands like the poor ostrich": The belief that the ostrich hides its head in the sand goes back to Pliny the Elder. Ostriches actually lie low with their necks along the ground, or turn their eggs in the nest with their beaks.
- "our good works should not live after us": Miss MacIntosh reverses Mark Antony in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar: "The evil that men do lives after them; / The good is oft interred with their bones." See Shakespeare.
- "not the left wing . . . not the right wing . . . but something more immense, an honest point of view, the whole bird": Centrism is a political outlook or specific position that involves acceptance or support of a balance of a degree of social equality and a degree of social hierarchy, while opposing political changes which would result in a significant shift of society strongly to either the left or the right. Centrism has a specific meaning within the Marxist movement, referring to a position between revolution and reformism. (Wikipedia) Miss MacIntosh's centrist position is a firm, pragmatic, and sober approach to life, emphasizing common sense, self-discipline, and the rejection of illusions as the best way to navigate a harsh and uncertain world. Miss MacIntosh's centrism is not merely a political or social stance but a fundamental worldview that privileges order, clarity, and practical wisdom in a world otherwise engulfed by confusion and chaos. Catherine's list in Chapter 2 included "the left-wing political movement, the right wing of the dove."
- "another sea-swept spar which, clothed with feathery goose barnacles": Goose barnacles hang from driftwood on fleshy stalks, their feathery feeding legs looking like plumes. Medieval writers such as Gerald of Wales believed that barnacle geese hatched from them, since no one had seen the geese nest.
- "without the dead body, there could be no proof of death in a legal sense": In the common law, a person who has been missing without word for seven years may be presumed dead, but without a body or that long wait, a death cannot be proved.

- “or even a lamp-lighter”: A lamplighter lit and tended candle or gas street lamps at dusk. Maria Susanna Cummins’s novel The Lamplighter (1854) was one of the great bestsellers of its century, and the lamplighter on his tiny planet in Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s The Little Prince (1943) lights and puts out his lamp every minute. The lamplighter stands as a symbol of hope, constancy, and the pursuit of clarity in a world engulfed by darkness, illusion, and uncertainty.
- “The wait-and-see policy had always been his”: “Wait and see” became a political catchphrase in 1910, when the British prime minister H. H. Asquith used it repeatedly in Parliament, and his critics made it his nickname.
- “no man knew, unless it was Mr. Spitzer, the hour of his death”: “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 25:13).
- “He had always preferred a dark lady”: The phrase recalls the Dark Lady of Shakespeare’s Sonnets, the dark-haired, dark-eyed woman of Sonnets 127 to 152, so unlike the fair beloved of convention. Miss MacIntosh, the redhead Mr. Spitzer remembers as a brunette, is the novel’s own dark lady.
- “at the doors of an employment agency which was turning away the unemployed”: During the Great Depression, unemployment in the United States reached about a quarter of the workforce in 1933, and lines of jobless men waited outside employment offices and soup kitchens.
- “under the sign of three golden balls of a pawn shop like golden apples”: The pawnbroker’s sign of three golden balls is often traced to the Medici of Florence, whose coat of arms bore balls, and to Saint Nicholas, patron of pawnbrokers, who gave three bags of gold to save three poor girls.

Vocabulary

Abaft

Toward the stern of a ship; behind.

Abjure

To renounce or reject solemnly.

Archaic

Very old; belonging to a much earlier time.

Asphodel

A lily-like flower that, in Greek myth, covers the meadows of the underworld where ordinary souls go after death.

Athwart

Across, from side to side; also, against.

Ballast

Heavy material, such as stones, carried low in a ship to keep it steady.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Beetling

Jutting out and overhanging, as beetling brows or cliffs.

Brusque

Abrupt and blunt in manner.

Calker

Also caulker. A worker who seals the seams of a wooden ship to make it watertight.

Canker

A blight or ulcer that eats away at a plant or the body; anything that corrupts from within.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chimera

A monster of Greek myth, part lion, part goat, part serpent; any wild, impossible fancy.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Coiffured

With the hair carefully styled.

Constitutional

A walk taken regularly for the sake of one’s health.

Cornice

A decorative molding that runs along the top of a wall or building.

Corpulent

Fat; stout.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Countenance

As a verb, to tolerate or approve of. As a noun, the face.

Cryptic

Mysterious; hard to make out.

Daft

Silly or crazy.

Deluge

A great flood or downpour. The Deluge is Noah’s flood.

Demoniac

Wild and frenzied, as if possessed by a demon.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Despoil

To rob or strip of something valuable.

Dillydally

To waste time; to dawdle.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Empearled

Adorned with pearls, or having a pearly sheen.

Equivocal

Open to more than one interpretation; deliberately vague.

Ermine

The white winter fur of the stoat, used to trim the robes of kings and nobles.

Estuary

The wide mouth of a river, where fresh water meets the tide.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Fichu

A triangular scarf of lace or muslin worn over the shoulders and knotted at the breast.

Fleshpots

Places or pleasures of luxury and sensual indulgence.

Flinty

Hard and unyielding, like flint.

Flounced

Trimmed with flounces, wide strips of gathered or pleated fabric sewn to a skirt or dress.

Frumpery

Dowdy, old-fashioned finery. Young pairs it with trumpery.

Gregarious

Fond of company; sociable.

Guttural

Harsh and throaty in sound.

Hale

Healthy and strong, especially said of someone older.

Harbinger

A forerunner; a sign of what is coming.

Hectic

Of the cheeks: flushed, as with fever. The word first described the flush of consumption.

Homespun

Simple and plain; originally, cloth spun at home.

Imbued

Filled or soaked through with a quality or feeling.

Imploring

Begging earnestly.

Inclement

Of weather: cold, wet, or stormy.

Iniquity

Great wickedness or injustice.

Kingpin

The central pin in bowling; the most important person in a group.

Laggard

Slow; falling behind.

Lath

A thin, narrow strip of wood. A sword of lath is a wooden stage sword.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Lode

A vein of metal ore in rock.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Ménage

A household.

Miasmic

Foul-smelling and unhealthy, like a miasma, the vapor once thought to cause disease.

Mien

A person’s look or manner.

Minuscular

Tiny. Young’s form of minuscule.

Moonstone

A milky, pearly-blue gemstone.

Morassed

Bogged down, as in a morass, a swamp.

Moribund

Dying; near death.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Mundane

Ordinary; of this world.

Myopic

Nearsighted.

Nefarious

Wicked; villainous.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Obtrude

To push in where one is not wanted.

Oilskin

Cloth made waterproof with oil; a raincoat of it.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Oxfords

Low, laced leather shoes.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Palings

Pointed wooden stakes, or a fence made of them.

Perchance

Perhaps; by chance.

Periwinkle

A small edible sea snail.

Petticoat

An underskirt.

Phantasmagoric

Like a phantasmagoria, a shifting series of dreamlike or nightmarish images. A phantasmagoria was an eighteenth-century magic-lantern ghost show.

Pine-marten

A weasel-like animal of northern forests, prized for its fur.

Pippin

An old variety of eating apple.

Presentiment

An intuitive feeling that something is about to happen.

Principality

A territory ruled by a prince.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Pumice

A light, porous, grey volcanic stone.

Raucous

Harsh and loud.

Reticule

A small drawstring handbag.

Romish

An old, hostile Protestant word for Roman Catholic.

Roseate

Rose-colored. Also hopeful or overly optimistic.

Russet

A reddish-brown color; also an apple with rough, brownish skin.

Salt-and-pepper

Of cloth or hair: flecked with black and white.

Sand dollar

A flat, round sea urchin whose white skeleton is found on beaches.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Sea nettle

A stinging jellyfish.

Sequester

To set apart or hold in safekeeping.

Seraphim

The highest order of angels, each with six wings. The singular is seraph.

Shirtwaist

A woman’s blouse tailored like a man’s shirt.

Skulking

Lurking or moving about in a sneaking way.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Soporific

Causing sleep; dulling the senses.

Soughing

Making a soft sighing or rushing sound, like wind in trees.

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard. Spar is also the name for certain shiny, easily split crystalline minerals, such as Iceland spar.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Spindrift

Spray blown from the tops of waves.

Spinster

An unmarried woman, especially an older one. The word first meant a woman who spun thread.

Spume

Foam or froth on the sea.

Squall

A sudden, violent gust of wind, often with rain or snow.

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Stygian

Of the river Styx in the Greek underworld; dark and gloomy.

Trumpery

Showy things of no value; nonsense.

Turncoat

One who switches sides.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Tweed

A rough woolen cloth, often of mixed colors, first woven in Scotland.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Vagaries

Unpredictable changes or whims.

Vagrant

Wandering, with no settled home.

Vainglorious

Excessively proud and boastful.

Visage

A person’s face or expression.

Vociferously

Loudly and forcefully.

Whalebone

Baleen, the flexible plates from the mouths of certain whales, once used to stiffen corsets.

Woolpack

A bale of wool; a heaped white cloud.

Wraith

A ghost; a faint, pale shape.

Chapter 4

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

For years after the disappearance, Vera grieves by the shore. Her hair is cropped and her body heavy, and she drifts in sleep and dreaming. She tries to write a book, lights fires on the beach, and questions fishermen and sailors. Catherine decides her daughter is losing her mind and offers the only cure she knows: opium and a dreamless paradise of eternal youth. Vera refuses, and years later travels west by train from Grand Central Station and then by bus, stopping short of Miss MacIntosh's Iowa in Indiana. She recalls a young woman who set out to be married, changed her mind at the last minute, and jumped from the Brooklyn Bridge clutching the suitcase that held her wedding veil. On the train, a fat, soft-faced lady warns her that the Middle West is desolate, a place of old people who are deaf because they do not wish to hear.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Miss MacIntosh · Catherine Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · The Search for Meaning · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Fire · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Moon and Stars · Opium · Roses and Flowers · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The House · Weddings and Funerals

Allusions: Ecclesiastes · Edgar Allan Poe · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Romantic Poets · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- Vera begins by describing a long period dominated by the dream of Miss MacIntosh, a lost and beloved figure whose disappearance profoundly affected her. She is trapped in a somnolent, vacant state, disconnected from reality, with her mother interpreting this as a loss of sanity. This passage highlights themes of grief, memory, and the struggle to hold onto reality after loss. The dream is both a refuge and a prison, reflecting Vera's internal conflict.
- Catherine's response to Vera's mental state is a complex act of love and resignation. She accepts Vera's "death in the midst of my life," urging her to remain still and give up on living fully, which symbolizes a surrender to despair and the avoidance of life's

harsh realities. This acceptance also suggests a generational transmission of defeat and illness, emphasizing the themes of mortality, mental illness, and the desire for oblivion.

- Vera recounts her mother Catherine's promises of eternal youth and beauty, describing a fantastical vision filled with precious jewels, supernatural servants, and luxurious attire. These images contrast sharply with Vera's own physical decline and sorrow, underscoring the tension between illusion and harsh reality. The mention of the "opium paradise" and "sleeping wakefulness" evokes a state of escapism, where illusion replaces the world.
- Despite years of despair, Vera has not given up searching for Miss MacIntosh, symbolizing a search for meaning, connection, and a normal life. The dream of a simple, domestic, and ordinary life with knitting needles in the sand, building a house of driftwood, and lighting a fire on the beach stands in stark contrast to her actual existence. This passage expresses the human longing for stability, belonging, and the "other America" of routine and community.
- Vera recalls Miss MacIntosh's descriptions of Iowa, a place of cold, ordinary, and finite life, filled with hardships and community ties. This reflection points to the inescapability of origin and the harsh realities that contrast with dreams of escape. The cold imagery of frozen ears, frozen horses, and frozen smoke symbolizes emotional and spiritual freezing, a life stunted by environment and circumstance.
- A fat, soft-faced lady warns Vera about the desolation awaiting her destination. She describes it as a place "out of this world," devoid of social life, communication, human contact, and filled with decay and death. This forewarning encapsulates themes of isolation, the death of community, and the futility of Vera's quest. It also reflects the fear of entering a place where life is "chilling," "numbing," and where the "golden bowl was broken."
- The chapter recounts the tragic end of a young woman who jumped from the Brooklyn Bridge clutching her suitcase, her veil packed inside, disappearing into the dark waters. This vivid and haunting image captures the despair and finality of fate, especially those of the lower classes, and reinforces themes of loss, hopelessness, and the elusive nature of identity and love.
- Toward the end, Vera expresses a yearning for a life filled with ordinary joys like family picnics, blossoming orchards, laughter of children, and a natural death after a long life. This vision contrasts with the dark hallucinations and self-deception that have plagued her. It symbolizes hope, renewal, and the possibility of healing from eternal mourning.
- Vera questions whether she has made the "wrong choice" or if there is no real choice at all, reflecting on the many "turnings" and "windings" of her journey. This existential doubt touches on themes of destiny, free will, and the search for meaning amid confusion and despair.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Catherine offers Vera “my death in the midst of my life” and promises that “The years should bring me youth.” Why does she think stillness is the kindest gift she can give?
- Vera dreams “of nothing but a shoemaker’s awl, an old tramp’s shoe which needed mending, a hammer, a nail.” Why does a rich girl dream of tools?
- Vera tries to write a book but cannot compete with “four snails crawling across the open pages,” whose “writing was more beautiful than mine.” Why does she leave the book by the tide?
- Miss MacIntosh’s Iowa is all frozen, down to the farmer brought ashore with his hands frozen to the reins. Then Vera says, “But this was not Iowa.” Whose Iowa is it?

Characters

- Catherine’s offer is called “my mother’s greatest act of love, the only sign that she had a child.” How can a gift of oblivion be love?
- The dead girl accepts the proposals of men she has never seen and describes herself differently to each. How is she like Vera, who sets out for a life she has read about in seed catalogues?
- The fat lady on the train calls the Middle West “the jumping-off place, the end of the world.” Is she a false prophet, or does she know something Vera does not?

Connections

- Vera calls herself “a Lazarus of these awakening joys.” Who or what does she hope will call her out of the tomb?
- The chapter promises “the silver, the golden, never the leaden bells.” How do bells mark the stages of a life here and in the chapters before?
- Miss MacIntosh “had given her life to prove that dreams were false,” yet Vera now lives by dreaming of her. How does the chapter turn the nursemaid herself into a dream?

Reflection

- Vera says she came “because only of the unknown, because only of that which I had reached for, life, the unreachable.” Can a person set out for a place they have only imagined?
- The old people are deaf because “they did not wish to hear,” their ears filled with “the roarings of the world inside.” What do people stop hearing when grief or age fills them?
- “Time died when my love died.” How does grief change a person’s sense of time?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- Deeply affected by Miss MacIntosh's disappearance or death.
- Battles between despair, illusions, and the desire for a meaningful life.
- Struggles with her mother Catherine's perception of her sanity.
- Embodies themes of mourning, hope, and transformation.

Miss MacIntosh

- The lost love, symbolizing a "normal life" and idealized domesticity.
- Her disappearance is mysterious and traumatic.
- Associated with innocence and unattainable dreams.

Catherine Cartwheel

- Acts as both caretaker and enforcer of oblivion.
- Seeks to protect Vera by encouraging a withdrawal from life.
- Represents acceptance of death in life and resignation.

Fat, soft-faced lady on the train

- Provides a warning about the desolation of Vera's destination.
- Symbolizes the voice of experience and harsh reality.
- Contrasts with Vera's hope and romanticism.

Research: Themes

Loss and Mourning

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Vera is consumed by the loss of Miss MacIntosh.
- Grief manifests as a somnolent, almost catatonic state, with Vera's body described as "slothful and immense" and her mind "employed by nothing but the dream" of normalcy.
- The loss is so profound that time seems to stop and Vera experiences a "long sleep of empty years."

Reality and Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality

- Catherine believes Vera is losing her sanity and attempts to have Vera “stilled and put away” through opium or drug-induced sleep, offering her an “opium paradise” as an escape from reality.
- Catherine creates a vision of immortal beauty and oblivion for her daughter, likening her eventual state to an “embalmed corpse” or a nymph in a fairy grotto as a metaphor for eternal stasis and escape from pain.
- Vera contrasts this illusion with her own experience, becoming “the creature of my own sorrow,” a “fat, stupid, indolent girl” whose sorrow isolates her from life.

Search for Meaning and Life

See: The Search for Meaning

- Despite despair, Vera clings to memories and symbols of Miss MacIntosh, such as the ivory knitting needles found in the sand, and lights a fire on the beach to signal her lost love.
- Vera undertakes a physical quest, talking to fishermen and sailors, symbolizing a search for connection and understanding in the vastness of the sea and life.
- Ultimately, Vera seeks to reconcile with life, imagining a “charmed life” in a familiar, ordinary world of nature, community, and simple joys, such as family picnics, wildflowers, and children’s laughter.

The Burden of the Past and Hope for Renewal

See: Memory and the Past

- Vera acknowledges the haunting presence of past memories and illusions but expresses hope for a new life free from these obsessions.
- She envisions a future where the “dead past would be buried,” and she would awaken to the “blessed events” of life, including natural death after a long life filled with love and community.
- The chapter returns again and again to the need to turn away from the insubstantial past toward the reality of life, even though it is fraught with disappointment and loss.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Red Hair and Red Rooster’s Wing

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Birds

- Symbolizes vitality, passion, and the vividness of Miss MacIntosh’s presence.

Opium Paradise and Dream States

See: Opium

- Represents escape from pain and reality.
- The “sleeping wakefulness” blurs lines between life and death, reality and illusion.

Driftwood House and Fire on the Beach

See: The House · Fire

- Symbolize Vera’s fragile hope and attempt to reach out to Miss MacIntosh or the lost past.

Frozen Iowa and Dead Star

See: Moon and Stars · Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Iowa represents the harsh, ordinary, and ultimately unwelcoming origin.
- The “dead star” metaphor suggests a point of no return or a lost opportunity.

Nature’s Cruelty and Funeral Wreaths

See: Roses and Flowers · Weddings and Funerals

- The natural world is depicted not as nurturing but cold and indifferent.
- Funeral wreaths and deaf old people symbolize death, silence, and abandonment.

Further notes from the text

- Catherine’s offer to Vera comes with a whole philosophy of not living: it is better to think of walking than to walk, better to think of dancing than to dance, and Vera should lie still as “the companion corpse of her eternal illness,” with an immortal beauty as her reward.
- Years after the disappearance Vera finds Miss MacIntosh’s ivory knitting needles in the sand. She searches by sailboat and questions fishermen drying their nets, lobstermen red as the lobsters they trap, and codfish fishermen back from the Grand Banks.
- Vera names herself formally here: daughter of Catherine Helena Cartwheel, née Snowden, “and of a father unknown, perhaps of many fathers.” She explains her own name, Vera, as standing for truth, and imagines the Midwest as a place where everyone will greet her by it.
- Before she reaches Iowa she imagines it frozen: birds dying on crystal branches, smoke frozen in the chimneys, a farmer whose wagon went through the ice of a lake and who came ashore in spring with his hands frozen to the reins and his four horses rising through the foam. Then she admits this was not Iowa at all.
- The bride who jumps from the Brooklyn Bridge had lost her father at three and was going a thousand miles to marry a stranger with a waxed mustache, until she changed her mind on the way to Grand Central Station. She fell clutching her straw suitcase

with her crushed veil inside. The waxed mustache links her to Vera's dream bridegroom in Chapter 10.

- The fat lady on the train adds folk consolations to her warnings: there are as many fish in the sea as were ever caught, and "there was a second husband for everybody."

Research: Resources

- "For those who died in the midst of life would never die": The burial service of the Book of Common Prayer says, "In the midst of life we are in death," from the medieval Latin chant Media vita in morte sumus. Catherine turns it around: Vera must accept "my death in the midst of my life."
- "She twirled her white umbrella in her swan boat": The swan boat in the Boston Public Garden is real and has been in service since 1877. See Swan boats (Ch 4).
- "Sometimes the sound of the sea was faded to a single cicada's cry": Periodical cicadas spend 13 or 17 years underground and then emerge by the millions in the same spring, filling the woods of the Middle West with their shrill song.
- "not even if I walked on stilts like the stilt birds": The black-necked stilt is a slender shorebird of marshes and salt pans whose very long pink legs let it wade deeper than other birds. See Birds.
- "a poor invalid sleeping in a charity ward or under the roofless heavens": Catherine repeats a fear from Chapter 2, where "Sometimes she thought she was a poor patient sleeping in a charity ward." See the Chapter 2 resources.
- "the inexhaustible jewels of Golconda": Golconda, in southern India, was the market for the diamond fields that produced the Koh-i-Noor and the Hope diamond, and its name came to mean any source of endless wealth.
- "filagreed coral reefs, sapphire pavements": In Exodus 24:10 the elders of Israel see the God of Israel, "and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in his clearness." See The Bible.
- "like a nymph in a mountain cave . . . the fairy grotto where the lone traveller is lured": In Keats's "La Belle Dame sans Merci" (1819), a knight is lured by a fairy lady to "her elfin grot" and wakes alone on a cold hillside. See Romantic Poets.
- "the opium paradise which should bring the power of wakeful sleep": Thomas De Quincey's Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1821) described the dreams and torments of opium, and Charles Baudelaire's Artificial Paradises (1860) took up the same theme. See Opium.
- "I should be the greatest debutante of any season": A debutante was a young woman formally presented to society, usually at a ball at the start of the winter season, to show that she was ready for marriage. Her "coming-out party" was the great event of a rich girl's youth.
- "white satin slippers with paper soles such as are worn by the dead who have not far to travel": Undertakers sold burial slippers with soles of cardboard or paper, made only to

be seen in the coffin.

- “or perhaps a thousand canaries blown here by the storm and singing in the candle flames”: In Chapter 2 Catherine’s canary Marco Polo flew out through an open transom into a thunderstorm. See the Chapter 2 resources.
- “the routine of Monday following Sunday, Tuesday following Monday, the washings on the lines . . . baking day”: The old household week ran by a fixed round of chores, washing on Monday, ironing on Tuesday, mending on Wednesday, and baking later in the week, as in the nursery rhyme, “They that wash on Monday / Have all the week to dry.”
- “knitting for the mission at some far Arctic post”: Church women across America knitted mittens, sweaters, and hoods for missions such as the Grenfell Mission of Labrador and Newfoundland, founded by the doctor Wilfred Grenfell in the 1890s.
- “I did not dream I lived in marble halls, for I lived in marble halls”: The line turns the song “I Dreamt I Dwelt in Marble Halls” from Michael Balfe’s opera The Bohemian Girl (1843), in which a lost noble girl raised by Gypsies dreams of the riches she was born to.
- “the red-faced lobster-trappers red as the lobsters they trapped”: Live lobsters are a dark greenish brown. They turn bright red only when cooked, as the heat frees the red pigment that a protein in the shell had kept hidden.
- “codfish fishermen returning from the Great Banks”: The Grand Banks off Newfoundland were for centuries the richest cod grounds in the world. In Young’s day the schooners of Gloucester and Boston still sailed to the Banks for cod, and many never came home.
- “to sailors of the deep, to all who were wayfarers of the sea”: Psalm 107:23-24 reads, “They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep.”
- “the night shrouded the night of the soul”: The phrase recalls “the dark night of the soul,” from the poem of the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic Saint John of the Cross, the soul’s passage through darkness and desolation toward God.
- “that was why she wore ear muffs”: Earmuffs were invented in 1873 by Chester Greenwood of Farmington, Maine, a fifteen-year-old whose ears froze while he skated. Miss MacIntosh wore hers against Iowa winters so cold that “the children’s ears were frozen.”
- “when the great boomers were booming”: The ice of a frozen lake booms and groans as it cracks and shifts with the changing temperature, especially in spring as it begins to break up.
- “the promised land of which I had read in catalogues of wild flowers and seed catalogues”: The Promised Land is the land God promised Israel, “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8). Seed catalogues such as W. Atlee Burpee’s, begun in 1876, brought pictures of gardens and orchards to farm families across the country. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.

- “There would be cherry and apple and peach and persimmon trees”: The wild persimmon grows across southern Indiana, where its fruit, sweet only when fully ripe, often after the first frost, is made into persimmon pudding. Mitchell, Indiana, has held a Persimmon Festival since 1946.
- “old rail fences broken down by the wild mares”: Split-rail fences, built of logs split lengthwise, zigzagged across the frontier Midwest. Abraham Lincoln grew up in southern Indiana from 1816 to 1830, and his campaign of 1860 sold him as “the rail-splitter.”
- “All people would greet me by my name, Vera, that which stands for truth”: Vera means “true” in Latin and “faith” in Russian. See the Chapter 1 resources.
- “I would be a Lazarus of these awakening joys”: Lazarus of Bethany, brother of Martha and Mary, was raised from the dead by Jesus after being dead for four days. This miracle is a central event in the Gospel of John (John 11). The story of Lazarus’s raising highlights the close relationship between Jesus and his friends, as well as Jesus’s power over death. The miracle was a powerful sign of Jesus’s divine authority and his identity as the Messiah as well as a symbol of the promise of eternal life through faith in Jesus. Lazarus in this context represents Vera’s yearning for a new beginning, a restored life beyond the illusions and failures of the past, where she can experience reality as it is lived by ordinary people, with the natural rhythms of life and death, love, and community. See Lazarus of Bethany (Ch 4).
- “births and weddings and wedding anniversaries, natural death at the end of a long life, the silver, the golden”: Silver and golden weddings mark the twenty-fifth and fiftieth anniversaries of a marriage, a custom that began in Germany, where a wife was given a wreath of silver or of gold.
- “the silver, the golden, never the leaden bells”: Bells in this chapter symbolize the presence of death and the funeral rites permeating the house, the relentless passage of time and the cycle of life and death, a link between the material and spiritual worlds, calling attention to the unseen and the spectral, the deep, underlying melancholy that shadows the characters’ lives and the house itself. Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “The Bells” (1849) moves through the same stages of life, from silver sleigh bells and golden wedding bells to brazen alarm bells and the iron bells of the funeral. See Bells (Ch 4) and Edgar Allan Poe.
- “the burning brimstone butterfly and the pebble moth”: The brimstone butterfly is named for its sulfur-yellow wings, and some think the butter-colored brimstone gave the word butterfly its name. The pebble prominent is a grey-brown moth of willows and poplars. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “a ribbon to the youngest baby, a medal to the oldest citizen”: County fairs and the Indiana State Fair, held since 1852, gave ribbons for babies, livestock, pies, and quilts, and the small-town celebration honored its oldest citizen.
- “from the insubstantial fabric of old days, old nights”: The phrase returns from Chapter 3, where Miss MacIntosh “dismissed the insubstantial fabric of the dream,” an echo of Prospero in The Tempest. See the Chapter 3 resources.

- “because of a dead girl’s love letters strewn on the floor of a room like a cell”: The dead girl first appears in Chapter 1, where Vera lists her among the reasons for her journey. Here her story is told in full. See the Chapter 1 resources.
- “each accepting the proposal of a man she had never seen”: Matrimonial newspapers and lonely hearts clubs printed letters from men and women seeking marriage, often farmers in remote country, and many couples married after corresponding without ever having met.
- “marriage, the union of body with soul, children, chickens, a little farm with a vine-covered gate”: The reality for women at that time was they had to be married or they were nothing. There were no other prospects. Marriage and a family was the most important event in a woman’s life and a wedding was every girl’s dream until very recently in the United States.
- “waxen brides in their wedding gowns with their long trains and veils”: The white wedding gown became the fashion after Queen Victoria wore white satin at her wedding in 1840. The dead girl has “no father who would give her away,” the old custom in which the bride passes from her father to her husband.
- “who wore a waxed mustache, an old-fashioned handlebar”: The stranger’s handlebar matches the one in “her portrait at the age of three in the arms of her father who had worn an old-fashioned handlebar.” She is going a thousand miles to marry a man who looks like the father she lost.
- “her mother who had been an Irish wash woman”: Irish immigrant women, many of them fleeing the famine of the 1840s, made up a large share of the laundresses and domestic servants in nineteenth-century American cities.
- “under a shower of rice and old shoes”: Guests threw rice at a wedding couple as a wish for fertility and plenty, and old shoes were thrown after them or tied to their carriage for luck.
- “for Grand Central Station”: The Chapter 2 resources tell the history of Grand Central. See Grand Central Station (Ch 4).
- “she had jumped from Brooklyn Bridge”: The first man known to jump from the Brooklyn Bridge, Robert Odlum, died doing it in 1885, two years after the bridge opened, and many have taken their lives there since. Hart Crane, whose long poem The Bridge celebrates it, drowned himself in 1932 by leaping from a ship in the Gulf of Mexico. See The Brooklyn Bridge (Ch 4) and Suicide in History and Literature.
- “she would go to Boise or Reno, where she had gone to get her divorces”: In 1931 Nevada cut the residency required for a divorce to six weeks, and Idaho soon matched it. Reno became the divorce capital of America, and its “divorce ranches” housed women waiting out their weeks. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “there were just as many fishes in the sea as ever were caught”: The old proverb, “There are plenty more fish in the sea,” is the usual consolation for a lost love.
- “there were bats in every broken belfry”: To have bats in the belfry, an American expression from about 1900, is to be crazy, the bats flitting about in an empty head.

- “there were funeral wreaths hanging on all the doors”: A wreath or a band of black crepe hung on the front door announced a death in the house and asked passersby for quiet. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “The voice of the turtle-dove was not heard in all that land, for the golden bowl was broken and the wheel broken at the cistern”: The lady reverses the Song of Solomon, “the voice of the turtle is heard in our land” (2:12), and quotes Ecclesiastes 12:6, “or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern.” That chapter of Ecclesiastes describes old age and failing senses, “and all the daughters of musick shall be brought low,” which fits the deaf old people. Henry James took the title of his novel The Golden Bowl (1904) from it. See Ecclesiastes.
- “Nobody knew what time it was, for all the clocks were stopped”: An old custom stopped the clocks of a house at the moment of a death. In Dickens’s Great Expectations, Miss Havisham stopped every clock at twenty minutes to nine, the moment she was jilted on her wedding day. See Clocks and Watches.
- “carrying old-fashioned ear trumpets which they did not turn on”: Before electric hearing aids, the hard of hearing held horn-shaped ear trumpets to their ears to gather sound. Beethoven used them as his deafness grew. See Silence and Deafness.
    - Young described a whole community of the stone deaf in her essay “The Midwest of Everywhere” (Mademoiselle, 1945). Asked in 1993 whether such things could be true, she answered, “Yes, and they were all true” (Miriam Fuchs, “A Brief Conversation with Marguerite Young,” St. Vincent’s Hospital, New York, June 1, 1993, in Marguerite Young, Our Darling, ed. Miriam Fuchs, Dalkey Archive Press, 1994).
- “their ears were mere empty shells filled with no roarings of the outside world”: The image recalls the Chapter 3 entry on the roar heard in a shell, the sound of the room caught inside. Here the shells are empty. See the Chapter 3 resources.
- “they had taken quinine to cure their malaria”: Quinine is an alkaloid, a naturally occurring compound, extracted from the bark of the cinchona tree. Quinine was historically and remains an important medication for treating malaria. Quinine’s bitter taste makes it a component of tonic water and some other beverages. Historically, this usage originated from mixing medicinal quinine with soda and sugar to mask its bitterness for malaria prevention in tropical regions. (Wikipedia) Quinine here is both a literal reference to the antimalarial drug and a symbolic element illustrating unintended suffering and the complex nature of healing and illness in the novel’s landscape. Large doses of quinine cause cinchonism, whose symptoms include ringing in the ears and hearing loss, so the cure really could have deafened them. See Quinine (Ch 4).
- “caused by the festerings in the river bottoms, the marsh butterflies”: Malaria, called the ague, plagued the river bottoms of nineteenth-century Indiana and Illinois. People blamed the bad air of the marshes until Ronald Ross showed in 1897 that mosquitoes carry the disease. The Chapter 3 resources explain malaria’s name, mal aria, “bad air.”

Vocabulary

Awl

A small pointed tool for piercing leather, used by shoemakers.

Belfry

A bell tower, or the room in a tower where the bells hang.

Brackish

Of water: slightly salty, as where a river meets the sea.

Brimstone

Sulfur. The brimstone butterfly is named for its sulfur-yellow wings.

Cat’s eye

A gemstone, such as chrysoberyl, with a band of light across it like the slit of a cat’s eye.

Cistern

A tank for storing water, often underground.

Crow’s feet

The small wrinkles at the outer corners of the eyes.

Debutante

A young woman making her formal entrance into society.

Diadem

A jeweled crown or headband worn as a sign of royalty.

Ear trumpet

A horn-shaped tube held to the ear to help the hard of hearing.

Ermine

The white winter fur of the stoat, used to trim the robes of kings and nobles.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Festering

Rotting and oozing; growing more corrupt.

Filigree

Delicate ornamental work of fine twisted wire. Young writes “filagreed.”

Fire opal

A red, orange, or yellow opal with flashes of color.

Fishmonger

A seller of fish.

Foolhardy

Recklessly bold.

Freighter

A ship that carries cargo.

Handlebar

A mustache with long ends curled upward like the handlebars of a bicycle.

Hawking

Hunting with trained hawks or falcons.

Hectagonal

Young's word, probably a slip for hexagonal (six-sided) or heptagonal (seven-sided). Quartz crystals grow in six-sided columns.

Hoar-frost

White frost formed as feathery ice crystals.

Husbanded

Kept carefully; conserved.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Imperceptibly

So slowly or slightly as to go unnoticed.

Indolent

Lazy; avoiding effort.

Lapis lazuli

A deep-blue stone, ground by painters to make the pigment ultramarine.

Matrimony

Marriage.

Moonstone

A milky, pearly-blue gemstone.

Née

Born; used before a woman's maiden name. Young writes "nee."

Negligee

A woman's light, flowing dressing gown.

Noxious

Harmful or poisonous.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Owlishly

Like an owl; staring wide-eyed and solemn.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Scudding

Moving fast before the wind.

Slumberous

Sleepy; inducing sleep.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard. Spar is also the name for certain shiny, easily split crystalline minerals, such as Iceland spar.

Squall

A sudden, violent gust of wind, often with rain or snow.

Tallow

Animal fat used for candles and soap. Tallow-colored is a dull, yellowish white.

Tributary

A stream or river that flows into a larger one.

Turtle-dove

A small wild dove. The “turtle” of the Bible’s “voice of the turtle” is this bird.

Undulating

Rising and falling in waves.

Vapid

Dull and empty of life or interest.

Vaunted

Boasted of; praised highly.

Wayfarer

A traveler, especially on foot.

Chapter 5

Summary

Night falls on the bus. The roads are flooded and there are no stars or signposts. The bus waits at a Pennsylvania Railroad crossing while Madge moans in her sleep, accusing every man but her husband. Moses sings, drinks, and holds forth. He refuses ever to cut his hair. He rails against the Democrats and the New Deal, though he never has time to vote. He lives with his old mother, has never married, and talks constantly of pregnant women and of old Doc O'Leary, who once delivered babies and has now lost his mind. Birth and death fill his talk. The chapter leaves open whether Moses is driving the bus or only dreaming that he drives it.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Moses Hunnecker · Justice O'Leary · Miss Pebbles · Madge Capehorn · Homer Capehorn

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Decay and Ruin · Fear and Courage · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Society, Class, and Race

Symbols: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Birds · Clouds and Storms · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Pregnancy, Birth, and Children · The Bus and the Journey

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres

Allusions: Angels and Archangels · Edgar Allan Poe · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Judaism · Music and Composers · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Civil War · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with the depiction of the bus-driver, Moses Hunnecker, losing his way, driving through a landscape of washed-out roads, fallen trees, and empty air. This journey seems endless and cyclical, capturing a sense of existential disorientation and decay. The imagery of "no stars, no sign-posts now," and "a crazy bus-driver losing his way that he knew too well" evokes a world without guidance or hope, emphasizing the theme of wandering and searching for meaning.
- A large portion of the chapter focuses on the bus-driver Moses's refusal to cut his hair. His hair is described as growing continuously, becoming intertwined with his identity

and his “immortal” self. It is his “only virtue,” his “angel,” his connection to life amid desolation. The hair is also political as a symbol of his resistance to the Democrats and the societal changes he despises, representing his claim to personal freedom and his soul. His hair grows like “golden tassels tossing in the wind,” full of “burning eyes like the eyes of Argus,” symbolizing watchfulness, memory, and vitality amidst decay.

- The bus-driver, Moses, is portrayed as a lifelong Republican, openly hostile to the Democrats whom he blames for the country’s ruin (“running this old country straight into its grave.”) He links his hair to his political identity, refusing to let the government control or “tax” even that last piece of himself. His tirades against political corruption, free public projects, and the decline of society are interwoven with his personal narrative and symbolic hair.
- The chapter outlines a tension between the bus-driver, Moses, and an old, senile doctor, Old Doc/Justice O’Leary, who persists in imagining a world of birth and vitality or a world that no longer exists. The doctor’s practice is described as a delusion, with “no patients but the stormy petrels in a land where were no stormy petrels.” The bus-driver mocks the doctor’s illusions and refuses his medical help, reflecting a conflict between life and death, reality and imagination. This interplay highlights themes of denial, madness, and the persistence of hope or delusion in a dead country.
- The chapter contains intense imagery of death and desolation from the flooded graves, dead fish, drowned seeds, barren trees, to the wild mares dreaming of pregnancy but carrying only death. Yet, paradoxically, it also speaks of rebirth and cyclical renewal (“you died every minute that you lived... and you were born every minute that you died”) though this cycle appears to be trapped in despair and futility. This duality underscores the existential and metaphysical concerns of the chapter.
- Towards the end, the bus-driver, Moses, questions his own reality and wonders if he is truly driving or merely dreaming in his four-poster bed. He contemplates death, resurrection, and the meaning of existence. His long hair, the enemies (the Democrats), the old doctor’s empty practice, the empty hotel, and the desolate landscape all blend into a hallucinatory vision of a world on the brink of oblivion. His repeated references to his mother, his hair, and his political stance deepen the sense of personal and societal collapse.
- The closing passages have the bus-driver, Moses, singing and murmuring amidst the rain, addressing the old doctor and his imaginary patients, declaring the futility of birth and renewal in a dead land. He embraces his identity as the bus-driver, calls old Doc “the bringer of pain,” and expresses a bitter, resigned acceptance of the endless, repetitive journey through a world without stars or hope.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Moses says his hair “was his angel, his dead mother who lived in him, his dream of life.” Why does a man who has kept nothing else keep his hair?

- Old Doc sees “the breath on the mirror where there was no breath, the feather move where there was no feather.” How does the chapter keep turning the signs of life into signs of death?
- The road keeps “passing the same things again and again.” Why might the novel make Vera’s journey a circle?

Characters

- Moses insists he is “my mother’s son and not my mother’s daughter,” yet says he is “Penelope weaving this web, not Ulysses.” What is he afraid of becoming?
- Moses and old Doc are mirror images, two bearded men who never married. Why does Moses need an enemy so like himself?
- Madge accuses “every man but her husband who slept at her side.” What does this reveal about her before her story is told?

Connections

- In Chapter 4 the fat lady warned of “the jumping-off place,” and here Moses uses the same words. How does the Middle West begin to take shape out of other people’s warnings?
- Moses calls the passengers “four angels at four bed-posts, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John.” What changes when a bus ride becomes a bedtime prayer?
- The chapter returns to Moses’s politics again and again. How is his hatred of the Democrats really about fear of losing himself? See The New Deal (Ch 5).

Reflection

- “There may be only one way to get into this world . . . but there is more than one way to get out of this world.” How does this chapter blur the line between birth and death?
- Moses swears never to cut his hair “as long as the Democrats were running us.” What vows do people keep long after the reason is gone?
- Moses says, “I never saw life come, but I have seen life go.” What does it mean to know death better than birth?
- Is Moses driving the bus or dreaming that he drives it? Does it matter to the passengers?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- Vera watches the bus-driver and the other passengers, including Madge, capturing their physical and emotional states with a keen, almost clinical eye. She notes Madge’s

moaning and accusing, Moses's erratic behavior and long hair, and the desolate landscape outside. Her observations are detailed, conveying a sense of decay, confusion, and suspended time.

- Vera's narration is imbued with philosophical undertones. She reflects on themes of life and death, creation and destruction, reality and illusion.
- She engages with the bus-driver's thoughts and conversations, especially his long monologue about his hair, politics, and existential musings.
- Vera seems to understand the symbolic weight of the bus-driver's hair as a metaphor for identity, resistance to corruption, and his connection to life amid death.
- Vera's narration conveys a sense of uncertainty about the reality of their situation. The bus-driver himself seems caught between dreaming and waking, life and death, and Vera shares this ambiguity.
- She hints that the bus-driver may be dead or dreaming, trapped in a liminal space where time loops and places vanish. This uncertainty colors her perspective, making her more contemplative and less definitive in her judgments.
- Vera is empathetic to the people around her. She also maintains a certain detachment. She does not intervene or change the course of events but rather records them with a mixture of sorrow, irony, and resignation. Her tone suggests an understanding of the tragic absurdity of their journey and the existential plight of the characters.
- Vera functions as a bridge between the reader and the symbolic, almost hallucinatory world of the chapter and for the rest of the novel. Through her narration, the reader gains access to the bus-driver's inner turmoil, the desolate landscape, and the metaphysical questions raised.
- Vera's bus trip exists in a liminal space between reality and dream, serving as a profound metaphor for her search for life and truth amid the illusions and uncertainties that surround her.

Moses Hunnecker (The Bus-Driver)

- Central figure, described as wild-eyed, drunken, and somewhat erratic.
- His long hair and beard symbolize his identity, freedom, and resistance to external control.
- He is a life-long Republican, openly hostile to Democrats, whom he blames for the country's decay.
- He is a caretaker figure for his mother and is caught between delusion and reality, possibly dead or dreaming while driving an old bus.
- His internal monologue reveals a deep existential crisis and philosophical reflection on life, death, and meaning.

Justice O’Leary (Old Doc)

- Represents a figure of lost hope and failed medical practice.
- He is senile, long-bearded, and imagines he is still delivering babies and practicing medicine in a dead world.
- Symbolizes a dying or decayed authority, clinging to illusions and the past.
- Moses criticizes him for bringing misery and being out of touch with reality.

Miss Pebbles

- She is a figure embodying deafness and detachment from reality, both literally and metaphorically.
- Her physical deafness also isolates and makes her unable to engage fully with the world around her.
- This deafness symbolizes a disconnection from the living world and the ongoing turmoil and a futile or incomplete attempt to connect or listen.
- Her perceptions and experiences are filtered through dreams or illusions rather than reality which further emphasizes her detachment and perhaps a coping mechanism against the bleakness surrounding her.
- She complains to the desk clerk about being kept awake by noises that are in fact spectral or imaginary. These hauntings reflect a world where the boundaries between life and death, reality and illusion, have blurred, and Miss Pebbles exists trapped in this liminal space.
- Her character serves as a poignant contrast to the bus-driver’s chaotic, vivid awareness of the world’s decay and the surreal events transpiring around them. While the bus-driver wrestles with his drunken consciousness and the metaphysical implications of his journey, Miss Pebbles is insulated, unable or unwilling to fully confront these realities. Her state can be seen as symbolic of denial or the human tendency to retreat into subjective realities when faced with overwhelming despair and madness.

Madge Capehorn and Homer Capehorn

- Madge is a figure of tragic endurance and profound emotional pain, trapped in a loveless and alienating marriage with Homer, who is depicted as passive, innocent, and disconnected. Their relationship embodies the novel’s exploration of despair, loss, and the elusive nature of human connection, with Madge’s pregnancy serving as a potent symbol of both life and death, hope and despair.

The Pregnant Women (Imaginary Patients)

- Appear as spectral or hallucinated figures in the old doctor’s dreams.
- Symbolize the barren or dead future, as none are truly alive or giving birth.

- Their cries and suffering are echoes of lost hope and the cyclical nature of life and death.

Research: Themes

Death and Resurrection

See: Death and Mortality

- The bus-driver's journey is metaphorical, possibly representing a passage between life and death.
- References to being buried alive, resurrection, and dying twice highlight the blurred line between existence and nonexistence.
- The cyclic nature of life and death is emphasized by imagery of birth cries, death moans, and eternal return.

Identity and Resistance

See: Identity and the Self · Fear and Courage

- The bus-driver's refusal to cut his hair symbolizes holding onto personal identity and autonomy despite external pressures.
- Hair represents a personal dream, a physical manifestation of selfhood that remains even when everything else decays.

Political and Social Decay

See: Decay and Ruin · Society, Class, and Race

- The bus-driver's tirades against Democrats reflect frustration with political corruption and societal decline.
- The country is depicted as a "dead country," with broken roads, empty towns, and lost hopes.

Illusion vs Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- The narrative questions what is real and what is imagined: the bus-driver might be dead, dreaming, or trapped in a cycle of madness.
- The old doctor's practice is a hallucination; the pregnant women are ghosts of a lost future.

Isolation and Loneliness

See: Isolation and Connection

- The bus-driver is isolated, both physically on his journey and mentally in his state of drunken delirium and existential despair.
- No one else truly communicates or understands him; the old doctor is never there when Moses rails at him, and the passengers sit silent behind him.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Bus and the Journey

See: The Bus and the Journey

- The bus is a metaphor for life's journey, fraught with obstacles, detours, and a lack of clear direction.
- The journey may represent the soul's passage through life and death or a psychological odyssey.

Hair

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- Symbolizes identity, resistance, and the last vestige of personal freedom.
- The bus-driver's hair grows uncontrollably, reflecting his wild imagination and refusal to conform.

Old Doctor's Instruments

- Rusted forceps, broken stethoscope, and apothecary weights symbolize decay and the death of old certainties.

Pregnant Women and Birth Imagery

See: Pregnancy, Birth, and Children

- Represent potential and hope but also pain, suffering, and the cycle of life and death.
- Their ghostly presence emphasizes barrenness and lost futures.

Stormy Petrels, Woodpeckers, Red-winged Blackbirds

See: Birds · Clouds and Storms

- Represent chaos, disturbance, and the persistence of nature amid decay.

Four Passengers / Angels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John)

See: Angels, Devils, and Myth

- Suggest a spiritual or religious dimension to the bus-driver's journey, hinting at judgment or salvation.

Research: Resources

- “Oh, the old grey mare, she ain’t what she used to was”: The “Old Gray Mare” song is believed to have originated as a campaign ditty in the 19th century, specifically as a political jab at seven-term Baltimore mayor Ferdinand Latrobe by Democratic political operative Thomas Francis McNulty. The tune itself comes from J. Warner’s minstrel song “Down in Alabam’” (1858). The tune has been adapted for various purposes, including Civil Rights songs and as a way to underscore the decline of aging. (Wikipedia) This song reflects the bus-driver’s weary, somewhat erratic state as he navigates the flooded roads, facing obstacles and detours, mirroring the theme of decline and weariness pervasive in the narrative. The old gray mare can be seen as a metaphor for the bus-driver himself, his vehicle, or even the broader journey of life marked by fatigue, struggle, and a sense of things not being what they once were.
- “all the glass-blowers, the night watchman”: Natural gas found in east-central Indiana in the 1880s drew glass factories, among them Ball Brothers in Muncie (1887), and glass-blowers were among the best-paid skilled workers of the day.
- “We were stopped by the shunting cars of the Pennsylvania Railroad”: The Pennsylvania Railroad was once the largest railroad in America by traffic and revenue, and it called itself “the Standard Railroad of the World.”
- “Three shakes of a dead dog’s tail”: The bus-driver gives a grim twist to the old phrase “two shakes of a lamb’s tail,” meaning in no time at all.
- “It’s the jumping-off place. It’s where creation stops”: The fat lady on the train used the same words in Chapter 4. See the Chapter 4 resources.
- “seeing the breath on the mirror where there was no breath, the feather move where there was no feather”: Holding a mirror or a feather to the lips was the old test for death. King Lear, holding the dead Cordelia, calls, “Lend me a looking-glass; / If that her breath will mist or stain the stone, / Why, then she lives,” and then, “This feather stirs; she lives!” See Shakespeare.
- “the elegiac music of the spheres or with those heavenly harmonies no mortal ears could hear”: Pythagoras taught that the planets make music as they move, a harmony too constant for human ears to notice. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres.
- “the great dolphins uplifting the stone boats of the dead upon the turbulent waves”: In Greek myth and funeral art dolphins carry souls across the sea and rescue the drowning, as they saved the poet Arion when sailors threw him overboard.
- “coming like all the furies”: The Furies, or Erinyes, were the Greek goddesses of vengeance who hunted down wrongdoers. See Greek Mythology.
- “the Burma-Shave signs, the broken rail fences”: The Burma-Shave sign series first appeared on U.S. highways in 1926 and remained a major advertising component until 1963. It was usually a series of six consecutive signs along the edge of highways. (Wikipedia) See Burma-Shave signs (Ch 5).

- “his memory of the polar star”: Polaris, the North Star, stays nearly fixed above the North Pole, and travelers have long steered by it.
- “holy Lucifer and Lucifer matches”: Friction matches were sold as “Lucifers” from 1829, and the name stuck to matches for a century.
- “so that he might hide himself away from the face of God”: Adam and Eve hid “from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden” (Genesis 3:8), and the murderer Cain says, “from thy face shall I be hid” (Genesis 4:14).
- “His hair had grown three inches since he left Persia at sunset”: Persia is a real small town in western Iowa. Midwestern towns often borrowed faraway names, such as Peru, Lebanon, Cairo, Moscow, and Athens. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “the sky had been filled with red-winged blackbirds”: The red-winged blackbird is one of the most common birds in North America, and in winter it gathers with grackles and cowbirds in flocks of millions. See Birds.
- “turning her broken earphones off and on”: Early electric hearing aids, with a microphone, a battery, and an earphone, came into use in the early twentieth century and replaced the ear trumpets of Chapter 4. See the Chapter 4 resources.
- “full of burning eyes like the eyes of Argus if he had lived, full of eyes like the peacock’s burning tail”: Argus Panoptes is a many-eyed giant in Greek mythology. This is known to have generated sayings like the eyes of Argus, which means to be subject to scrutiny of one’s actions to an invasive degree. (Wikipedia) Hera set Argus to guard Io, and after Hermes lulled him to sleep and killed him, Hera set his hundred eyes in the tail of her peacock. See Argus Panoptes (Ch 5).
- “this womb of time”: Iago says, “There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered” (Othello 1.3). See Shakespeare.
- “he could always, if things got too much for him, hang himself by the hair of his head”: King David’s son Absalom was caught by the head in an oak, by tradition by his long hair, and was left hanging until he was killed (2 Samuel 18:9). Moses’s vow never to cut his hair is also the Nazirite vow, “there shall no razor come upon his head” (Numbers 6:5), and Samson lost his strength when his hair was cut (Judges 16).
- “the way the Democrats were running this old country straight into its grave”: The New Deal faced opposition due to concerns that it strayed too far towards socialism, expanded presidential power unconstitutionally, and potentially redistributed wealth. Some critics believed the government was not doing enough to combat the Great Depression, while others argued the New Deal’s policies hindered private enterprise and individual liberty. Many critics, including the American Liberty League, saw the New Deal as a step towards socialism, arguing it involved excessive government intervention in the economy. Opponents, like Robert A. Taft, argued that Roosevelt was exceeding his constitutional authority and expanding the powers of the presidency. Some feared that the New Deal policies would lead to a massive and potentially detrimental redistribution of wealth. Critics, like Herbert Hoover, argued the New Deal would create a bloated bureaucracy, intrude on business, and limit personal liberty. Some believed the New Deal’s policies, such as increased business taxes and Social

Security excise taxes, harmed businesses and discouraged hiring. Critics also questioned the New Deal's effectiveness in addressing the Great Depression, arguing it didn't create enough jobs or revive the economy. The reaction of Moses to the New Deal policies symbolizes the broader social and economic upheavals of the era, seen through the eyes of a common man who feels alienated and distrustful of political leaders and their solutions. The chapter uses his perspective to illustrate the anxieties and conflicts within American society at that historical moment. See The New Deal (Ch 5).

- "What with all these free-lunch counters": Saloons once set out a "free lunch" of ham, pickles, and bread for anyone who bought a nickel glass of beer, the salt in the food keeping customers drinking.
- "They say we are all equal in the sight of God": The Declaration of Independence holds that "all men are created equal," and Paul writes, "ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Moses answers that God "did not create us all alike."
- "an old retriever, a dog with a bird in its mouth. It's a wild duck": In Henrik Ibsen's The Wild Duck (1884) a wounded wild duck dives to the bottom to die and is brought up by a clever dog. The family keeps it in their attic, and the play turns on the illusions people need in order to live.
- "the bus-driver was no fly to be caught in that spider's web": Mary Howitt's poem "The Spider and the Fly" (1829) begins, "Will you walk into my parlour?" said the Spider to the Fly.
- "to sleep in the country churchyard": Thomas Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" (1751) mourns the humble dead of a village, where "The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."
- "will cover me with a coat of hair like the wild asses that live in the desert places": In Job 39:5-8 God asks, "Who hath sent out the wild ass free?" and says that he scorns the city. Jacob says of his brother, "Esau my brother is a hairy man" (Genesis 27:11).
- "all those Brain Trusters were busted with their W.P.A. projects": Brain Trust was a term for a group of close advisers, most associated with the advisers to Franklin Roosevelt. (Wikipedia) A newspaper gave the name in 1932 to Roosevelt's circle of professors, chiefly Raymond Moley, Rexford Tugwell, and Adolf Berle.
- "their W.P.A. projects and their public parks and their marble bird baths and their rotten roads and their free skating rinks": WPA (Work Projects Administration) was an American New Deal agency which employed millions of mostly unskilled men to carry out public works projects to provide employment during the Great Depression. (Wikipedia) It began in 1935 as the Works Progress Administration and was renamed in 1939. Its workers, about 8.5 million in all, built parks, roads, and skating rinks and ran nursery schools, which is why Moses complains of "free kindergartens."
- "why don't you just close their wombs, tie the knots?": Indiana passed the first eugenic sterilization law in 1907, and in Buck v. Bell (1927) the Supreme Court upheld forced sterilization. Tens of thousands of Americans were sterilized under such laws.

- “Put away your medical case, Doc, and get out your violin.”: Old Doc was a real doctor, and Young kept his name, Doctor O’Leary (Chapter 68). “I knew Dr. O’Leary and his violin. He never used to hear the telephone ring,” she said. “I was living in the house with him.… He was delivering imaginary babies” (Miriam Fuchs, “A Brief Conversation with Marguerite Young,” St. Vincent’s Hospital, New York, June 1, 1993, in Marguerite Young, Our Darling, ed. Miriam Fuchs, Dalkey Archive Press, 1994). She told Studs Terkel, “I knew an old doctor like that in Iowa City used to have all his instruments in the hallway,” and that “the idea of the senile doctor still carrying on his practice was one of the things which started me on the book” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Justice O’Leary.
- “the barber who was once a blood-letter, too”: Bloodletting, practiced since ancient times, reached its height in the 18th and 19th centuries, with various instruments and techniques developed to facilitate the process. Leeches were also used to draw blood, and lancets and scarificators were employed to create incisions for blood removal. Prominent physicians and surgeons, including John Hunter, endorsed bloodletting for various conditions. In 18th and 19th century America, physicians, barber-surgeons, and even barbers could practice bloodletting. While physicians often recommended bloodletting, barbers and barber-surgeons, who also performed minor surgeries and grooming services, frequently carried out the procedure. (Wikipedia) In America Benjamin Rush bled patients heavily during the Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic of 1793. The “bloodletting” in the chapter symbolizes obsolete medical practices and, by extension, the ineffectiveness of attempts to control or cure the pervasive decay and suffering in the world depicted in the novel. See the Chapter 3 resources on the barber pole.
- “is the blood of Abel crying from the ground that I should live to see these bloody flowers?”: This may refer to the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4:10, where God says, “the voice of thy brother’s blood crieth unto me from the ground,” and where Abel’s blood carries a power that doesn’t let Cain settle again on the earth. The first human death could symbolize the future violence which pollutes the earth. God uses a flood later on in Genesis to purify the earth. This phrase encapsulates Moses’s anguished contemplation of human suffering’s enduring cry through history and its impact on her perception of life and the world around her.
- “have we elected a king or a congress? What’s the senate doing?”: This could be referring to the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) who was elected to a record four terms as president before the Twenty-second Amendment, ratified in 1951, limited a president to two terms. His 1937 plan to add justices to the Supreme Court led critics to charge that he wanted to rule like a king.
- “remember that you are a good Republican and that we shall never have free medicine”: Roosevelt left health insurance out of the Social Security Act of 1935 for fear of the American Medical Association, and when Truman proposed national health insurance in 1945, the AMA fought it as “socialized medicine.” The universal healthcare discussion in this chapter serves to underscore one of the novel’s key themes: the tension between the ideal and the practical, between dreams and reality, and the social

ethics of care and responsibility. It represents a call for tangible, practical action in a world marked by suffering and deprivation.

- “He would not trust himself in that secret box”: The secret ballot, printed by the government and marked in private, came to the U.S. from Australia, and the states adopted it between 1888 and the 1890s. Before that, voters often cast party tickets in public view.
- “his White Horse, his Long John, his Johnnie Walker, his fire water”: The different whiskeys represent both Moses’s personal struggles and the broader themes of despair, escape, and the search for meaning in the novel’s interior American setting. Prohibition ended in December 1933, Roosevelt’s first year in office, after the Democrats ran on repeal, so Moses drinks freely under the party he hates.
  - White Horse Scotch Whisky is a blended Scotch whisky from Edinburgh, first produced by James Logan Mackie in about 1890.
  - Long John Whisky may refer to Long John Macdonald, a bootlegger who took out a license and founded the Ben Nevis distillery at Fort William in 1825.
  - Johnnie Walker is a brand of Scotch whisky now owned by Diageo that originated in the Scottish burgh of Kilmarnock in East Ayrshire. (Wikipedia) The brand began with the grocer John Walker, who opened his Kilmarnock shop in 1820 and was selling whisky by 1825. The Johnnie Walker name and the Striding Man logo came from his grandsons’ rebranding in 1908 and 1909.
  - Firewater is a strong alcohol and may also be called moonshine. Some sources suggest that “firewater” may have originated as a term used by Native Americans to describe alcohol. The term “firewater” is thought to be a translation of the Algonquian Indian word “scoutiouabou,” which means the same thing. (Wikipedia)
- “old fool gives up his sceptre and his crown of stars and his golden throne”: The “old fool” is Roosevelt. Moses swore not to cut his hair “until Roosevelt got out of the White House,” so the sceptre, crown, and golden throne mock the president’s long hold on office. Scepter is a staff or wand held in the hand by a ruling monarch as an item of royal insignia. A crown of stars is a circle of stars often representing unity, solidarity and harmony in flags, seals, and signs and is also in motifs related to the Woman of the Apocalypse (Revelation 12:1) and Baroque allegorical art depicting the Crown of Immortality. The Crown of Immortality is a metaphorical symbolic representation of eternal life, often depicted in art and literature. It’s a traditional symbol of honor, achievement, and immortality, often associated with religious or spiritual concepts. It can be visualized as a laurel wreath or a circle of stars. A golden throne symbolizes divine authority, high status, and opulence. In various cultures, it represents the power and majesty of rulers, deities, or figures of significance. The use of gold, a precious and revered metal, further enhances this symbolism, connecting it to concepts of wealth, divinity, and triumph. The phrase captures a theme of resistance to inevitable change, the stubbornness of old power figures, and the futility of clinging to decaying authority in a world that moves on. It underscores the chapter’s atmosphere of decay,

entrapment, and social criticism expressed through the bus-driver's bitter, drunken monologue.

- "in a dark night of the human soul": The phrase comes from the Spanish mystic Saint John of the Cross, whose poem "The Dark Night" (1500s) describes the soul's passage through darkness to God. The Dark Night of the Soul has been described as a type of evolution where it has been recognized that those things that are limited need to be set aside and to press forward with patience and perseverance. In this chapter, the "Dark Night of the Soul" signifies the profound inner crisis of confronting the shadow side of existence (birth and death, loss and love, illusion and reality) captured in Moses's night of screaming women and his question whether it was "his birth or his death he was living through once again." See the Chapter 4 resources and The Dark Night (Ch 5).
- "stormy petrels in the way of the old bus-driver": The petrel may be named for Saint Peter, since it seems to walk on the water. Sailors took the storm petrel as an omen of bad weather, and "stormy petrel" came to mean a troublemaker. See Birds.
- "Jezebel!": Jezebel is in the Book of Kings in the Hebrew Bible. She is known for violently purging the prophets of God from Israel and instituting the worship of Baal and Asherah. She was later put to death by defenestration or being thrown from a high place or window. In the Book of Revelation (2:20) she is symbolically associated with false prophets. (Wikipedia) Before her death Jezebel "painted her face, and tired her head" (2 Kings 9:30), dressing her hair, a fitting curse in a chapter so taken up with hair. "Jezebel" in this context represents a symbol of moral judgment and inner conflict within the bus-driver's troubled psyche during a moment of dark reflection and suffering.
- "the woodticks ticking like old town clocks": The deathwatch beetle bores into old timbers and taps its head against the wood to call a mate. The ticking, heard in quiet rooms at night, was long taken as an omen of death. Moses's woodticks ticking "like old town clocks that went on after they had stopped" carry the same omen.
- "he was Penelope weaving this web, not Ulysses who wandered over the wide seas": Penelope is a character in Homer's Odyssey. The reference to Penelope highlights themes of waiting, fidelity, and steadfastness amid uncertainty and absence. Penelope, the faithful wife of Odysseus in Greek mythology, is renowned for her patience and loyalty, waiting many years for her husband's return from the Trojan War while warding off numerous suitors. (Wikipedia) She put off her suitors by weaving a shroud for her father-in-law Laertes by day and unraveling it each night.
- "his immortal hair was the part of him that was immortal, that would never die, that would keep on growing": Hair and nails do not continue to grow after death. While it may appear that way due to dehydration and skin shrinking, it's an optical illusion. The actual growth of hair and nails requires complex hormonal regulation and the continued production of new cells, which ceases upon death. Hair and nails symbolize the fragile boundary between appearance and reality, life and death, strength and vulnerability, serving as potent metaphors for the characters' inner lives and existential conditions.

- “He had been told of people buried alive and crying in their graves”: While there appears to be an overestimation of the number of people buried alive accidentally in this chapter, in 1885 a victim was found inside his coffin with much of his hair pulled out. The fear was widespread in the nineteenth century. Poe’s story “The Premature Burial” (1844) turns on it, and inventors patented “safety coffins” with bells, air tubes, and flags so that anyone who woke underground could signal. See Edgar Allan Poe.
- “not even if Gabriel should blow his horn to resurrect us all”: Gabriel is an archangel first described in the Hebrew Bible (Daniel 8:16). (Wikipedia) The Bible does not name the angel of the last trumpet, only “the trump of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16); the spiritual “Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel,” printed in Slave Songs of the United States (1867), gives it to Gabriel.
- “There would still be those rusted forceps of his”: Obstetric forceps for delivering babies were invented by the Chamberlen family in England, who kept them a family secret for more than a century.
- “the apothecaries’ weights that he used for paper weights”: Druggists weighed medicines in grains, scruples, drams, and ounces, the apothecaries’ system, until the metric system replaced it.
- “bare footprints in the dust, long and light, some with webbed toes”: Syndactyly affects 1 in 2,000 to 3,000 births and most frequently in white males where there is webbing (extra skin between the toes and/or hands). Throughout history, people with birth defects, including those with syndactyly, faced stigma and marginalization. In some cultures, birth defects were seen as a sign of divine displeasure or as having supernatural origins, leading to fear or even infanticide. (Wikipedia) In this chapter the webbed toes belong to old Doc, who goes about in “his long white nightgown with his webbed toes,” and to the bare footprints in his office, “some with webbed toes, footprints of things unhuman.”
- “That same stream which a child could wade in was that same river which a man could drown in”: Pope Gregory the Great wrote that Scripture is like a river, “shallow enough here for the lamb to go wading, but deep enough there for the elephant to swim” (Moralia in Job).
- “you died every minute that you lived, got a new skin every seven years”: The popular belief that the body renews itself every seven years is a myth. Skin in fact replaces itself in about a month, though some cells last a lifetime.
- “as if he had been old Father Time himself”: Father Time is the old man with a long beard, a scythe, and an hourglass, the figure of passing time and death.
- “you remembered only the last thing you saw”: In the nineteenth century some believed the eye of a dead person kept the last image it saw, and police photographed the eyes of murder victims hoping to see the killer. The idea was called optography.
- “the undertaker . . . had done an excellent sidetrade in the furniture business”: In nineteenth-century America the town cabinetmaker often made coffins as well as tables and beds, and many furniture dealers became undertakers. Embalming, the undertaker’s art “to paint the dead and make them seem alive,” spread after the Civil

War, when soldiers were embalmed to be sent home and Lincoln's embalmed body was carried across the country. See The Civil War.

- "no credit in the book of human life, none by the recording angel": In Jewish and Christian tradition an angel records every deed of a person's life. In Laurence Sterne's Tristram Shandy the recording angel drops a tear on a sinful oath and blots it out forever.
- "old Doc with his broken stethoscope": The French doctor René Laennec invented the stethoscope in 1816, at first a simple wooden tube, so that he would not have to put his ear to a patient's chest.
- "these shotgun weddings": A shotgun wedding was a marriage hurried along because the bride was pregnant, as if her father stood behind the groom with a gun.
- "imagining he was drunk on ether and starlight": In the nineteenth century people breathed ether for fun at "ether frolics" before doctors used it to put patients to sleep. See the Chapter 1 resources on ether.
- "in his second childhood": In Shakespeare's As You Like It, Jaques's seven ages of man end in "second childishness and mere oblivion." See Shakespeare.
- "He should have been a horse-and-buggy doctor": The country doctor who drove his buggy to farmhouses at all hours was celebrated in Arthur Hertzler's bestselling memoir of practice in Kansas, The Horse and Buggy Doctor (1938).
- "not a cent with which to pay old Charon when they crossed the river in a leaking boat": Charon in Greek and Roman mythology is the ferryman to Hades or the underworld. The Greeks put a coin, an obol, in the mouth of the dead to pay the ferryman, so the dead without "a cent" cannot cross. See the Chapter 3 resources.
- "It was a dead country": Moses's dead country of the empty box factory, "the foundry that had no bricks and no fires and the bell-tower that had no bells," and "the filling station that was always closed" is the small-town Middle West emptied by the Depression. The decline of rural America is a multifaceted issue with roots in the 19th century and continuing into the present day. It's driven by factors like industrialization, urbanization, and economic shifts, leading to population loss, declining infrastructure, and increased poverty. As the U.S. industrial sector grew, urban areas became magnets for jobs and economic opportunities, drawing people from rural areas. This shift began in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, and continued into the 20th century. Technological advancements in agriculture led to increased efficiency and the displacement of farm workers, further contributing to out-migration from rural areas. Rural areas struggled to keep pace with industrialization and urban growth, often experiencing higher poverty rates and fewer opportunities compared to cities. From the mid-20th century on, rural areas lost manufacturing jobs as factories closed and industries moved to urban centers. Rural areas often have older populations, with fewer young people choosing to stay and contribute to the workforce.
- "four angels at four bed-posts, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John": Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the authors of the first four books of the New Testament, collectively known as the Gospels. These books provide accounts of the life, teachings, death, and

resurrection of Jesus Christ. They are not simply historical accounts but are also theological interpretations of Jesus' life. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John in the chapter symbolize the four passengers as spiritual or angelic figures, evoking the Four Evangelists and thus linking the narrative to themes of spiritual journey, life, death, and cosmic judgment. Moses is reciting the old bedtime prayer known as the White Paternoster, recorded in the 1600s: "Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, / Bless the bed that I lie on. / Four corners to my bed, / Four angels round my head."

- "Conceived on boxwood, born on cedarwood, died on wormwood": Boxwood and cedarwood evoke the desire for stability and lasting truth, as embodied by Miss MacIntosh and the grounded aspects of Vera's search for reality, while wormwood represents the bitterness, loss, and spiritual malaise that haunt Vera's life and her mother's opium-induced coma.
    - Boxwood has several meanings in the bible: 1) In Isaiah 41:19, boxwood is listed among trees God will plant in the desert, symbolizing divine provision and the restoration of Israel. 2) Isaiah 60:13 mentions boxwood as part of the adornment of God's sanctuary, representing beauty and God's presence. 3) The use of boxwood in prophetic visions symbolizes resilience and God's ability to shape creation with purpose and care.
    - Cedarwood has several meanings in the bible: 1) Cedar wood, known for its strength and resistance to decay, is associated with the construction of sacred spaces like the Temple of Solomon, symbolizing endurance, holiness, and divine presence. 2) The cedars of Lebanon symbolize the flourishing and prosperous life of the righteous, often associated with grandeur and splendor. 3) The use of cedar in palaces and homes represents security and shelter. 4) Cedar can also symbolize human pride and the subsequent downfall, as seen in Ezekiel 31:3.
    - Wormwood has several meanings in the bible: 1) Wormwood, known for its bitter taste, is used metaphorically to represent bitterness, affliction, remorse, and punitive suffering. 2) Wormwood symbolizes the bitter consequences of turning away from God, like idolatry, disobedience, and injustice. 3) In Revelation 8:10-11, the falling star called "Wormwood" symbolizes a catastrophic event, divine judgment, and the consequences of spiritual infidelity. 4) In Lamentations, wormwood is used to describe the profound grief and suffering caused by God's judgment.
- "don't come after me with those old pruning hooks": Isaiah 2:4 foresees a time when nations "shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks."
- "Take away your bellows. There's no living spark": God breathed into Adam "the breath of life" (Genesis 2:7). In the eighteenth century the humane societies founded to rescue the drowned tried to revive them by blowing air into their lungs with bellows.
- "Go play your double flutes somewhere else": The aulos, the double pipe of ancient Greece, was the instrument of satyrs, of Dionysian revels, and of funerals.
- "as long as I'm my mother's son and not my mother's daughter": In this time period writers like Ernest Hemingway and others were concerned about the masculine point

of view in their writing. Through recorded time there has been a fear of the feminization of men and boys that will bring about the downfall of society. For all the hysteria that successive waves of feminism have wrought, the patriarchy continues to fight back with the rise of authoritarianism and fascism. Both fully constrict women and children to their assigned “natural roles.” Choice for women and children is restricted or completely eliminated.

- “the angels crying, crying like loons”: The common loon’s wailing call carries for miles across northern lakes at night, and its wild sound gave rise to the phrase “crazy as a loon.” Moses calls old Doc “crazy as a loon” a few lines later. See Birds.
- “you black Republican”: Historically, the term “Black Republican” has had different meanings: 1) Before the Civil War, it was used as a derogatory term for abolitionist members of the Republican Party. 2) During Reconstruction the term was also used for Republicans who supported legislation that favored African Americans. 3) During and after the Civil War the term was used to refer to members of the Negro Republican Party, a faction of the Republican Party in the South that was predominantly made up of Black Americans. 4) From the 1870s to the 1960s it was associated with the “black-and-tan faction” of the Republican Party in the South, which opposed the segregationist “lily-white movement.” (Wikipedia) Moses, a life-long Republican, hurls his own party’s name at old Doc as an insult, as he did moments before with “you damned Republican trying to fleece me.”
- “mad enough to go off his beam”: In the 1930s pilots flew along radio range beams, and a pilot who strayed heard the signal change. “Off the beam” came to mean off course or wrong.
- “It ain’t going to rain no more, no more”: “It Ain’t Gonna Rain No Mo’,” Wendell Hall’s comic song of 1923, was one of the great hits of the decade.
- “The old grey goose is dead. Died in the morning”: The folk song “Go Tell Aunt Rhody” (also known as “The Old Gray Goose is Dead”) has a rich history rooted in both European and American traditions. The melody originated as a gavotte in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s 1752 opera Le Devin du Village. An English version of the opera was produced in London in 1766, and the tune subsequently inspired various English lyrics, including “Sweet Melissa.” Around 1825, the tune began appearing in U.S. hymnals, and the Aunt Rhody version, a common American folk song, has appeared in numerous song anthologies. The lyrics tell the story of a gray goose that is being saved to make a feather bed, but dies. The song’s lyrics are often interpreted as expressing grief or loss, specifically the death of a loved one, but it’s also been suggested that the goose’s death is a matter of gain for those who need feathers for their beds. (Wikipedia) See Go Tell Aunt Rhody (Ch 5).
- “the cigar store Indian puffing his pipe”: Carved wooden figures of Native Americans stood outside tobacco shops from the nineteenth century, because Europeans had learned tobacco from Native peoples. The figures were a stereotype and have mostly disappeared.

- “You know me, Moses Hunnecker, the bus-driver”: Like the Moses of Exodus, the bus-driver leads his people through a wilderness toward a promised land, and the biblical Moses saw the Promised Land from Mount Nebo but never entered it (Deuteronomy 34). See Moses Hunnecker’s name carries Biblical freight (Ch 5).
- “A doctor ought to bury his secrets, bury his mistakes”: An old saying holds that doctors bury their mistakes. Frank Lloyd Wright gave it a twist in 1953: “The physician can bury his mistakes, but the architect can only advise his client to plant vines” (New York Times Magazine, October 4, 1953).
- “maybe he should have let that excellent old doctor look at him”: Moses refuses old Doc again and again and only at the end wonders whether he should have let him look. Men have long avoided doctors and medical help because of fear and feeling vulnerable.

Vocabulary

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Attenuated

Having been reduced in force, effect, or value; thinned out.

Auroral

Of the dawn, or like the dawn; named for Aurora, Roman goddess of the dawn.

Burs

Prickly seed cases that cling to hair and clothing.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Conciliatory

Meant to soothe or win someone over.

Coxcomb

The red crest of a rooster, or the jester’s cap shaped like one; also a vain, foolish man.

Crow’s-nest

A lookout platform high on a ship’s mast.

Dead-beat

One who does not pay his debts.

Deluge

A great flood or downpour. The Deluge is Noah’s flood.

Distaff side

The female side of a family. A distaff is the staff that holds wool for spinning, long women’s work.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Ere

Before.

Erratic

Unpredictable; irregular.

Fluted

Marked with long rounded grooves, like a column.

Fogdog

A bright patch of light seen in a bank of fog.

Forceps

A pincer-like instrument for grasping, used in delivering babies.

Gnashing

Grinding the teeth together in anger or pain.

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Hock

The joint in the hind leg of a horse, between the knee and the fetlock.

Inanition

Exhaustion caused by lack of nourishment, or lack of mental or spiritual vigor and enthusiasm.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Misadventure

An unlucky accident.

Molt

To shed hair or feathers.

Pallbearer

One who helps carry a coffin at a funeral.

Parturition

The act of giving birth.

Perdition

Damnation; eternal ruin.

Petrified

Turned to stone; also, paralyzed with fear.

Pinion

A bird’s wing, or the outer part of it.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Pumice

A light, porous, grey volcanic stone.

Razorback

A wild hog with a sharp ridge of bristles along its back; also a sharp-ridged hill.

Sceptre

A staff carried by a ruler as a sign of power. Also spelled scepter.

Senile

Weakened in mind by old age.

Shanks

The legs, especially from knee to ankle.

Shunting

Moving railroad cars from one track to another.

Spavined

Of a horse: lame from a swelling of the hock; decrepit or broken down.

Spinster

An unmarried woman, especially an older one. The word first meant a woman who spun thread.

Stethoscope

An instrument for listening to the heart and lungs.

Thatched

Covered with straw or reeds, like a roof; of hair, thick and shaggy.

Voluminous

Large, full, or great in volume.

Wind-broken

Of a horse: short of breath from damaged lungs.

Wrack

Wreck or ruin, as in “wrack and ruin.”

Chapter 6

Content note: *A speaker recalls that his father shot himself when his mother became pregnant.*

Summary

The bus passes broken gates, fallen pillars, and a derelict windmill in a flooded field. Madge wakes and her story emerges. She is five months pregnant, older than Homer, and worked as a telephone operator and receptionist at a pottery. She married Homer to give her child a father, though she never names the real father; she speaks of “that old Adam,” and the chapter hints darkly at her own father (“the child of the dead father”). Homer, half asleep, dreams of his high school sweetheart, Jacqueline White, who is dying of tuberculosis. Madge accuses him of loving her still, and he denies it. Death runs through both families. Madge’s mother died giving birth to her. Years later her father mistook Madge for her dead mother, and she drove him out into a winter storm; he fell through the ice of the river and drowned. Homer’s father killed himself when he learned his wife was pregnant. Madge expects to die in childbirth. The chapter ends with her painting her lips in a darkened mirror and finding she has painted two mouths.

Characters present

Madge Capehorn · Homer Capehorn · Jacqueline White · Vera Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Duality and Doubles · Identity and the Self · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Cards, Games, and Chance · Clocks and Watches · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Dogs · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · The Bus and the Journey · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Aristotle · Descartes and Dualism · Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Plato and Platonism · Schopenhauer · William James and Pragmatism · Wittgenstein

Allusions: Ecclesiastes · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Greek Mythology · Homer’s Epics · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Music and Composers · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with vivid imagery of a desolate, dreamlike landscape: the thin tree branches, withered yellow leaves, broken gates, fallen pillars, and a derelict windmill turning furiously in the wind. This sets the tone of decay and melancholy and introduces the motif of a journey that is both physical and spiritual, with a bus driver, Moses, asleep at the wheel, symbolizing a loss of control and the blurring of reality and dream. The pregnant girl, Madge, is crying in her sleep, embodying sorrow and foreshadowing tragedy.
- Madge is described as caught in a terrible trap. She is pregnant, married, yet betrayed and coming to an early grave. Her face is contorted with rage and sorrow, and she is haunted by an “old rival” gnawing at her heart, at once the unborn child and her other self, and later Jacqueline White, who has taken her place in her husband’s affections. This passage is crucial as it reveals her internal conflict, her sense of loss of self, and the inevitability of her fate as she struggles with her fragmented identity and the horrific loneliness of her condition.
- The narrative delves deeply into Madge’s feelings about her recent marriage, which she perceives as empty and ghostly, greater in tragedy than her death or pregnancy. The husband is a young, oblivious football player, Homer, who does not love her and dreams only of another girl, Jackie White, the real object of his affection. Madge’s fierce jealousy and despair about this love triangle, which she calls “eternal,” drive much of the emotional intensity in the chapter. The passage also highlights the husband’s detachment and the theme of betrayal.
- Madge’s voice is sharp and accusatory as she confronts her husband, Homer, calling him a beast and a numbskull who does not understand her suffering. She struggles with the injustice of bearing a child that is not his and the loss of her independence and identity. This passage is important for the raw emotional outpouring and the depiction of gender dynamics and suffering in marriage.
- Here, Madge contemplates the futility of marriage, the absence of love, and the inevitable death that awaits. She speaks about the lack of a real wedding, the absence of proof or ceremony, and the symbolic meaning of her torn wedding veil and lost ring. The passage also includes reflections on death as birth, the blurring of life and death, and the haunting presence of ghosts in their marriage. The theme of duality and the merging of identities is emphasized, with a sense that Madge is losing herself completely.
- Madge’s jealousy of Jackie White, the other woman who occupies the husband’s thoughts and dreams, is a central focus here. This “eternal triangle” is described as a source of endless torment. Madge accuses her husband of calling out Jacqueline’s name in his sleep and warns of the impossibility of peace between them. This section deepens the theme of fragmented identity, unfulfilled love, and the haunting nature of past and present relationships.

- The dialogue between Madge and Homer shifts to reflections on death, youth, and memory. The husband clings to hope and the belief in eternal youth and rebirth, while Madge is grounded in grim reality and the inevitability of decay and loss. The mention of tuberculosis, the fading of Jacqueline, and the metaphor of sporting events emphasize the transitory nature of life and love. This passage contrasts hope and despair.
- The chapter concludes with Madge's acceptance of her fate, her loneliness, and her impending death. She mourns her lost youth and identity, questions the meaning of her suffering, and acknowledges the tragic triangle that defines her existence. Homer's detachment and inability to fully grasp her pain are underscored, and Madge's voice becomes a mournful, almost prophetic lament. The imagery of the old hunter, the dogs, and the toll-keeper reinforce the inevitability of death and the passage to the beyond.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Madge asks, "Where were her two brides? One should be clothed, but one should be naked." Who are the two brides?
- The chapter ends with Madge's "two mouths" and "two hearts." How has the chapter prepared for that image?
- Madge's hat carries Brooklyn Bridge, ferris wheels, and a stuffed bird "always in agreement with the dual-minded wearer of the hat." What does the hat say about her?

Characters

- Homer says Jacqueline "was all of us, and she was none of us. We elected her to be immortal." Why do the town's men need her to stay young?
- Madge says she married Homer "only to make him a man in the eyes of this world." Who rescued whom?
- Madge's father mistook her for her dead mother, and Homer's father killed himself when his mother became pregnant. How do the fathers shape this marriage?

Connections

- In Chapter 5 Moses is "my mother's son and not my mother's daughter," and here Madge would "wear a tuxedo and a high silk hat." How does the novel keep crossing the line between men and women?
- Madge dreams of "the great potter" and "the great glass-blower." How do clay and glass describe what people are made of?
- Miss Pebbles hears dead lovers quarreling in Chapter 5, and Madge hears "voices I hear even when I am asleep." How does the bus collect the voices of the dead?

Reflection

- “There is no time for man, but there is time for woman.” Is Madge right?
- Madge says, “It’s easier to be married to the dead.” Why is a memory harder to compete with than a living rival?
- Homer says, “I always will look on the sunny side,” and Madge sees only the dark. Which of them sees more truly?

Research: Characters

Madge Capehorn (Edwards)

- Central figure, struggling with her pregnancy, marriage, and identity.
- She is haunted by memories and fears, feeling trapped and betrayed.
- Experiences deep psychological conflict, torn between her past self and her present reality.
- Symbolizes fragility, loss of innocence, and the burden of unwanted responsibility.
- Her sleep is restless, and she cries in her dreams, revealing her subconscious anguish.
- She is both alive and metaphorically dead, caught between states.

Homer Capehorn

- Physically strong but emotionally absent and oblivious to Madge’s suffering.
- Described as sleeping at her side, dreaming of himself rather than her.
- Represents failed masculinity and emotional neglect.
- He is not the father of Madge’s child, and their marriage is hollow and unfulfilling.

Jacqueline (Jackie) White

- Madge’s rival, the girl her husband truly loves and dreams of.
- Dying or already dead, symbolizing lost youth and unattainable ideals.
- Represents the perfect, unattainable love and the ghost of the past haunting the present.
- Eighteen, the banker’s daughter, class president, cheer leader, and Morality in the senior pageant, now dying of tuberculosis.

Madge’s Father (Mr. Edwards)

- A ghostly presence who blames Madge for her mother’s death.
- His death and absence symbolize broken family ties and unresolved guilt.

- A drunken fisherman who drowned under the river ice after Madge drove him out.

Adam

- Madge says, “That old Adam never tempted me . . . and I never tempted him.” The old Adam is the Bible’s name for fallen human nature, and whether Adam is a real man is never made clear.

Homer’s Father

- He shot himself when his wife became pregnant. Homer hears him in the old hunter’s horn and the barking dogs, and in the North wind.

Homer’s Mother

- A widow who never liked Madge. Madge dreads giving birth in her house under the sampler “Remember Thy Creator in the Days of Thy Youth.”

Research: Themes

Life, Death, and Rebirth

See: Death and Mortality · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth

- The narrative blurs the lines between living and dead, birth and death.
- Madge’s pregnancy is a metaphor for birth and death intertwined; she “dies” in giving birth.
- Death is portrayed as a complex continuation rather than an end.

Identity and Duality

See: Identity and the Self · Duality and Doubles

- Madge struggles with her identity, feeling split between her past self, her present, and the “other” face she must become.
- The motif of doubles: Madge and Jacqueline, life and death, waking and sleeping.
- Madge’s painted face and changing appearances symbolize the fluidity and fragility of identity.

Betrayal and Loneliness

See: Isolation and Connection

- Madge feels betrayed by her husband, who loves another.
- She is isolated emotionally and physically, carrying all burdens alone.
- Loneliness is amplified by the absence of family, friends, and societal support.

Memory and Forgetting

See: Memory and the Past

- The tension between remembering and forgetting is prominent.
- Madge tries to hold onto memories but is haunted by the past she cannot fully grasp.
- Memory is unreliable, fragmented, and painful.

Marriage and Gender Roles

See: Women, Gender, and Marriage

- Marriage is depicted as a hollow, oppressive institution.
- The double standard of fidelity and suffering between men and women is critiqued.
- Madge's role as a wife and mother is tragic rather than fulfilling.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Bus and the Road

See: The Bus and the Journey

- The journey on the bus symbolizes the passage of life, the inescapable path Madge must follow.
- The driver's drunken sleep parallels Madge's own unconscious navigation through life and fate.

The Stuffed Bird on Madge's Hat

See: Birds · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Symbolizes fragile consciousness, the artificiality of appearance, and the precariousness of Madge's situation.

Death and the Moon

See: Moon and Stars

- The moon and stars symbolize time, fate, and the inevitability of death.
- "Dead birds singing" and "falling star" evoke loss and the ephemeral nature of life.

Glass and Clay

- Glass symbolizes fragility and transparency; Madge is often compared to glass or clay.
- The potter and glassblower metaphors reflect themes of creation, shaping identity, and vulnerability.

The Wedding and Funeral Imagery

See: Weddings and Funerals

- Madge's "wedding" is a funeral; marriage equals death in her experience.
- The absence of traditional wedding symbols intensifies the sense of loss and unrealized hopes.

Madge's dress and accessories

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Madge's dress and accessories are a kaleidoscope of symbols portraying a young woman caught in the painful tension between societal expectations and her grim reality.
- Her artificial makeup and mismatched finery mask a deeper denial and despair about her pregnancy and future, while the sports motifs and exposed sexuality reflect a conflicted desire for life and normalcy.
- The decayed and ill-fitting garments evoke the disintegration of her life and identity, and her restless sleep gestures toward her psychological torment and tragic fate.
- These symbolic details richly underscore the themes of denial, vulnerability, and the tragic loss of innocence in Madge's character within the novel.

Further notes from the text

- The longest chapter in the novel opens with the road "turning and turning upon itself," so that the bus seems to be going back the way it came, a small picture of the whole book's structure.
- Madge's vanity case is decorated with tiny tarnished hands whose red fingernails drip like blood, and she sleeps a narrow, rigid sleep with her ornaments tinkling around her like a belated alarm.
- Much of the chapter is Madge's inner monologue about her own body: aching breasts small as withered flowers, last winter's coat too tight to breathe in, a corset with rusted stays, glass-heeled shoes for a journey through the valley of the shadow of life.
- Her view of marriage is bitter and exact. She thought she was marrying one man and married another, "this poor shadow of a man," and he married "this poor shadow of herself." She calls it a marriage of three, with Jacqueline White, and wonders whether it will become four.
- Her accusation of Homer turns on time: "There is no time for man, but there is time for woman." He would rather mourn Jacqueline, she says, because the dead stay forever young.
- Jacqueline's decline is told in hard small-town detail: she has lost her job at the saw mill and at the restaurant because of the germs she was spreading, yet she still draws

the boys and the old married men “by a thread, a silken cable.”

- The chapter returns again and again to footprints in snow and frost: the infant’s footprint found in the frost, and Madge’s father’s drunkard’s footprints zigzagging across the frozen river on the night she drove him out into the storm.

Research: Resources

- “leading the dance in your little glass shoes”: Cinderella’s glass slipper comes from Charles Perrault’s tale (1697), and Madge travels in “glass-heeled shoes.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “Should she give birth to a prime minister? Should a flea give birth to a star?”: Horace turned it the other way: “The mountains labor, and a ridiculous mouse is born” (Ars Poetica).
- “the old-fashioned sulky racers”: Harness racing, with drivers in light two-wheeled sulkies, was a fixture of Midwestern county fairs.
- “Brooklyn Bridge like a spidery web”: The Brooklyn Bridge opened in 1883, and its steel-wire cables made it the great suspension bridge of its day.
- “ferris wheels”: George Ferris built the first for the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago.
- “a great conflict with the angel of death or the angel of life”: Jacob wrestles the angel at Peniel until dawn (Genesis 32:24-30). See The Bible.
- “her little thoughts running and running about as if they could not stop”: Lucy Ellmann’s novel Ducks, Newburyport (2019) puts into black and white the constant thinking (mental and emotional labor) that many women do throughout the day. Gertrude Stein’s The Making of Americans (written 1903-1911, published 1925) runs nearly a thousand pages of repeating, circling sentences, another book that, like Miss MacIntosh, My Darling, tries to set down the whole of a mind.
- “no consciousness which was her own and not somebody else’s”: In philosophy, the problem of personal identity is concerned with how one is able to identify a single person over a time interval, dealing with such questions as, “What makes it true that a person at one time is the same thing as a person at another time?” or “What kinds of things are we persons?” (Wikipedia) John Locke held that personal identity rests on consciousness and memory, the very things Madge lacks. See Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume).
- “She was breaking into two, herself and the other, this face unknown”: Young seems to be describing through Madge a form of depersonalization-derealization that is now labeled a disorder and can be brought about by stress or trauma such as rape. See Mirrors and Reflections.
- “for she died in giving birth”: At the time Young started this book maternal mortality was pervasive for multiple reasons. Around 1900 six to nine women died for every

thousand births, and rates stayed highest through 1930. They fell 71% between 1939 and 1948 with the move to hospital births, antibiotics, and safe blood transfusions.
    - Maternal mortality rates were 30-40% higher before Roe v. Wade according to New York State, which saw maternal mortality fall by that much after New York legalized abortion in 1970, three years before Roe v. Wade. Depending on the state, maternal and infant mortality rates are rising due to inconsistent access to abortion. Some states that restrict abortion, rather than face the rise in mortality, have simply stopped reporting or disbanded the councils that were meant to monitor mortality rates in women and infants.
- “her little wedding cake bridegroom with his polished mustache”: Cake toppers of a tiny bride and groom became fashionable in the United States in the early twentieth century. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “Where was her little red stag?”: Stag symbolism in general: regeneration, intuition, and gentleness. In Jacobean symbolism a stag symbolizes Christ, nobility, wisdom, and acute hearing and musicality. The stag is a metaphor for the protective but ultimately fragile forces that surround Madge, highlighting her precarious position and the tension between safety and threat in her experience.
- “Where was her little stalking horse?”: Hunters hid behind a horse, or a screen shaped like one, to creep up on game, and the term came to mean a decoy or pretext.
- “Where was her little knight with his black plume”: The “knight in shining armor” trope, representing a brave and noble rescuer, originated in medieval literature with characters like King Arthur and his knights. This image of a knight in shining armor, often depicted with polished armor, evolved into a symbol of chivalric ideals like bravery, honor, and gallantry. The term has since expanded to represent any character who acts heroically to save another, even outside of traditional medieval settings. (Wikipedia) Madge’s knight carries only a “little paper shield and bright paper sword.”
- “little red-winged blackbirds where the snow was falling”: Blackbirds can symbolize different things depending on the culture: death, change, magic, and mystery. Specifically in Christianity it is a symbol of temptation and carnal pleasure. Blackbirds in the chapter are multifaceted symbols embodying death, the haunting past, sorrow, and the thin veil separating life and death, reinforcing the novel’s pervasive atmosphere of melancholy and existential uncertainty. See Birds.
- “this circle of creation, all of one piece having no beginning and no end”: The wedding ring has long stood for eternity. It is worn on the fourth finger, where an old belief placed a vein running to the heart. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “a handful of rice or confetti or white rose petals”: Rice was thrown for fertility, a bride wore “something old” such as her mother’s veil, and the bride who caught the bouquet would be the next to marry. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “the pale girl dancing herself to death”: In the ballet Giselle (1841) the wilis are the ghosts of brides who died before their weddings and dance men to death. See Music and Composers.

- “to carry her across the threshold”: The custom goes back to Rome. A bride who stumbled at the door brought bad luck, and Madge “had stumbled on her way to the altar.” See Weddings and Funerals.
- “dance at the old dance hall, dance at the river saloon”: Dance halls, ballrooms, and dance palaces were social spaces where couples could meet after work. They were common from the 1910s to the 1930s. In taxi-dance halls men paid ten cents a dance to dance with a hostess.
- “though she had worked in a pottery”: Madge had left the town to work in a pottery or potter town that produced ceramics. In the Midwest through Ohio and Indiana, there was a variety of pottery and stoneware clays with common items made such as washbowls, jugs, and red roof tiles. East Liverpool, Ohio, which called itself the Crockery City of the World, is an example of a “potter town.” See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “her little shoes which danced and danced without her”: In “The Red Shoes” (1845) by Hans Christian Andersen a vain girl is condemned to dance even after she dies. The red shoes represent Madge’s precarious balance between appearance and reality, innocence and corruption, freedom and constraint. They are a vivid symbol of her tragic, conflicted condition as she rides the bus toward an uncertain fate. In the tale the executioner cuts off Karen’s feet, and the red shoes dance away with them, much as Jacqueline dances “on one foot.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “She would paint her face”: American beauty standards for women have historically favored a thin, tall, light-skinned, blonde-haired, light-eyed, and youthful appearance. Unrealistic beauty standards can contribute to body image issues, low self-esteem, and mental health problems. Women may feel pressured to conform to beauty standards, leading to unhealthy behaviors like excessive dieting and cosmetic procedures. Beauty standards can be used to discriminate against women based on their physical appearance, leading to job or social disadvantages. Beauty standards are often used by corporations to promote products and services, contributing to a culture of consumption.
    - The Beauty Myth by Naomi Wolf argues that the pursuit of physical beauty is a myth, not a natural or necessary requirement. Wolf contends that this beauty obsession is used as a tool to control and undermine women, diverting them from their goals and priorities. She highlights how the media and advertising industry actively promote and perpetuate the beauty myth, creating a constant pressure to conform. The book explores the negative consequences of the beauty myth, including self-esteem issues, body image problems, and a lack of focus on other important aspects of life. Wolf calls for a reevaluation of societal perceptions of women’s worth, arguing that beauty should not be the primary measure of a woman’s value. The book emphasizes how commercial interests benefit from the beauty myth, driving the sale of beauty products and promoting a consumerist culture. Wolf’s analysis offers a feminist perspective on the societal pressures placed on women and the impact of these pressures on their lives. (Wikipedia)

- “she was just a poor skeleton in armor”: Longfellow’s “The Skeleton in Armor” (1841) is told by the ghost of a Viking who carried off his bride.
- “She dreamed that she was not herself”: Philosophy of self examines the idea of the self at a conceptual level. Most philosophical definitions of self (per Descartes, Locke, Hume, and William James) are expressed in the first person. The particular characteristics of the self determine its identity. (Wikipedia)
- “She dreamed that she was a sundial in a ruined garden”: Old sundials carry the motto “I count only the sunny hours.” See Clocks and Watches.
- “the men whose feet were clay”: In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream the great image has “feet part of iron and part of clay” (Daniel 2:33). See The Bible.
- “the prettiest telephone operator and receptionist, talking on four wires at once”: Emma Nutt became the first woman telephone operator in 1878, and by the 1920s operators, nearly all women, connected every call by hand at a switchboard.
- “Never had she been a fisherman of these old human hearts”: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19). See The Bible.
- “she would have to go down through this dark, thorny valley of this shadow of life”: Psalm 23:4 reads, “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” Madge turns death into life. See The Bible.
- “come to the wedding feast and had stayed for the funeral”: Hamlet reversed: “the funeral baked meats / Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables” (Hamlet 1.2). See Shakespeare.
- “no dance programs”: Dance cards listed each dance and the partner promised it.
- “champion skeet shooter, shooting the clay targets”: Clay pigeons replaced live birds in the 1880s, and skeet was named in 1926. Later Madge says, “Make me a clay pigeon.”
- “he who would never again wear the laurel wreath”: Victors at Apollo’s Pythian Games wore laurel, and the two-handled loving cup became the sports trophy. See Greek Mythology.
- “kicked from pillar to post”: The phrase is first found in the 1400s as “from post to pillar.”
- “She was watching the old town clock very closely now”: Clocks can signify: time, schedules, business, modern man, new beginnings, endings, and the transitory nature of human beings. In Tudor times a clock could mean truth unveiled by time. Clocks in this chapter are not merely instruments measuring time but serve as potent symbols of the instability of human experience, the blending of reality and dream, and the inexorable flow of time that ultimately eludes human control. See Clocks and Watches.
- “until Death did them part”: The phrase comes from the marriage vows of the Book of Common Prayer (1549), which read “till death us depart”; the wording later became “till death us do part.” The same vows promise “for better for worse.” See Weddings and Funerals.

- “this sleeping beauty who never dreamed of her”: In Perrault’s and the Grimms’ tale a kiss wakes the sleeping princess. Here the bridegroom sleeps, and Madge says later, “Your kiss will not restore her beauty.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “three crescent moons interlinking”: Three interlaced crescents were the emblem of Henri II of France, an allusion to his mistress Diane de Poitiers, in a famous triangle with his queen, Catherine de’ Medici.
- “he was not shaped by the great potter”: The Great Potter from Isaiah 64:8 in the Bible is an analogy where God is the potter and man is the clay. It is talking about how God molds and shapes people in this life. Jeremiah 18:6 says, “as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand.” See The Bible.
- “She would wear a tuxedo and a high silk hat”: Marlene Dietrich wore a man’s tuxedo and top hat in Morocco (1930).
- “the fox of her fur collar”: Fox furs, with the head and paws still attached, were high fashion from the 1920s through the 1940s.
- “wearing this mask to hide her natural sorrow”: Masking in psychology refers to the act of concealing or suppressing one’s true thoughts, feelings, or behaviors to fit in with social norms or expectations. It involves presenting a different persona to the world than the individual’s actual self. Masking can be intentional, where an individual consciously chooses to hide their true self, or unconscious, where it occurs automatically in response to social pressures. Masking can involve hiding negative emotions, such as sadness, anger, or anxiety, to appear more socially acceptable. Individuals may change their body language, facial expressions, or even their interests to conform to societal expectations. (Wikipedia)
    - Marguerite Young did comment about how all people wear masks. They have at least an inner component and an outer component that is shown to the public.
- “circles within circles, wheels within wheels, orbs within orbs”: Ezekiel saw “a wheel in the middle of a wheel” (Ezekiel 1:16), and Ptolemy’s astronomy set the planets on circles riding upon circles. See The Bible.
- “stars should deceive us when they shine no more”: Starlight takes years to reach the earth, so a star might be gone while its light still arrives.
- “She plucked her already invisible eyebrows”: Pencil-thin brows were the fashion of the 1930s, made famous by Jean Harlow and Marlene Dietrich.
- “She was like a tired archer. Perhaps she would always miss her target”: The Greek word the New Testament uses for sin, hamartia, first meant missing the mark.
- “Marriage, what was it but only this awakening which had disillusioned her”: Criticisms of marriage are arguments against the practical or moral value of the institution of marriage or particular forms of matrimony. These have included the effects that marriage has on individual liberty, equality between the sexes, the relationship between marriage and violence, the amount of control a person has over another, the financial risk when measured against alternatives and divorce, and questioning of the necessity to have a relationship sanctioned by government or religious authorities.

Feminist activists often point to historical, legal and social inequalities of marriage, family life, and divorce in their criticism of marriage. (Wikipedia)

- “it had not been a marriage of true souls”: Shakespeare’s Sonnet 116: “Let me not to the marriage of true minds / Admit impediments. Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds.” Later Madge asks whether love can “alter.” See Shakespeare.
- “She had married him to give a name to the child”: In Young’s day a child born outside marriage was legally “illegitimate,” and the word appeared on many birth records.
- “Marriage was not the realization of a young girl’s dreams”: This whole imagery about marriage from Madge is counter to every stereotype and idealization about marriage at the time Young started writing this book. Marriage was the dream of every girl, and the only path open to women at that time was marriage, wife, homemaker, and mother.
- “his face like a death’s-head”: A death’s-head is a skull, a common emblem on gravestones and mourning rings.
- “marrying when you knew not what you did”: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). See The Bible.
- “That old Adam never tempted me”: The “old Adam” is fallen human nature (Romans 6:6). Madge reverses Eden, where Eve tempted Adam. See The Bible.
- “I was the apple highest on the tree, hardest to reach”: Sappho, in Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s translation “One Girl” (Poems, 1870): “Like the sweet apple which reddens upon the topmost bough, / Atop on the topmost twig, which the pluckers forgot, somehow.”
- “what to show for her mental independence”: Even though Madge considered herself independent and living independently, in the end she was not and had nothing to show for it. This characterizes marriage in that women were not independent and were often handed from their father to their husband. Usually they had to marry for economic security and there were not many professions or choices except to be married and raise children.
- “could she not hear the flutter of a moth in her ear?”: A moth can symbolize faith, light, vulnerability, sensuality, death, adaptation, divinity and the afterlife, personal growth and transformation. In Jacobean times it represented the return of the soul.
- “too late for giving in marriage”: “In the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven” (Matthew 22:30). See The Bible.
- “Oh, Romeo, oh, Romeo!”: Juliet’s “O Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?” (Romeo and Juliet 2.2). See Shakespeare.
- “love is blind”: “But love is blind, and lovers cannot see” (The Merchant of Venice 2.6). See Shakespeare.
- “the dragonflies were spinning their threads above her face”: Dragonfly is a symbol used all over the world to signify change, transformation, and self-realization.
- “the old glazier who had told her that she was a glass girl”: Cervantes’s “The Glass Graduate” (1613) is about a man who believes he is made of glass, a delusion

recorded by doctors of the time.

- “Ding, dong, bell”: Ariel’s song for a drowned father in The Tempest: “Full fathom five thy father lies . . . Ding-dong, bell.” Madge’s father drowned. The nursery rhyme “Ding, dong, bell, / Pussy’s in the well” also ends in drowning. See Shakespeare and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “They say she went to bed one night when she was young and beautiful”: In H. Rider Haggard’s She (1887) the immortal Ayesha withers into old age in a moment and shrinks smaller and smaller.
- “He was the king of heaven, but woman was the queen of hell”: Persephone, carried off by Hades, became queen of the underworld, and winter came to the earth. “Death was her first lover. Death was her first husband and her last.” See Greek Mythology.
- “There was no autumn, no Indian summer”: Indian summer, a warm spell after the first frost, is an American term from the 1770s.
- “Once you will mistake her for the wing of a white pheasant”: The pheasant can symbolize seductiveness, fertility, passion and attraction. The pheasant in the chapter symbolizes an element of natural life and beauty woven into the narrative’s complex symbolism, highlighting the contrasts between order and chaos, the real and the illusory, and the mortal and the eternal.
- “He told me that all were clay”: In Edward FitzGerald’s Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám a misshapen pot asks, “What! did the Hand then of the Potter shake?”
- “the Justice of the Peace to tie the knot”: A justice of the peace could perform a civil marriage without a church or guests. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “Tell them Papa’s gone a-hunting the rabbits”: Rabbits can symbolize good luck, prosperity, and abundance. The symbol of rabbits in the chapter encompasses innocence, vulnerability, lost youth, and the pervasive presence of death that shadows life in the novel. The nursery rhyme runs, “Bye, baby Bunting, / Daddy’s gone a-hunting, / Gone to get a rabbit skin / To wrap the baby Bunting in.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “He was carrying the torch for her”: To carry a torch for someone, to love without return, is an American phrase of the 1920s, which gave its name to the torch song.
- “the way of a man with a maid”: Proverbs 30:19 names it among four things “too wonderful for me.” See The Bible.
- “My head is pillowed on a stone”: Jacob slept with a stone for his pillow and dreamed of the ladder to heaven (Genesis 28:11-12). See The Bible.
- “I’ve had no wink of sleep since the night I married you”: Through these paragraphs Madge has been thinking and talking to herself while Homer continues to sleep beside her. Research shows that women tend to worry and think and not let things go as easily as men do, so they tend to get less sleep.
- “a tinker’s dam? Oh, who would solder this great hole”: A tinker’s dam was a wall of dough built to hold molten solder and thrown away after use, so it was worthless.

- “Should the child give birth to the mother?”: Madge cannot find a harmonious transition from who she was to who she has become or is becoming. This is not as unusual as it sounds if one thinks about how life is different before and after having children. For women, since domestic duties still fall mainly on their shoulders, once a child is born it is like a career change and one that is all day, every day for at least the first six to seven years and lasts until the child is an adult. If there is more than one child then that cycle continues as it did for many women whose only goal given by society was to be a wife and mother.
- “Death was birth, and birth was death”: Schopenhauer’s philosophy views death not as a final annihilation, but as the negation of the individual “will-to-live,” a fundamental force driving existence and causing suffering. He believed that life is inherently a state of suffering, a constant cycle of wanting and never truly being satisfied. Death, for him, is the end of this striving, the cessation of the individual will and a return to the underlying, impersonal Will. He argued that the fear of death is irrational, stemming from the attachment to the will-to-live. Although acknowledging the desire to escape suffering, Schopenhauer rejected suicide as a philosophical solution. He argued that suicide, like the will-to-live, is an act of will, preventing the potential for a more profound liberation through the negation of the will in death. Schopenhauer saw individuality as an illusion, a temporary manifestation of the underlying Will. See Schopenhauer.
- “Remember Thy Creator in the Days of Thy Youth Ere the Evil Days Come on Thee”: Ecclesiastes 12:1, a favorite verse for girls’ needlework samplers. See Ecclesiastes.
- “what eyes have not seen, what ears have not heard”: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard . . . the things which God hath prepared” (1 Corinthians 2:9). See The Bible.
- “You think that beauty is as beauty does”: The proverb says a person’s true beauty is in their character and actions, not their physical appearance. The older proverb is “handsome is as handsome does” (1500s). The sentiment is found in the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” (c. 1387) from The Canterbury Tales. Chaucer’s lines suggest that the most virtuous person, regardless of physical appearance, is the most beautiful. The Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle linked beauty to virtue, order, and symmetry. This perspective influenced the development of the proverb, suggesting that inner qualities are just as important as outward appearance in determining beauty. See Plato and Platonism.
- “She was no Venus Adonis, no handsome girl with a broken arm”: The Venus de Milo, found in 1820, has lost her arms. Adonis was the youth Venus loved. See Greek Mythology.
- “She was no Helen of Troy, no face to launch a thousand ships”: Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus asks, “Was this the face that launched a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?” The Greeks entered Troy hidden in the wooden horse. See Greek Mythology.
- “Quit barking up the wrong tree”: The phrase is American, from the 1830s, for a hunting dog barking at a tree its quarry has already left. See Dogs.

- “the angels do not marry, for they are male and female in one body”: In Plato’s Symposium Aristophanes tells of the first humans, double beings later split in two, each half forever seeking the other. See Plato and Platonism.
- “love, honor, and obey”: The older prayer book vows had only the bride promise to “obey.” Madge throws the word at Homer. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “She had lifted her flaming sword”: God set cherubim and “a flaming sword which turned every way” at the gate of Eden (Genesis 3:24). See The Bible.
- “The needle points to the star”: The compass needle points to the magnetic north, not quite to the North Star.
- “a dime-store ring of brass”: F. W. Woolworth opened his first five-and-ten in 1879.
- “those brass rings that are tossed out to the lucky riders at the merry-go-round”: A rider who grabbed the brass ring won a free ride, hence “grab the brass ring.”
- “Always the bridegroom, I said, never the bride”: Listerine’s 1925 advertisement made famous “Often a bridesmaid but never a bride.”
- “the little jacks-in-the-pulpit, little Johnny-jump-ups”: Both are wildflowers, and both carry Jackie’s name.
- “She was little Jackie White who would scarcely remember Madge”: Jackie grew from a sentence Young overheard: “I remember crossing a street in Indianapolis and I heard a man say, ‘Poor Robert, he tried so hard to live long enough to see his sister graduate from high school.’” That “entered into the theme of Jackie and the high school team” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). She named Jackie, she said, “long, long before the first lady” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Jacqueline White and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “this eternal triangle”: The phrase for two lovers and a rival was first recorded in 1907.
- “that old high school cheer leader”: Cheering began with a man, Johnny Campbell, at the University of Minnesota in 1898. Girls took it over in the 1920s and 1930s.
- “she was Morality in the high school pageant”: Medieval morality plays such as Everyman cast virtues as characters, and the American pageant movement brought such spectacles to towns and schools in the 1910s.
- “She was Morality, and I was Honesty”: Homer Capehorn shares the poet’s name. Homer’s works (the Iliad and the Odyssey) present a complex picture of morality and honesty, reflecting the values and norms of ancient Greek society. In the Odyssey, Odysseus frequently uses lies and deception for survival and self-preservation, particularly when disguised. He tailors his falsehoods to specific situations and individuals, demonstrating his cleverness and resourcefulness. While Odysseus’s actions are often portrayed as strategic and necessary for his survival, they can also be viewed as ethically problematic. Despite the prevalence of deception, Homer also portrays honesty as a valuable trait. Odysseus drops his disguise at last to Penelope and to his father, and honesty brings him home.

- “They were playing taps for the World War soldiers”: General Daniel Butterfield set “Taps” in 1862, and it became the bugle call at military funerals. See Music and Composers.
- “She was Juliet, and I was Romeo”: In the play Romeo kisses Juliet, believing her dead, and drinks poison before she wakes from the sleeping potion. See Shakespeare and Suicide in History and Literature.
- “She was the drum majorette”: Majorettes twirling batons began leading high school and college bands in the 1930s.
- “First in the hearts of her countrymen”: Henry Lee’s eulogy of Washington (1799): “First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.”
- “If you did not know Theobald, how will you know her?”: The Ship of Theseus, also known as Theseus’s Paradox, is a paradox and a common thought experiment about whether an object is the same object after having all of its original components replaced over time, typically one after the other. In Greek mythology, Theseus, the mythical king of the city of Athens, rescued the children of Athens from King Minos after slaying the minotaur and then escaped onto a ship going to Delos. Each year, the Athenians would commemorate this by taking the ship on a pilgrimage to Delos to honor Apollo. A question was raised by ancient philosophers: If no pieces of the original made up the current ship, was it still the Ship of Theseus? Furthermore, if it was no longer the same, when had it ceased existing as the original ship? In contemporary philosophy, the thought experiment has applications to the philosophical study of identity over time. Within the contemporary philosophy of mind, it has inspired a variety of proposed solutions and concepts regarding the persistence of personal identity. (Wikipedia) See Greek Mythology.
- “He told me that you will never pluck last summer’s rose”: This may refer to Thomas Moore’s poem “The Last Rose of Summer” (1805, published in Irish Melodies, 1813), which begins, “’Tis the last rose of summer, / Left blooming alone.” The metaphor underscores the futility of trying to recapture or resurrect what time has irrevocably taken, reinforcing the novel’s meditation on the inescapable flow of life and the illusions that both sustain and deceive.
- “her poodle-dog hair-cut”: The poodle cut, short tight curls, came into fashion in the early 1950s while Young was writing.
- “She was Abraham Lincoln’s sweetheart and Lincoln’s mother afterwards”: Ann Rutledge, Lincoln’s legendary sweetheart, died young in 1835. His mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, died of milk sickness in Indiana in 1818. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “Jenny Lind”: The “Swedish Nightingale” toured America for P. T. Barnum in 1850-1852. See Music and Composers.
- “Little Sir Echo! How do you do?”: The children’s song (1917) was a hit again in 1939. In myth the nymph Echo pined for Narcissus until only her voice was left. See Music and Composers and Greek Mythology.

- “She carried the yellow tuberoses at the commencement”: Tuberoses, heavily fragrant, were favorite flowers at Victorian funerals. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “To thine own self be true, and it will follow as the day the night”: Polonius gives this advice to his son Laertes in Hamlet (1.3): “This above all: to thine own self be true, / And it must follow, as the night the day, / Thou canst not then be false to any man.” Homer gets it backwards, “as the day the night.” See Shakespeare.
- “Though the flesh might wither and die, even as the grass”: “All flesh is grass . . . The grass withereth, the flower fadeth” (Isaiah 40:6-8). See The Bible.
- “Death comes to every wedding feast”: In Holbein’s Dance of Death (1538) a skeleton drums ahead of a newly married couple. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “Everyone pays the piper”: In the tale of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, the town that would not pay the piper lost its children. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “She had never worn perfume”: Ashes of Roses is a perfume by Bourjois, France, 1909.
- “Time was no respecter, Madge said, of persons”: “God is no respecter of persons” (Acts 10:34). See The Bible.
- “it was not the malaria poisoning the air”: Malaria, “bad air,” or ague, plagued the marshy Midwest in the nineteenth century until drainage and quinine drove it out. It was carried by mosquitoes, not the air. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “the galloping consumption she was spreading around”: Tuberculosis was also called consumption. It was a leading cause of death in the U.S. through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was called the “Great White Plague” because of how pale people became who had it. Robert Koch identified the germ in 1882, which is why Jacqueline loses her jobs for spreading it. Patients were sent to sanatoriums until streptomycin (1944) gave the first cure.
- “all dressed like British lords in scarlet coats”: Fox-hunters’ red coats are called “hunting pink.” See Dogs.
- “They say it changes your color before you can say Jack Robinson”: The phrase means a very short amount of time. The phrase first appeared in print in 1778 in Frances Burney’s novel Evelina (“I’d do it as soon as say Jack Robinson”), but probably was in wide use before that time. Another story relates the origin of the phrase to a comic song of the 1840s, written and performed by Tom Hudson, which tells of a sailor who returns from a voyage to discover that his wife has married another sailor in his absence. (Wikipedia)
- “Jack Frost who paints the window pane white”: The nursery rhyme runs, “Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, / Jack jump over the candlestick.” Madge’s string of Jacks, Jack Robinson, Jack Frost, little Jack Fleet, Jack White, Jack-in-the-pulpit, and later Homer’s jack-in-the-box, all circle back to Jackie. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “the oldest pinochle player in town”: German immigrants brought pinochle to America, and it filled Midwestern taverns and kitchens. See Cards, Games, and Chance.

- “Oh, a little birdie told me”: “A bird of the air shall carry the voice” (Ecclesiastes 10:20). See Ecclesiastes.
- “Love’s the ghostly reaper now. He asks not what flower he reaps”: Longfellow’s “The Reaper and the Flowers” (1839) begins, “There is a Reaper, whose name is Death.”
- “taking them all over the hill and far away”: “Over the Hills and Far Away” is an old soldiers’ song, sung in The Beggar’s Opera (1728). See Music and Composers.
- “Death was always the bridegroom”: Death and the Maiden, the skeleton embracing the girl, was a favorite subject of Renaissance painters and of Schubert’s song (1817). See Music and Composers.
- “Two bodies can’t occupy exactly the same position in space”: Impenetrability is a fundamental property of matter that dictates that two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time. This concept is a cornerstone of classical and quantum mechanics, defining how matter interacts and exists in space. In quantum mechanics the Pauli exclusion principle (1925), which helps explain impenetrability, states that two identical fermions cannot occupy the same quantum state (including spatial coordinates, spin, etc.) in a system at the same time. (Wikipedia) Everyday objects, like a brick and a table, demonstrate impenetrability. A brick cannot sit in the space a table already fills.
- “One must be a spirit not anywhere in space”: Philosophy of mind is a branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of the mind and its relation to the body and the external world. Dualism and monism are the two central schools of thought on the mind-body problem. (Wikipedia) Descartes held that the mind takes up no space, and Homer guesses that a spirit must be “outside of space.” See Descartes and Dualism.
- “If one triangle is laid over another triangle”: Euclid proves triangles equal by laying one upon the other, since “things which coincide with one another are equal.”
- “You are you, and she is she. I am I, or am I?”: In metaphysics the philosophy of identity is the relation each thing bears only to itself. The notion of identity gives rise to many philosophical problems, including the identity of indiscernibles (if x and y share all their properties, are they one and the same thing?), and questions about change and personal identity over time (what has to be the case for a person x at one time and a person y at a later time to be one and the same person?). The philosophical concept concerns a relation, specifically, a relation that x and y stand in if, and only if they are one and the same thing, or identical to each other (i.e. if, and only if x = y). The law of identity originates from classical antiquity. The modern formulation of identity is that of Gottfried Leibniz, who held that x is the same as y if and only if every predicate true of x is true of y as well. (Wikipedia) Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote (Tractatus 5.5301): “That identity is not a relation between objects is obvious.” At 5.5303 he elaborates: “Roughly speaking: to say of two things that they are identical is nonsense, and to say of one thing that it is identical with itself is to say nothing.” See Wittgenstein.
- “The sunny side of the street”: “On the Sunny Side of the Street” (1930) was a Depression-era hit. See Music and Composers.

- “Not that some pity would not have stirred in Madge’s heart if Jacqueline had been married”: Madge could not pity Jacqueline because she did not settle down and marry so that the other men would have lost interest. This is something women are still addressing. If a woman belongs to a man then she is not “available.” She is someone else’s property and a man respects another man’s property. He controls his woman and sees that she does not reflect badly on him.
- “The grave gave up its dead as the river gave up its dead”: “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it” (Revelation 20:13). See The Bible.
- “the drunkard’s walk which was the pattern upon the faded quilt”: The Drunkard’s Path quilt pattern, with curved zigzags, became popular late in the nineteenth century, and some accounts tie it to the temperance movement.
- “you and the wounded bird. God never dropped anybody”: “Not one sparrow shall fall on the ground without your Father” (Matthew 10:29). See The Bible.
- “It’s only the lead in my system makes me want to sleep”: Pottery glazes were made with lead, and glaze dippers suffered lead poisoning, with exhaustion, pallor, and drowsiness. Homer met Madge at the pottery (“I hardly remembered you until I saw you at the pottery”), so the lead may be real.
- “Death is an old hunter. Wait until you hear his winding horn”: In the legend of the Wild Hunt a ghostly huntsman rides through the winter sky with baying hounds, and to hear him meant death. See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Dogs.
- “My father was the North wind”: In Greek myth the North Wind is Boreas, who carried off the girl Oreithyia to be his bride. See Greek Mythology.
- “She was painting her lips with a cupid’s bow”: The cupid’s-bow mouth, painted into a sharp double curve, was made famous by the actress Clara Bow in the 1920s. See Mirrors and Reflections.

Vocabulary

Affable

Friendly and easy to talk to.

Aloof

Distant; not friendly or involved.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Artifice

Clever trickery, or the art of making things seem other than they are.

Chivalry

The code of the medieval knight; courtesy and protection shown by a man toward a woman.

Coiffured

With the hair carefully styled.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Countenance

As a verb, to tolerate or approve of. As a noun, the face.

Crabbed

Bent and cramped, or bad-tempered.

Crucible

A heat-resistant pot for melting metals. Figuratively, a severe test that changes a person.

Deflowered

Robbed of virginity.

Demented

Out of one’s mind.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Disrelation

A lack of relation between things.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Effaced

Erased; wiped out.

Ere

Before.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Evanescent

Quickly fading or vanishing.

Extricate

To free from a trap or difficulty.

Fitful

Starting and stopping; irregular.

Gauze

A thin, transparent fabric.

Glazier

One who sets glass in windows.

Gnashing

Grinding the teeth together in anger or pain.

Gossamer

A fine film of cobweb; anything light and delicate.

Grizzled

Streaked with grey.

Harebell

A wildflower with nodding blue bell-shaped flowers.

Ibis

A long-legged wading bird with a downward-curved bill, sacred in ancient Egypt to Thoth, god of writing and wisdom.

Indeterminate

Not clearly fixed or defined.

Intricacy

Complexity; many interwoven parts.

Irredeemable

Beyond saving or repair.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Lucid

Clear; clear-headed.

Molt

To shed hair or feathers.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Negligee

A woman’s light, flowing dressing gown.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Palanquin

A covered litter carried on poles on the shoulders of bearers.

Pallbearer

One who helps carry a coffin at a funeral.

Palsy

Paralysis or uncontrollable trembling.

Patent leather

Leather with a hard, glossy finish.

Petticoat

An underskirt.

Petulantly

In a sulky, impatient way.

Philanderer

A man who carries on many love affairs.

Phosphorescent

Glowing faintly in the dark.

Pinochle

A card game for two to four players, played with a 48-card deck.

Pirouetting

Spinning on one foot, as in ballet.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Prescience

Knowledge of events before they happen.

Quail

A small, plump ground bird hunted as game.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Roan

Of a horse: with a solid-colored coat sprinkled with white hairs.

Rouge

A red powder or cream used to color the cheeks or lips.

Scalpel

A small, sharp surgeon’s knife.

Scudding

Moving fast before the wind.

Sexton

A church officer who looks after the building and churchyard and often digs the graves.

Snood

A hairnet or band worn to hold the hair at the back of the head.

Solder

Melted metal used to join metal parts; to join them with it.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Strumpet

A prostitute; a woman thought immoral.

Sulky

A light two-wheeled cart for one driver, used in harness racing.

Teamster

A driver of a team of horses; later, a truck driver.

Tracery

Delicate lacework of interlacing lines.

Trousseau

The clothes and linens a bride gathers for her marriage.

Tuberose

A Mexican plant with heavily fragrant white flowers.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Vanity case

A small case for carrying makeup.

Vaporous

Full of mist or vapor.

Vicariously

Experienced through another person.

Vivacity

Liveliness.

Winding sheet

The cloth a corpse is wrapped in for burial.

Chapter 7

Content note: *A man dismisses women who say they were raped as hysterical.*

Summary

Through rain and flood, Moses spots the wheelless frame of old Doc's Model T by the road. He imagines the doctor tending patients who are ghosts or were never born. He mocks the old man and is moved by him, but does not stop. Inside the bus, Madge tells Homer the dark stories of their hometown. Josh and Rudolph Hathaway were brothers, and both are dead. Gertrude, who married first one and then the other, is accused by Madge of killing them both, in a murky story of a locked door and a fire. Musidora, Gertrude's simple-minded sister, was married off to an old man and has too many children, who play in the graveyard. Old Josh burned to death in a coat closet locked from the outside. Homer wants to think the best of everyone. Madge brings the talk back to Jacqueline, and Homer says he is hungry.

Characters present

Justice O'Leary · Moses Hunnecker · Madge Capehorn · Homer Capehorn · Gertrude Hathaway Tidings · Musidora Tidings · Jacqueline White

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Decay and Ruin · Dreams and Imagination · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Illusion and Reality · Madness and Sanity

Symbols: Birds · Cards, Games, and Chance · Fire · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Music and Instruments · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Buddhism · Heraclitus and Flux · Phenomenology · Schopenhauer · Spiritualism and the Occult

Allusions: American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Angels and Archangels · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Judaism · Milton · Music and Composers · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a vivid, poetic description of a rain-drenched, misty landscape, setting a somber, almost surreal tone. The bus-driver, Moses, encounters Old Doc's wrecked, skeletal Ford chassis stranded in a flooded road, illuminated faintly like a firefly or consciousness itself. The driver muses whether what he sees is real or a

dream, questioning reality, life, and death, and Old Doc's tireless but seemingly futile attempts to "start a spark of life." This passage metaphorically explores mortality, transition, and the persistence of hope or duty even when all seems lost. The imagery of the broken-down car, the flooded road, and the "angels chattering in the tree-tops" suggests a liminal space between life and death, reality and imagination.

- The bus-driver's monologue about Old Doc reveals him as a tragic, almost mythic figure: an old doctor who never refuses a call, even when it seems he has lost his faculties, his vehicle, and perhaps his sanity. The doctor's relentless, futile journeys on icy roads with no proper equipment symbolize stubborn persistence in the face of inevitable decline and death. The narrative illustrates how Old Doc is both mocked and respected, seen as a fool by some but possessing a deeper, perhaps spiritual role in a world where birth and death are blurred or denied. This passage touches on themes of duty, madness, the passage of time, and the elusive boundary between life and death.
- Moses debates whether to help Old Doc or leave him to his fate, expressing frustration and resignation. He speculates on Old Doc's patients described as shades, ghosts, or figures who may never have been born or are long dead. Moses also reflects on the futility of Old Doc's efforts. This passage highlights human helplessness in the face of death and the limits of care or intervention. The bus-driver's inner conflict personifies the tension between compassion and self-preservation.
- A shift from the spectral and metaphysical to the more earthly unfolds in the conversation between Homer Capehorn and Madge. They discuss the recent death of Old Josh, a local figure who ran a saloon and who died under suspicious circumstances. Madge accuses Gertrude, Josh's wife (and widow of his brother), of having killed both brothers, linking the tragedy to a dark family history of violence and secrets. Homer is skeptical, representing denial or disbelief, while Madge embodies a grim acceptance of harsh truths. This passage explores themes of murder, betrayal, community gossip, and the difficulty of uncovering truth in a close-knit but troubled town.
- Madge tells a haunting story about the Tidings family, focusing on two sisters, Gertrude and Musidora, and the legacy of violence and neglect they endure. Musidora is described as a tragic, possibly mentally ill figure who drags a baby carriage and lives in poverty and squalor, while Gertrude is implicated in violent acts. Their mother is said to have killed one child and sold Musidora to an old man who is both her husband and the father of many children. The narrative paints a bleak picture of generational suffering, broken families, and societal neglect, interwoven with supernatural or symbolic elements like the pale, moth-like children playing in a graveyard. This passage deepens the themes of innocence lost, cyclical violence, and the marginalization of the vulnerable.
- Towards the end, Madge and Homer discuss the fate of Musidora's children and the complexities of love, care, and survival in harsh conditions. The dialogue reflects on what constitutes sorrow and happiness in such a bleak existence and the role of the community or authorities in intervening. The mention of the age of twelve as the "age

of wisdom” and references to biblical figures add a layer of symbolic meaning, suggesting a loss of innocence and an inevitable confrontation with harsh realities.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Moses lists everything old Doc’s car lacks: “No steering wheel, no tires, no windshield, no motor.” What is left when everything is missing?
- “Keys never turn by themselves. Somebody always turns them.” “Keys do turn by themselves.” Which voice does the chapter trust?
- Moses recites a “broken jeremiad” of names and stones. What is he mourning?

Characters

- Old Doc has “never refused a call yet,” even when no one calls. Is he a fool or a saint?
- Madge says, “There are some things you know better through never having been there.” How does she know what she knows?
- Musidora “never speaks.” What does the town see when it looks at her?

Connections

- In Chapter 6 Madge drove her father out to drown, and here Gertrude is accused of locking Josh in to burn. Why do Madge’s stories so often accuse women of killing men?
- The skull on Mrs. Tidings’s mantel and Gertrude marrying her husband’s brother both come from Hamlet. What does the town of Madge’s stories share with Elsinore?
- In Chapter 5 old Doc practiced “only in his crazy dreams,” and here his patients are “shades.” How has his practice changed?

Reflection

- “What is sorrow? Is it happiness?” Can Musidora be happy if she does not know she should be sad?
- Homer says, “You ought not to say anything you cannot prove.” Madge answers that a world needing proof would be silent. Who is right?
- “Nobody cares. Nobody could prove a thing.” What does a town owe its most helpless members?

Research: Characters

Justice O’Leary (Old Doc)

- Is described as an enigmatic figure who seems to exist between life and death. He is the former town doctor, now retired.
- Drives an old, broken-down vehicle with no wheels or steering wheel, symbolizing a loss of control or connection to the physical world.
- Represents persistence and duty, always answering calls to help, even when no one is calling, suggesting a supernatural or symbolic role as a “doctor” for the dying or unborn.
- Plays a violin and uses a carriage lantern, reinforcing his ghostly or timeless nature.
- His practice is described as increasingly mystical, with many patients “as many as the stars.”

Moses Hunnecker (The Bus Driver)

- Acts as a skeptical observer, rationalizing Old Doc’s strange behavior.
- Reflects on Old Doc’s past and present, doubts his sanity, and worries about his own survival.
- Represents the worldly, pragmatic perspective contrasted with Old Doc’s mystical one.

Madge Capehorn

- A woman who provides a dark, detailed account of local tragedies and suspicions.
- Reveals complex family histories involving death, murder, and social decay.
- Portrays a harsh view of morality and survival in a tough town, accusing Gertrude of murder and describing Musidora’s tragic life.

Homer Capehorn

- Madge’s husband, often skeptical and somewhat detached.
- Exhibits a more hopeful or resigned attitude toward death and life’s hardships, believing in an afterlife and the persistence of spirits.
- Struggles to accept Madge’s harsher truths and prefers rational explanations.

Gertrude Hathaway (Tidings)

- A woman accused by Madge of killing two brothers (Rudolph and Josh).
- Described as a drinker and a failing housekeeper, living in a state of decay.
- Twice widowed, and proud of it: “I’ll still be Mrs. Hathaway.”

Musidora (Tidings)

- Gertrude’s sister, portrayed as mentally impaired or “peculiar.”
- Lives in poverty and neglect with many children, exhibiting signs of mental and physical deterioration.
- Symbolizes innocence lost and the cyclical nature of suffering.

Josh and Rudolph Hathaway

- Brothers who stopped speaking when Gertrude married Rudolph. Rudolph owned the bar and never paid Josh. After Rudolph’s death Josh married the widow and burned to death in a locked closet among his brother’s coats.

Mrs. Tidings

- Mother of Gertrude and Musidora, said to have killed her husband and the baby she thought “didn’t have its right mind,” and to have sold Musidora for sixteen dollars and a new roof.

Musidora’s Husband

- A sixty-five-year-old W.P.A. worker who could have been her father.

Jacqueline White

- At the end Madge reverses herself and says Jacqueline “will see another winter’s snow, another dawn.”

Research: Themes

Death and Transition

See: Death and Mortality

- Death is depicted as a gradual, inevitable process akin to fading light or the slow recognition of loss.
- Old Doc’s role as a doctor between worlds symbolizes the liminal space between life and death.
- The community’s attitudes toward death reflect denial, suspicion, and sorrow.

Decay and Ruin

See: Decay and Ruin

- Physical decay (flooded roads, broken vehicles, ruined houses) mirrors moral and social decay in the community.

- The ruined chassis of Old Doc’s car symbolizes a body or life broken down but still carrying a faint spark of consciousness.

Mystery and Suspicion

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The deaths of Josh and his brother Rudolph are shrouded in mystery and accusations of murder, highlighting themes of betrayal and concealed violence.
- The locked door and fire incident suggest murder but remain unproven, emphasizing distrust and ambiguity.

Family and Generational Trauma

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- The Tidings family represents cycles of violence, neglect, and mental illness passed through generations.
- Musidora’s tragic life and Madge’s narrative of her children illustrate the impact of social neglect and inherited suffering.

Reality and Imagination

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination

- The bus driver’s rational skepticism contrasts with Old Doc’s mystical reality, blurring the line between dream and waking life.
- Madge and Homer’s differing views represent conflicting ways of understanding harsh truths.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Old Doc’s Vehicle

- A Model T without wheels or engine parts symbolizes a journey without direction, life without vitality, or a soul trapped between worlds.

The Locked Door and Fire

See: Keys, Doors, and Locks · Fire

- Symbolizes inescapable fate, hidden crimes, and the destructive power of secrets.

The Graveyard

See: Weddings and Funerals

- A place of refuge and sustenance for Musidora and her children, representing the blurred line between life and death. One of the last public places where people can gather.

Violin and Lantern

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light · Music and Instruments

- Old Doc's violin (sometimes broken) and smoky lantern symbolize fading life, memory, and guidance in darkness.

Feathers and Wings

See: Birds

- The fragile boundary between life and death, the ephemeral nature of existence, spiritual transition, decay, and the vulnerability of identity and innocence. They create an atmosphere of haunting delicacy and the inevitability of loss and change.

Research: Resources

- "the mackerel sky": Cirrocumulus clouds rippled like fish scales, from the old rhyme "Mackerel sky and mares' tails make lofty ships carry low sails," a sign of rain.
- "Transition seemed the only permanence": Heraclitus taught that everything flows and that change is the only constant. See Heraclitus and Flux.
- "windows of torn isinglass": Isinglass, sheets of mica, made the side curtains of early cars.
- "Am I seeing with my eyes?": This reflects the phenomenological tradition of bodily awareness. Moses's questions are phenomenology's: what the senses and the body give to consciousness. Vera asked the same in Chapter 1, when the world seemed "the conspiracy of memories and dreams floating without purpose" and "The individual is the one illusion." See Phenomenology.
- "You've lost your fifth wheel": A fifth wheel is something useless.
- "There's a new fool born every minute, and an old fool never dies": "There's a sucker born every minute" is attributed to P. T. Barnum, a famous American showman, but there is no strong evidence to support this. Some say that it originated with David Hannum, a Syracuse banker with a share in the Cardiff Giant (1869), a "fake giant," who was frustrated by the people flocking to see Barnum's copy of it. There have been variations of this saying in print as early as 1806. (Wikipedia)
- "Lucifer and all the angels of creation, the brightest that ever fell": "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" (Isaiah 14:12). See The Bible.
- "he would need hot water and clean towels": Semmelweis showed in 1847 that clean hands saved mothers from childbed fever, and Lister brought antiseptic surgery in 1867.

- “take a headache powder”: Headache powders of acetanilide or aspirin were sold everywhere, and acetanilide poisoned many who took too much.
- “He said it was Mozart”: Mozart was a prolific and influential composer of the Classical period. Despite his short life, his rapid pace of composition and proficiency from an early age resulted in more than 800 works representing virtually every Western classical genre of his time. (Wikipedia) Mozart died at thirty-five in 1791 while writing his Requiem. See Music and Composers.
- “if it was Napoleon Bonaparte being born or George Washington’s mother”: Washington’s mother was Mary Ball Washington, and legend says Napoleon was born on a rug woven with scenes from the Iliad.
- “the fringe is frozen on the surrey top”: “The Surrey with the Fringe on Top,” from Oklahoma! (1943). See Music and Composers.
- “old angel Gabriel blowing his tin horn”: Gabriel is an archangel in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Gabriel announces the births of John the Baptist and of Jesus (Luke 1:19, 26), fit company for a doctor of births. The Bible does not name the angel of the last trumpet; the spiritual “Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel,” printed in Slave Songs of the United States (1867), gives it to Gabriel. See Angels and Archangels.
- “A fool, Lear in the storm”: In Shakespeare’s King Lear, the “storm” is both a physical and metaphorical force. Lear is exposed to a violent natural storm on the heath, symbolizing his internal turmoil and the chaos of his kingdom after he disowns his loyal supporters and his loving daughter Cordelia. This exposure forces him to confront his own mortality and the suffering of others, leading to a shift in his perspective and, ultimately, a descent into madness. It is a metaphorical description that situates old Doc in the tradition of tragic figures overwhelmed by chaos, emphasizing themes of madness, vulnerability, and existential struggle that run through the novel. See Shakespeare and Madness and Sanity.
- “It must have been that wounded bank-robber”: John Dillinger, from Mooresville, Indiana, robbed banks across the Midwest in 1933-1934. He had his wounds treated, and his face altered, by doctors who kept quiet. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “thinking they had been raped, even by their old husbands”: Nebraska first struck the marital exemption from its rape law in 1976, and in 1978 John Rideout of Oregon became the first husband tried for raping his wife while they lived together. By 1993 marital rape was a crime in all fifty states, although some states still treat it very differently than non-marital rape.
- “Crazier than fifty mad men playing at badminton in an insane asylum”: Despite the shared space and activity, each player struggles individually while staff, guards, and others look on for their amusement. The phrase underscores the sense of profound disorientation and madness that pervades the novel, particularly embodied in old Doc, caught between life and death, reality and dream. See Madness and Sanity.
- “What said the night watchman to the owl? What said the owl?”: The question echoes Isaiah 21:11, “Watchman, what of the night?”

- “Solomon, Bathsheba! What can I do?”: Moses calls on the wise king and his mother. See The Bible.
  - Solomon was a wealthy and wise king of Israel.
  - Bathsheba was the mother of Solomon. She was the wife of Uriah the Hittite until David, Solomon’s father, saw her bathing and wanted her. David sent her husband to the front during a war in the hopes that he would be killed.
- “Reuben, Gad, Manasseh, Jahaziel, Eliezer, Luke, Dan, Saul”: Moses recites names the way the Bible’s genealogies do, “begetting, begetting, begetting.” See The Bible.
  - Reuben was the eldest son of Jacob and Leah.
  - Gad was the first son of Jacob and Zilpah.
  - Manasseh was the eldest son of Joseph and the Egyptian Asenath.
  - Jahaziel is the name of five characters in the Hebrew Bible.
  - Eliezer was the name of three individuals in the Bible.
  - Luke, traditionally the author of the Gospel of Luke and Acts, is “the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14).
  - Dan was the fifth son of Jacob and first son of Bilhah.
  - Saul was the first king of Israel.
- “in a broken jeremiad for a watery mile”: A jeremiad is a long literary work, usually in prose but sometimes in verse, in which the author bitterly laments the state of society and its morals in a serious tone of sustained invective, and always contains a prophecy of society’s imminent downfall. (Wikipedia) The word comes from the prophet Jeremiah, and the American jeremiad was the Puritan sermon lamenting a fallen people.
- “the children of Ham”: Ham was a son of Noah. Noah’s curse fell on Ham’s son Canaan (Genesis 9:25), and defenders of slavery twisted it into the so-called curse of Ham to justify enslaving Africans. It has been used as the origin of the “cursed race” or “Negroes” with regard to white supremacy in the U.S. (and elsewhere). See The Bible.
- “Old Jesse Ferguson, John Simon, William Williams, Hannegan, Flint, Stein”: Each of these names appears only once in the whole novel, here, and none belongs to a character anywhere else. Elsewhere “Stein” is only part of another word, such as Steinkirk, “flint” is the mineral, and “buck” is a bucket or a buckle. The next sentence gives the key: “It’s a stone without hands. It’s a headstone, a corner stone, a stone of stumbling.” Stein is German for stone, flint is a stone, and Skinflint carries flint inside it, so the list closes on stones and opens into a litany of headstones for men “all gone over the hill.” The names point outward to real people and also stand as the stones of a graveyard. With the biblical names on one side and the titles of Christ on the other, a few modern writers are tucked into a sacred roll call of the dead, given the same weight as the tribes of Israel.
  - Stein: Gertrude Stein (1874-1946), the American modernist whose Paris salon drew Picasso, Matisse, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald. She shares a first name with the

chapter’s Gertrude.

- William Williams: William Carlos Williams (1883-1963), the poet with his middle name dropped. He was also a doctor in Rutherford, New Jersey, fit company for old Doc.
- Flint: F. S. Flint (1885-1960), the English Imagist poet who ran with Ezra Pound and H.D. With Stein and Williams he makes a tight modernist knot, three writers of the same moment buried together in the driver’s chant.
- Hannegan: The name has a strong Indiana ring, worth noticing in a Hoosier writer who spent decades on a life of Eugene Debs. Edward A. Hannegan, an Indiana congressman and senator, killed his brother-in-law in a drunken rage and was acquitted.
- Red Mayhew: This may reach back to Henry Mayhew, whose London Labour and the London Poor (1851) set down the lives of the city’s poor, with “Red” tinting him toward the political.
- Buck: This could be Pearl S. Buck, author of The Good Earth (1931) and winner of the 1938 Nobel Prize. A buck is also a dollar.
- John Simon: This could be the critic John Simon (1925-2019).
- Ferguson: Too many candidates exist to settle on one, among them the preacher and Spiritualist Jesse Babcock Ferguson (1819-1870).
- Skinflint: Young seems to play off Flint, a pun that feeds the stone motif. A skinflint is also a miser.
- Tim Dorey: No source has been found for “old Tim Dorey,” which is itself worth noting.

- “It’s a stone without hands”: Daniel 2:34 reads, “a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay,” the same image as Chapter 6’s “feet of clay.” Moses strings together the Bible’s stones, after the names Flint and Stein, German for stone. See The Bible.
  - In the Bible, the “head stone of the corner” (Psalm 118:22) is the chief stone of a building. Easton’s Bible Dictionary (1897) explains that the “head of the corner” is the topstone, and Zechariah 4:7 says, “he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.” The headstone signifies strength, stability, and alignment. Specifically, it’s often associated with Jesus Christ, who is described as the cornerstone upon which believers are built. In a broader sense, headstones can also refer to memorial markers at graves, symbolizing remembrance and faith. (Psalm 118:22; Acts 4:11; 1 Peter 2:7; Genesis 28:18-22; Joshua 4:1-8).
  - In the Bible, the cornerstone represents Jesus Christ, serving as the foundational and essential element for the Christian faith, both in the literal building and the spiritual “house” of God. Easton’s Bible Dictionary (1897) describes the corner stone as “a block of great importance in binding together the sides of a building,” and Ephesians 2:20 calls Christ “the chief corner stone.” Jesus is described as the

cornerstone, the first stone laid in the foundation, which defines the structure and alignment of the entire building. He is also the “chief cornerstone,” signifying his primary and ultimate role. (Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42; Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6).

    - In the Bible, a “stone of stumbling” metaphorically refers to an obstacle or something that causes people to fall or fail in their spiritual journey. It often signifies a hindrance to faith or understanding, specifically related to the person of Jesus Christ. Isaiah 8:14 reads, “for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence,” and 1 Peter 2:8 applies the words to Christ. (Isaiah 8:14; Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:8; Matthew 21:43-44; Luke 17:1).
    - The “rock of offence” (Isaiah 8:14; Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:8, KJV) is a biblical phrase, which refers to Jesus Christ as a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense to those who reject him. The idea is that some will stumble over Christ, while others will be saved by believing in him. (Romans 9:33; Isaiah 8:14; 1 Peter 2:8).
    - In the Bible, “living stones” primarily refers to the concept of believers in Christianity. Jesus is also called the “living stone,” and believers are described as being built together with him into a “spiritual house” or temple. This metaphor emphasizes the idea that believers are part of a living, spiritual community where each person contributes to the whole. The King James reads, “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house” (1 Peter 2:5), and calls Christ “a living stone” (1 Peter 2:4). (1 Peter 2:4-5).
    - The “tried stone” refers to the foundation laid by God in Zion, which is later identified as Jesus Christ in the New Testament. This stone is described as “a precious corner stone, a sure foundation.” The term “tried” suggests that this stone has been tested and approved, signifying its strength and reliability as a foundation for faith and salvation. (Isaiah 28:16).

- “He searcheth out stones in the darkness”: Job 28:3 speaks of “the stones of darkness, and the shadow of death.” This phrase can be interpreted as reflecting the struggle to find meaning, certainty, or “stones” of reality when surrounded by the unknown, illusions, or the intangible nature of life and death. It is part of the larger motif of searching for stability, truth, or guidance in a world filled with shifting shadows, dreamlike states, and elusive realities. See The Book of Job.
- “The stork knoweth her times”: “Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times” (Jeremiah 8:7). Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Storks” (1838) helped spread the story that storks bring babies, a fit verse for a doctor of births. See The Bible and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “The footman, the forerunner”: Moses recites the Bible’s titles for Christ and his servants: the forerunner (Hebrews 6:20), the mediator (1 Timothy 2:5), the daysman (Job 9:33), the interpreter (Job 33:23), the advocate (1 John 2:1). See The Bible.
    - Footman is a servant or a soldier in the infantry. Forerunner is a sign or warning of something to come. “If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee” (Jeremiah 12:5).

    - Mediator is someone who acts as an intermediary, a go-between, or a peacemaker between two or more parties, particularly between God and humanity. Jesus Christ is the ultimate mediator, reconciling humanity with God through his sacrifice and subsequent exaltation. Easton's Bible Dictionary (1897) defines a mediator as "one who intervenes between two persons who are at variance, with a view to reconcile them," and 1 Timothy 2:5 reads, "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:19; 1 Timothy 2:5; Hebrews 8:6, 9:15, 12:24).
    - Daysman is an arbiter, umpire, or day laborer.
    - Intercessor is someone who intervenes on another's behalf, especially by prayer.
    - The keeper of the seals is the person who is entitled to keep and authorize use of the great seal of a country. In Revelation only the Lamb is worthy to open the book sealed with seven seals (Revelation 5:1-5).
    - The strayed sheep may refer to the Parable of the Lost Sheep where a shepherd leaves his flock of ninety-nine sheep to find the one that is lost (Luke 15:4-7).
    - The unjust steward may refer to the Parable of the Unjust Steward who is about to be fired and seeks favor with his master's debtors by canceling some of their debts (Luke 16:1-8).
    - The wedding gown may refer to the guest without a wedding garment in the Parable of the Wedding Feast (Matthew 22:11-12).
    - The candlestick may refer to "Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick" (Matthew 5:15).
- "Jack, Jack, be quick": The nursery rhyme "Jack be nimble, Jack be quick, / Jack jump over the candlestick" follows straight from Moses's candlestick. See the Chapter 6 resources.
- "It's my laburnum": Laburnum is also known as the Golden Chain Tree. This moment captures the bus-driver's struggle to maintain control and connection to life despite his deteriorating condition and the hallucinatory nature of his environment. It is an expression of his clinging to what is real and vital for him in a world that is otherwise disorienting and filled with ghosts, illusions, and decay. Every part of the laburnum is poisonous, especially the seeds.
- "Shall the zebra lose its stripes?": "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?" (Jeremiah 13:23). See The Bible.
- "He's rolling in the flood": John Milton, Paradise Lost (1.324): "To adore the conqueror, who now beholds / Cherub and seraph rolling in the flood." The expression metaphorically conveys that old Doc is submerged in a kind of existential or spiritual flood: caught in the overwhelming currents of his own disordered mind or possibly in the waters of death itself. It suggests that Doc is drowning or engulfed by his circumstances, unable to escape his fate. The flood represents a chaotic, engulfing force that traps Doc, reflecting his mental confusion and the dissolution of his medical practice and life. See Milton.

- “Water on his brain, bats in his belfry”: “Bats in the belfry,” for a crazy head, is American slang from around 1900.
- “All these old cretins”: Cretinism, stunted growth and mind from a lack of iodine, was common in the Great Lakes “goiter belt” until iodized salt came to Michigan in 1924. See Madness and Sanity.
- “Hitch your old tin lizzy on to me”: “Tin Lizzie” is another name for the Model T Ford. Henry Ford of the Ford Motor Company built this car, and it was known for its affordability and durability. Ford built it from 1908 to 1927, more than fifteen million of them.
- “the amateur star-gazers’ association”: Amateur astronomers, many in the American Association of Variable Star Observers (1911), found new stars that sometimes proved to be old ones.
- “A doctor buries his secrets”: Chapter 5 has “A doctor ought to bury his secrets, bury his mistakes.” See the Chapter 5 resources.
- “pills, ointments, oils, elixirs, mercury to awaken his vital spirits”: Patent medicines promised everything, and doctors dosed patients with mercury as calomel. “Vital spirits” goes back to Galen.
  - Albumen is egg white.
  - Aqua regia (“royal water”), nitric and hydrochloric acid, is a fuming liquid that can dissolve gold and platinum.
- “a floating kidney”: The loose kidney was a fashionable diagnosis around 1900, treated with corsets and surgery.
- “There’s black crape across the windows”: Black crape on the door or window announced a death in the house.
- “kicked his traces, kicked the bucket, crossed the bar”: A horse kicks over the traces when it breaks free of harness. Tennyson’s “Crossing the Bar” (1889) is the poem of dying, “Twilight and evening bell, / And after that the dark!”
- “drink together from an old German helmet that was their loving cup”: Soldiers brought home spiked German helmets as souvenirs of the World War.
- “They should have played taps, but they made a mistake and played reveille”: Reveille wakes the camp at dawn, and Taps ends the day and the soldier. See the Chapter 6 resources.
- “Rah, rah, rah”: Princeton’s 1869 “Rah, rah, rah! Tiger, tiger, tiger!” was among the first college yells.
- “go over the river to the mines and be the paymaster, or he might dig coal in the pits”: Southwestern Indiana’s coal fields employed thousands of miners, who wore carbide lamps on their caps. See the Chapter 3 resources on labor and Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “What did he expect, marrying his brother’s wife”: Levirate marriage is the custom where the brother of a deceased man is obliged to marry his brother’s widow.

(Wikipedia) Deuteronomy 25:5 commands it, and Leviticus 20:21 forbids it. Henry VIII used Leviticus to end his marriage to Catherine of Aragon, his brother's widow. In Shakespeare's Hamlet, Gertrude, Hamlet's mother, marries her husband's brother Claudius after the king's death. Since women were completely dependent on their father, brother, or husband, they did not have much choice. In order to not be destitute they had to be attached. Even now women are poorer at retirement with less savings mainly because of missed years of income raising children. Social Security was partly founded to take care of these widows who wrote letters to FDR.

- "killing two brothers with one stone": Madge twists "killing two birds with one stone."
- "I know old Gertrude from away back": Gertrude may be named after the character in Hamlet by Shakespeare. Both Gertrudes embody the tragic consequences of familial and marital complexities: Miss MacIntosh's Gertrude through literal murder and madness, Shakespeare's Gertrude through moral ambiguity and political betrayal. They both represent the fragility of women's positions within patriarchal and violent family systems, caught between roles as wives, mothers, and individuals subjected to forces beyond their control. Their characters explore themes of guilt, innocence, and the ambiguity of human motives, complicating simplistic moral judgments. Both have a presence associated with death and decay, whether physical or psychological, underscoring the novel's and play's meditation on mortality. See Shakespeare.
- "We all have to turn in our checks some time": Poker players cash in their checks, or chips, when they leave the game, so the phrase came to mean dying. See Cards, Games, and Chance.
- "I dreamed I was rounding Cape Horn": Homer Capehorn's dream is his own name. Cape Horn, at the tip of South America, was the sailors' graveyard.
- "no lock which could not be opened at last by the locksmith": The proverb "Love laughs at locksmiths" comes from Shakespeare's Venus and Adonis. See Shakespeare.
- "She was Mrs. Hathaway, and she became Mrs. Hathaway": Shakespeare's wife was Anne Hathaway, a fitting married name for a Gertrude straight out of Hamlet. See Shakespeare.
- "the door of the coat closet where old Josh was locked in was locked from the outside": Young loved murder mysteries and had a minor in criminology (B.A., Butler University, 1930; EBSCO Research Starters, "Marguerite Young"), so she may have included the "locked-room mystery" when Madge gossips about Josh's death. A locked-room murder is committed in circumstances under which it appeared impossible for the perpetrator to enter the crime scene, commit the crime, and leave undetected. The crime in question typically involves a situation whereby an intruder could not have left; for example the original literal "locked room": a murder victim found in a windowless room locked from the inside at the time of discovery. Following other conventions of classic detective fiction, the reader is normally presented with the puzzle and all of the clues, and is encouraged to solve the mystery before the solution is revealed in a dramatic climax. The prima facie impression from a locked-room crime is that the perpetrator is a dangerous, supernatural entity capable of defying the laws of nature by

walking through walls or vanishing into thin air. The need for a rational explanation for the crime is what drives the protagonist to look beyond these appearances and solve the puzzle. Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) is the first locked-room mystery, and John Dickson Carr's The Hollow Man (1935) gives a famous "locked-room lecture." See American Writers.

- "his brother's coats with moth balls in their pockets": Mothballs were made of naphthalene, which burns readily, and Josh struck a match among them.
- "somebody saying it looked like the phoenix": The phoenix burns itself and rises from its own ashes. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- "pouring down hail and brimstone": "The Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire" (Genesis 19:24). See The Bible.
- "the headless horsemen riding with their torches": Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow" (1820). See American Writers.
- "the drunken sexton who used to dance a merry jig when anybody died": Hamlet's gravedigger sings at his work: "Has this fellow no feeling of his business, that he sings at grave-making?" (Hamlet 5.1). See Shakespeare.
- "a hot time in the old town next Saturday night": "A Hot Time in the Old Town" (1896) became the marching song of the Spanish-American War. See Music and Composers.
- "There are bricks with layers of straw": Pharaoh ordered, "Ye shall no more give the people straw to make brick" (Exodus 5:7). See The Bible.
- "The better element wanted to close down on old Josh anyhow": Indiana's county-option law of 1908 let voters close saloons county by county, and the state went dry in 1918, before national Prohibition. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- "If it is not true, it must be false": The three laws of logic: the law of identity states that if a statement is true, it must be true; the law of non-contradiction states that a statement cannot be both true and false at the same time; the law of the excluded middle states that a statement must be either true or false. Aristotle set out the law of non-contradiction in his Metaphysics. Homer's "If it is not true, it must be false" is the excluded middle, and "It cannot be both true and false" is non-contradiction.
- "because it didn't have its right mind. It was an idiot": Idiot, imbecile, and moron were official medical categories, ranked by the eugenicist Henry Goddard in 1910. See Madness and Sanity.
- "It was that skull the children played with": "Alas, poor Yorick!" Hamlet holds the jester's skull (Hamlet 5.1). See Shakespeare.
- "I don't know where she got that name": The name Musidora means "gift of the Muses." It belongs to the bather in James Thomson's The Seasons (1727) and to the French silent-film vamp Musidora of Les Vampires (1915).
- "grew up with the water on her brain": Hydrocephalus. Before shunts were developed in the 1950s, children with it were often called idiots and put away. See Madness and Sanity.

- “She lives down there in that old house boat with the holes in the roof”: Shantyboats housed thousands of poor river families on the Ohio and Mississippi during the Depression.
- “It’s awful the way these common people reproduce themselves”: Eugenics is an immoral and pseudoscientific theory that claims it is possible to perfect people and groups through genetics and the scientific laws of inheritance. Eugenicists used an incorrect and prejudiced understanding of the work of Charles Darwin and Gregor Mendel to support the idea of “racial improvement.” Women judged “feeble-minded,” like Musidora, were the chief targets of the sterilization laws, Indiana’s first among them (1907), and Madge asks why “the county” could not “put her away.” See the Chapter 5 resources and Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “He’s sixty-five years old and on the W.P.A.”: The W.P.A. was the Works Progress Administration, which President Franklin D. Roosevelt established in 1935 as part of his New Deal to employ millions of job-seekers on public works projects during the severe unemployment and economic hardship of the Great Depression. Sixty-five was the retirement age the Social Security Act set in 1935. See the Chapter 5 resources.
- “The old man bought her from her mother for sixteen dollars and a new roof”: In the 1930s many states still let girls of twelve to fourteen marry with a parent’s consent.
- “Her children played ring-around-a-rosy”: The rhyme was first printed in 1881. The story that it describes the plague is a twentieth-century invention. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “What is sorrow? Is it happiness?”: The exploration of happiness and sorrow may refer to Schopenhauer who provides a Western interpretation of Buddhism which includes: the will to life (why people strive to keep on living no matter what) as a major driving force; it is an error to believe people exist to be happy; his solutions are to become a monk or sage and to spend as much time as possible with art and philosophy. See Schopenhauer.
- “Little pitchers have big ears”: The proverb is in John Heywood’s collection of 1546. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “Oh, the things that parrot could tell”: Large parrots can live sixty years or more and outlive their owners.
- “twelve, which is the age of wisdom”: Madge garbles Luke 2:42-47, where Jesus at twelve sits in the Temple among the doctors. The twelve apostles came later. In Jewish law a girl comes of age at twelve. See The Bible.
- “She’s a pillar of the church”: Paul calls James, Peter, and John “pillars” of the church at Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9). See The Bible.
- “whether school keeps or not”: “Not to care whether school keeps or not,” meaning not to care at all, is an American saying of the 1880s.

Vocabulary

Albumen

Egg white; the protein found in it.

Aqua regia

A mixture of nitric and hydrochloric acids that dissolves gold and platinum.

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Belfry

A bell tower, or the room in a tower where the bells hang.

Brimstone

Sulfur. The brimstone butterfly is named for its sulfur-yellow wings.

Cauterize

To burn a wound to stop bleeding or infection.

Chassis

The frame of a car, on which the body is mounted.

Corporeal

Having a body; physical.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Coxcomb

The red crest of a rooster, or the jester’s cap shaped like one; also a vain, foolish man.

Crape

Black crinkled silk worn or hung in mourning.

Cretin

A person stunted in body and mind by a lack of iodine from birth; later an insult.

Elixir

A medicine sold as a cure-all.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Fluted

Marked with long rounded grooves, like a column.

Foregather

To gather together.

Gangrene

The death and decay of body tissue.

Groveling

Crawling on the ground; abasing oneself.

Gulched

Cut into gullies.

Haggard

Worn and gaunt from age, worry, or illness.

Isinglass

Thin sheets of mica, used for windows in stoves and early cars.

Jeremiad

A long, bitter lament.

Laburnum

A small tree with hanging yellow flowers and poisonous seeds.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Lumbering

Moving heavily and clumsily.

Mackerel sky

A sky of rippled clouds like the markings of a mackerel.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Mitts

Fingerless gloves.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Pallbearer

One who helps carry a coffin at a funeral.

Palpitation

A rapid, pounding heartbeat.

Palsy

Paralysis or uncontrollable trembling.

Paymaster

The official who pays out wages.

Peaked

Thin and pale, as from illness.

Petticoat

An underskirt.

Retread

To put new tread on a worn tire.

Reveille

The bugle call that wakes soldiers in the morning.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Scudding

Moving fast before the wind.

Sexton

A church officer who looks after the building and churchyard and often digs the graves.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Surrey

A light four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with two seats, often with a fringed canopy on top.

Tousled

Untidy, rumpled.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Whippersnapper

A young and impertinent person.

Wrack

Wreck or ruin, as in “wrack and ruin.”

Chapter 8

Summary

The bus pushes through a cloudburst with a broken windshield wiper, the road barely distinguishable from the flooded fields. It stops at a fork near a hill of old tombstones, beside Beatrice Fitzgerald’s tin house in a yard of mud and wreckage. Madge calls Beatrice a common prostitute. Homer defends her: a hard worker who lost an eye to a boy’s arrow, whose son, rumored to be old Doc’s, joined the Navy. Lost in thought of drowning, Vera cries out for Miss MacIntosh. Moses brings word that old Josh Hathaway is dead and calls it murder, whoever turned the key. Moses delivers a long, dark meditation on death and medicine, insisting that not even the best doctor could help Jacqueline. The bus enters a village at night. Its houses look like coffins under a skull-like moon, and Vera wonders whether she has arrived in a land of eternal night or a dream within a dream.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Moses Hunnecker · Madge Capehorn · Homer Capehorn · Beatrice Fitzgerald · Jacqueline White · Miss MacIntosh · Justice O’Leary

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Isolation and Connection · Madness and Sanity · Memory and the Past · Society, Class, and Race · Time

Symbols: Birds · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Lamps, Candles, and Light · The Bus and the Journey · The House · The Sea and Water · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Aristotle · Augustine and Christian Theology · Descartes and Dualism · Kant and Hegel · Plato and Platonism · Schopenhauer

Allusions: Dante · Don Quixote · Edgar Allan Poe · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Milton · Music and Composers · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a vivid description of passing through violent weather: cloudbursts, thunder, rain like a deluge, darkness without illumination, the broken windshield wiper, and the road as a river. This stormy journey symbolizes a transition, perhaps even a metaphor for the passage from life to death or from one state of existence to another. Vera reflects, “Perhaps it was the beginning of creation. Perhaps

we had said farewell to earth." This sets a tone of mystery and existential reflection, indicating a crossing into an unknown or liminal space.

- The bus stops at a place where the road divides near a graveyard hill, with old tombstones bearing faded names. One branch leads downward to an obscure village described as a "land of promise through eternity," where time ceases, and life is eternal, "where the children would dance, where the young would not grow old, where the old would never die." This passage contrasts the realm of death (graveyard) with the idealized vision of eternal life, emphasizing themes of mortality, hope, and the human yearning for immortality.
- On the other side of the road is a decrepit tin house in a flooded yard, described in grim detail: mud, refuse, broken furniture, and wreckage. Here lives Beatrice Fitzgerald, an old woman shrouded in mystery and local gossip. The dialogue about her reveals the community's harsh judgments, mingling myth and fact: she is called a "common prostitute," yet also described as "royal," with "blue blood" due to her name's prefix "Fitz-." Her tragic story includes losing an eye and having a son who joined the Navy and travels the world but still remembers her. This passage reflects themes of social ostracism, the complexity of human identity, and the enduring bonds of family amid decay and despair.
- Moses delivers a long, rambling, and philosophical monologue about "old Doc," a once-practicing physician now dismissed as mad and irrelevant. He talks about the futility of medical science against death and decay, expressing skepticism about doctors, cures, and even the existence of God or heaven. His words are laced with dark humor and bitterness: "There's no hell, and there's no heaven, and there's no doctor." He wrestles with mortality, the inevitability of death, and the human desire to resist it, but ultimately acknowledges the helplessness everyone faces. This passage is a meditation on aging, illness, and the limits of human control over life and death.
- Moses's speech includes vivid, symbolic imagery: "Alpha and Omega, beginning and end! Trunk, bole, hulk, skeleton," and references to biblical and mythological figures: Leviathan, Julius Caesar, Hercules, and Charon. These evoke the grand, inescapable cycle of life and death, reinforcing the theme that no one escapes mortality. The passage blends the mundane and the cosmic, illustrating the universal human condition through both everyday and mythic lenses.
- The chapter concludes with a haunting description of arriving at a village at night, described as "spectral," with "upright houses like coffins," "a pale, dented moon like a skull," and "great spaces yawning between." The imagery evokes death, emptiness, and silence, filled only with the voices of the past and the dead. Vera questions whether this place is real or a dream, a "dream within the dream," underscoring the elusive nature of reality and the boundary between life and death.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- The road divides at the graveyard: one branch climbs to the tombstones, the other descends to the village of “promise through eternity.” Which branch does the bus take?
- Madge leaves the light on so a man “cannot say he did not know,” while Beatrice puts the lights out. What does each woman want to be seen, or not seen?
- Moses rattles off strings of words: “Barmy . . . screw loose, unhinged, off his head.” What is he trying not to say?

Characters

- Homer calls Beatrice “royal,” and Madge calls her “the oldest prostitute in all this country.” What makes each of them see her as they do?
- Moses says of old Doc, “you can’t help giving him your hand when he gives his hand to you.” Why can’t Moses let Doc go?
- Beatrice’s son “never forgot her” and sends postcards from the world’s great ports. What has he escaped, and what has he kept?

Connections

- Moses repeats “the key turned by itself” and Madge’s charge of murder from Chapter 7. Why does the novel keep returning to the locked door?
- Vera wonders whether she relives “another’s” life, as the drowning are said to do. Whose face is “pillowed upon the oozy tides of time”?
- The chapter ends on “that dream within the dream.” How has the whole journey come to feel like one?

Reflection

- “You can’t prove it’s murder . . . you can’t prove it’s not, so you are right, whichever way you look at it.” Can a town live by that logic?
- “There’s no hell, and there’s no heaven, and there’s no doctor.” What is left to Moses if he believes this?
- “To come to a village at night may be never to know it.” What do people miss when they first meet a place, or a person, in the dark?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- Her descriptions are richly metaphorical and poetic, often blending natural imagery with existential or mythic overtones.
- She imparts a sense of transition or passage not just through physical space but through states of being or time.
- She frequently distances herself from the events, perceiving them as if in a vision or dream.
- She is grappling with realities that are elusive, fragmented, or overwhelming.
- She contemplates mortality, memory, and identity. This reflects an engagement with themes of impermanence and the unknowability of ultimate fate.
- While observing others on the bus, Vera remains somewhat apart, bearing witness to their stories and conflicts without fully participating.
- Her grief and confusion suggest a loneliness or estrangement, emphasized by the eerie, almost spectral description of the village and its inhabitants.
- Vera is positioned on the edge of the known and unknown, the living and the dead, the earthly and the eternal.
- The stopping of the bus at a fork, one path leading to a graveyard hill and the other to a mysterious village of promise, serves as a potent symbol for her liminal condition. This reflects an internal or spiritual threshold, not merely a physical one.
- Her tone is somber, contemplative, and at times skeptical or cynical, especially in the bus-driver's monologue on medical science, mortality, and social decay. She absorbs this skepticism without endorsing it outright, contributing to a complex, layered narrative voice.

Moses Hunnecker (The Bus Driver)

- An experienced, somewhat cynical man who knows the terrain well and sees the storm as routine.
- He stops the bus at a graveyard hill, signaling a crucial moment in the journey.
- He is skeptical of medical science and doctors, especially "old Doc," whom he sees as out of touch and ineffective.
- The bus-driver's long monologue reveals his mistrust in institutions, the inevitability of death, and a complex view of life, health, and mortality.

Madge Capehorn

- Madge condemns Beatrice Fitzgerald as "the oldest prostitute in all this country."

- Madge is outspoken and somewhat judgmental, suggesting that Beatrice tries to hide in darkness because of her ugliness and reputation.
- Madge's perspective contrasts with Homer's more sympathetic view.

Homer Capehorn

- Offers a more nuanced and sympathetic view of Beatrice Fitzgerald, describing her as hardworking, loyal, and even "royal" because of her name's lineage.
- He recounts stories of her past hardships and suggests a tragic background, including the loss of an eye and a son who joined the Navy.

Beatrice Fitzgerald

- Described by some characters as an "old dirty thing," "the ugliest old hag for miles," and a "common prostitute," highlighting the harsh judgment and stigma she endures.
- Madge's disdainful remarks emphasize how Beatrice is viewed through a lens of moral condemnation and social ostracism.
- This negative perception is powerful enough that Beatrice is said to hide because she "puts out the lights" so "they won't see her," suggesting that she is conscious of her social invisibility and perhaps the shame imposed upon her by the community.
- Contrasting with the harsh judgments, Homer provides a more sympathetic and respectful view of Beatrice. He notes that she "brings my mother's laundry" and "washes the clothes so clean," and that "no one ever worked so hard," illustrating her role as a diligent, if marginalized, member of society.
- The image of her pulling a little red sled over snow, with "Her face turns blue," evokes a sense of endurance and hardship borne quietly.
- This portrayal complicates the one-dimensional negative stereotype and suggests that beneath social condemnation lies a person who struggles to survive and maintain dignity.
- Beatrice is noted to be "nearly blind" and losing "the other eye," a physical manifestation of her vulnerability and decline.
- This detail adds a layer of pathos to her character, symbolizing not only physical deterioration but also perhaps the metaphorical blindness of society toward her suffering.
- The loss of her eye is somberly attributed to a childhood incident, where "a little boy shot at her with his bow and arrow," an event she dismissed lightly, indicating either denial or stoic acceptance of suffering.
- Homer refers to Beatrice as "royal," citing her surname Fitzgerald and the idea that names beginning with "Fitz" are linked to royal bastardy ("the bar sinister").
- This rumor of noble blood contrasts sharply with her low social standing, suggesting a tragic fall from grace or a life marked by lost potential.

- The community's suspicion and gossip about her lineage add to the aura of mystery and complexity surrounding her identity.
- Homer also speaks of a son Beatrice supposedly had with "old Doc," a figure who "never claimed him."
- This son, who joined the Navy and travels the world, symbolizes a link to a life beyond the village and possibly a hope or legacy that Beatrice clings to.
- The son's absence and the fact that "no one ever worked so hard" to survive in the village underscore themes of abandonment and endurance.
- The chapter uses Beatrice as a symbol of those who exist on the margins of society, invisible and judged yet enduring.
- Her existence amidst "wreckage" and a "flooded yard oozing with mud and refuse" reflects her precarious social and material condition.
- The bus-driver's need to "change horses" at her house metaphorically suggests a pause or shift in the journey, highlighting Beatrice's role as a waypoint in the narrative of this community's life and death struggles.

Jacqueline White

- Jacqueline is described as a "poor little Jacqueline" who evokes a poignant emotional response from the old bus-driver. The bus-driver reflects on her with a mixture of sympathy and sorrow, noting that "Death never entered her head" and calling her "kind of infatuated with life."
- He observes that she is "prettier now than she ever was," and there is a hopeful anticipation that she will go "to see us all next Christmas, going to dance the light fantastic."
- This imagery conveys a youthful vitality and innocence, an almost naïve optimism or denial of mortality in the face of impending death.
- Jacqueline is portrayed as vibrant and spirited, someone who clings to life and the joys it holds, despite the dark, foreboding atmosphere that envelopes much of the chapter.
- The bus-driver's reflection on Jacqueline contrasts with the grim and fatalistic tone that permeates his monologue about death, illness, and the futility of medical science.
- He laments that "the best doctor couldn't help her," and that "Old Doc certainly couldn't," implying Jacqueline is suffering from an incurable condition.
- This adds a tragic dimension to her character; she is full of life and hope, yet doomed by forces beyond her control.
- The bus-driver's lament underscores the helplessness felt by those who witness her decline and the inevitability of death, which no amount of medical intervention or human will can prevent.
- Jacqueline's brief mention is also thematically significant. Her character embodies the tension between life and death, hope and despair, youth and decay that runs

throughout the chapter.

- The contrast between her vitality and the decay and ruin described elsewhere in the chapter highlights the fragility of life and the relentless passage of time.
- Jacqueline represents a fleeting glimpse of beauty and life amidst a landscape marked by death, desolation, and resignation.

Research: Themes

Mortality and Death

See: Death and Mortality

- The graveyard hill, the bus-driver's reflections, and the references to death throughout the dialogue emphasize the theme of mortality.
- The bus-driver's long rant on death, medical science's limitations, and the inevitability of going "when the tide goes" frame death as an unavoidable reality.

Memory and the Passage of Time

See: Memory and the Past · Time

- Vera reflects on the idea that drowning people relive their lives in moments before death, but here the memories seem fragmented and possibly belong to others.
- The blending of past and present, and the uncertainty of reality and memory, permeate the narrative.

Isolation and Mystery

See: Isolation and Connection · Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The setting (a spectral village at night, broken fences, a flooded yard with refuse, and a mysterious woman who hides from strangers) creates a sense of isolation and secrets.
- The village itself appears ghost-like, with empty streets, wooden geese, and flickering lights, symbolizing a place suspended between life and death.

Skepticism Toward Institutions

See: Society, Class, and Race

- The bus-driver's distrust of "old Doc," politicians, and even the concept of God highlights disillusionment with traditional authorities and systems.
- Medical science is portrayed as outmoded and helpless in the face of mortality.

Social Stigma and Reputation

See: Society, Class, and Race

- Beatrice Fitzgerald’s character embodies themes of social judgment, stigma (being called a prostitute), and resilience.
- The conflicting opinions of Madge and Homer reveal the complexity of social roles and the harshness of gossip.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Broken Windshield Wiper and Flooded Road

See: The Sea and Water · The Bus and the Journey

- Symbolize vulnerability and the overwhelming forces of nature or fate that the characters cannot control.

The Graveyard Hill

See: Weddings and Funerals

- Represents the boundary between life and death, a literal and figurative crossroads on the journey.

The Old Tin House and Flooded Yard

See: The Sea and Water · The House

- The dilapidated house and refuse-strewn yard symbolize decay, neglect, and the harsh realities hidden behind appearances.

Light and Darkness

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light

- The dimming and raising of lights in the house reflect attempts to hide or reveal truth, beauty, and identity.
- Madge’s insistence on keeping the light on contrasts with Beatrice’s hiding in darkness.

Names on Tombstones

See: Weddings and Funerals

- Names like Stonecipher, Longtree, Thistlewaite, Chesterfield, and others evoke lineage, memory, and the passage of generations, underscoring the permanence of death. Longtree is the last name of Esther, a character at the end of the novel.

The Locked Door and the Turning Key

See: Keys, Doors, and Locks

- Suggest mysteries, secrets, or supernatural forces at play.

- The locked door that “just locked by itself” hints at unseen powers or fate.

Birds (Woodpeckers, Bluejays, Mockingbirds)

See: Birds

- Birds appear repeatedly, symbolizing nature, communication, and, perhaps, the persistence of life amid decay.

Research: Resources

- “where the cape of the glacier had reached”: The last ice sheets covered northern and central Indiana and left behind the flat, rich till plains. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “a white carbon lamp like a moon”: Carbon-arc lamps lit streets and grounds with a harsh white light from the 1880s into the 1920s.
- “Stonecipher, Longtree, Thistlewaite, Chesterfield, Dalton, Grebe, Thomas, Whitehill”: The graves carry names of stone, tree, thistle, and hill, as Chapter 7’s dead carried names of stone. Longtree is the surname of Esther, who appears late in the novel.
  - Stonecipher means stone, swampy creek.
  - Longtree refers to the parish they came from in England.
  - Thistlewaite means thistle meadow.
  - Chesterfield means Roman fort, open country.
  - Dalton means from the valley town.
  - Grebe means digger of ditches or graves or engraver of seals.
  - Thomas is a common name meaning twin.
  - Whitehill is a Scottish name meaning white hill.
- “a realm of visionary hypothesis or uncertain speculation”: Representationalism, or indirect realism, is the philosophical theory that argues that the mind perceives only mental images (representations) of the external world, not the world itself. It is opposed to direct realism, which holds that “physical objects are after all themselves directly or immediately perceived” (Laurence BonJour, “Epistemological Problems of Perception,” Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). In his philosophy, Kant distinguishes between intuitions (immediate, sensory representations) and concepts (general, mediate representations). He also distinguishes between appearances (things as they appear to an observer) and things-in-themselves (the world as it is independently of anyone’s perception).
- “I got to change horses”: Stagecoaches changed horses at stations along the road. Moses’s “last stage” is also a phrase for dying.
- “that same old one-eyed Beatrice”: Beatrice is a name derived from the French name Béatrice, which came from the Latin Beatrix, which means “she who makes happy.”

The popularity of the name spread because of Dante Alighieri's poetry about the Florentine woman Beatrice Portinari. Dante presents Beatrice as being worthy of speaking for God, making her a holy individual. Beatrice "Bice" di Folco Portinari was an Italian woman who has been commonly identified as the principal inspiration for Dante Alighieri's Vita Nuova, and is also identified with the Beatrice who acts as his guide in the last book of his narrative poem the Divine Comedy, Paradiso, and during the conclusion of the preceding Purgatorio. Within the Comedy, Beatrice is symbolic of divine grace and theology. (Wikipedia) Young's Beatrice, a one-eyed washerwoman called a whore, is the opposite of Dante's guide to heaven. Yet she too lives where the road divides, the graveyard on one side and the village of "promise through eternity" on the other. See Dante.

- "Everything that begins with Fitz is royal in this country": There is the belief that the last name Fitzgerald and every name that begins with Fitz is from royalty except that it is a bastard line in England. This belief is because of Charles II, who named his bastard son Fitzroy and the Duke of Clarence, later William IV, whose children by the actress Dorothea Jordan were named FitzClarence. Fitz comes from the Norman French fils, "son," so Fitzgerald means son of Gerald. The Fitzgeralds were Norman lords in Ireland, the Earls of Kildare.
- "It's the bar sinister": Bar sinister is the popular and erroneous term for bend sinister. Bend sinister is a diagonal stripe on a shield said to be a sign of bastardy.
- "That's where they learned to toboggan, too": Toboggan is a sled. The word comes from the Mi'kmaq, and Madge uses it as a sly euphemism.
- "See no evil": The three wise monkeys are carved over a stable at the Tōshō-gū shrine in Nikkō, Japan (1636).
- "Borneo, Singapore, Japan, the China Sea, the Rock of Gibraltar": In the 1920s and 1930s the U.S. Navy's Asiatic Fleet patrolled the China coast and its rivers, so a sailor could truly send postcards from these ports.
    - Borneo is the third largest island in the world.
    - Singapore is a sovereign island city-state.
    - Japan is an island country in East Asia.
    - The China Sea is the East and South China Seas, the waters off the coast of China.
    - The Rock of Gibraltar is a monolithic limestone promontory located in the British territory of Gibraltar, near the southwestern tip of Europe on the Iberian Peninsula. (Wikipedia) Its name is Arabic, Jabal Tariq, for Tariq ibn Ziyad, the Muslim general who landed there in 711 to invade Spain. The Prudential Insurance Company made the Rock its emblem in 1896, which is Homer's "life insurance ad."
- "was it really true that one relived, in three minutes, all one's life as the drowning are said to do": Life review: In 1790, British naval officer Francis Beaufort nearly drowned and reported experiencing a life review. In 1847, a letter by Beaufort recalling the incident was published in the autobiography of Sir John Barrow, 1st Baronet. Wrote Beaufort: "Thought rose after thought with a rapidity of succession that is not only

indescribable, but probably inconceivable, by any one who has not been in a similar situation. The course of those thoughts I can even now in a great measure retrace... our last cruise - a former voyage, and shipwreck - my school - the progress I had made there, and the time I misspent - and even all my boyish pursuits and adventures. Thus travelling backwards, every past incident of my life seemed to glance across my recollection in retrograde succession; not, however, in mere outline, as here stated, but the picture filled up with every minute and collateral feature. In short, the whole period of my existence seemed to be placed before me in a kind of panoramic review, and each act of it seemed to be accompanied by some reflection on its cause, or its consequences; indeed, many trifling events which had been long forgotten then crowded into my imagination, and with the character of recent familiarity. The length of time that was occupied by this deluge of ideas, or rather the shortness of time into which they were condensed, I cannot now state with precision, yet certainly two minutes could not have elapsed from the moment of suffocation to that of my being hauled up." (Wikipedia) Vera finds herself remembering not her own life but "another's ultimate face," and she cries out for Miss MacIntosh, who was lost in the sea.

- "I was sinking for the first, the second, the third time": An old belief held that a drowning person rises three times before going down for good.
- "Where was Miss MacIntosh, my darling, now aloud I cried?": The novel's title may echo the old ballad "Oh My Darling, Clementine," whose Clementine is lost beneath the water. See Music and Composers.
- "You can't prove it's murder": A logical fallacy is a flaw in reasoning, "a form of argument that seems to be correct but which proves, upon examination, not to be so" (Irving Copi, quoted in Hans Hansen, "Fallacies," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy). It's an error in logic that can weaken or even defeat the conclusion of an argument. Fallacies can be either formal (related to the structure of the argument) or informal (related to the content or premises of the argument). Knowing them helps a reader spot weak or flawed arguments, argue more persuasively by avoiding them, and weigh information more critically. Moses commits the argument from ignorance: what cannot be proved false is taken as true.
- "Who killed the old horse? Who killed the sparrows?": The nursery rhyme asks, "Who killed Cock Robin? / I, said the Sparrow." See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- "the influenza epidemic that struck us shortly after the Armistice": The influenza pandemic of 1918 peaked as the war ended on November 11, 1918, and killed about 675,000 Americans. It reached the United States through Boston, and rumors blamed German agents for spreading it, hence Moses's "German germs washed up in Boston Harbor."
- "Delirium tremens, mocking birds, snakes": The shaking delirium of alcohol withdrawal often brings visions of snakes and crawling things. See Madness and Sanity.
- "snatch me from the jaws of living death": Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade" (1854): "Into the jaws of Death, / Into the mouth of Hell."

- “me hanging by a thread”: The sword of Damocles hung over him by a single horsehair. In Chapter 5 Moses hangs on to life by “a single hair that would never break, a hair hanging between him and a star.” See the Chapter 5 resources.
- “me trusting to a broken reed”: “Thou trustest in the staff of this broken reed, on Egypt” (Isaiah 36:6). See The Bible.
- “going to dance the light fantastic”: John Milton’s poem L’Allegro (The Happy Man), written about 1631 and published 1645, has the lines “Come, and trip it as ye go / On the light fantastic toe.” It is a pastoral poem, which has from its first appearance been paired with the contrasting pastoral poem, Il Penseroso (The Melancholy Man), which depicts a similar day spent in contemplation and thought. (Wikipedia) L’Allegro is the poem of the happy man, and Moses gives its dance to the dying Jacqueline. See Milton.
- “Barmy, old Doc is, screw loose, unhinged, off his head”: Moses’s strings of synonyms, mad words here and later “Trunk, bole, hulk, skeleton,” read like the lists in Roget’s Thesaurus (1852). See Madness and Sanity.
- “Mad as a March hare”: Hares run wild in their March mating season. Lewis Carroll’s March Hare (1865) keeps the mad tea party. See Madness and Sanity.
- “that old knight errant curing them all”: Don Quixote, the mad knight errant who rides out to help people who never asked to be rescued. See Don Quixote.
- “A clean bill of health!”: A ship’s certificate that no disease was aboard when it left port.
- “Galloping consumption, that churchyard cough”: Moses names Jacqueline’s tuberculosis. See the Chapter 6 resources.
- “horse feathers”: 1920s slang for nonsense, and the title of a Marx Brothers film (1932).
- “You got to go when the tide goes”: In Dickens’s David Copperfield, Barkis “goes out with the tide,” since, as Mr. Peggotty says, people along the coast “can’t die . . . except when the tide’s pretty nigh out.”
- “Shallows, rocks, crossing the bar”: Tennyson’s “Crossing the Bar” again. See the Chapter 7 resources.
- “Greatest kings have died. A turtle falling on your head”: The story goes that the playwright Aeschylus, father of tragedy, died when an eagle dropped a tortoise on his bald head. See Greek Mythology.
- “three sheets to the wind”: Sailors’ slang for drunk. The sheets are the ropes that, let loose, leave a ship staggering.
- “Yet you can’t help giving him your hand when he gives his hand to you”: Schopenhauer places compassion as the foundation of his ethical system, arguing that it is the only truly moral motive because it is based on a genuine concern for the well-being of others. He sees indifference as the opposite of this, something to be overcome in order to live a moral life. Compassion allows individuals to transcend their self-centeredness and act for the benefit of others, whereas indifference is a form of

egoism that hinders moral conduct. Moses mocks old Doc and still pities him: “It kind of makes your heart give.” See Schopenhauer.

- “Was old Lethe roaring, making you forget?”: Lethe means oblivion, forgetfulness, or concealment. Lethe is the river of forgetfulness in Hades, from which the dead drank to forget their lives. See Greek Mythology.
- “How was old Charon that rowed the boat?”: Charon is the ferryman of Hades (the underworld). See the Chapter 5 resources and Greek Mythology.
- “My age, my change of life!”: The change of life is menopause. Moses claims it for himself, as in Chapter 5 he would not be “my mother’s daughter.”
- “Alpha and Omega, beginning and end!”: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end” (Revelation 22:13). See The Bible.
- “Man of straws where?”: A man of straw is a weak argument set up to be knocked down, another fallacy for Moses.
- “bone of my bone”: Adam says of Eve, “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23). See Genesis.
- “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s!”: “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21). Moses turns it into “Render unto Doc.” See The Bible.
- “Canst thou draw out leviathan with a hook?”: Moses recites God’s speech on Leviathan from Job 41:1-21 nearly word for word, then adds his own line, “He roareth like a great locomotive.” See The Book of Job.
    - “Or his tongue with a cord which thou lettest down?” (Job 41:1). This phrase metaphorically questions how one might access or influence the hidden, powerful depths of existence: whether within the self, nature, or the cosmos.
- “What happened to Julius Caesar?”: Julius Caesar was a Roman general and statesman. He was stabbed in the Senate in 44 B.C. by conspirators including Brutus, his friend, and Shakespeare gave him the words “Et tu, Brute?” See Shakespeare.
- “Hercules, what happened to Hercules?”: Hercules is a half-god in Greek and Roman mythology famous for his strength and adventures. He died through his wife, Deianira, who gave him a shirt soaked in the centaur Nessus’s poisoned blood, believing it a love charm. Burning with it, he built his own funeral pyre, a death by a wife and by fire, like old Josh’s. See Greek Mythology.
- “Wormwood, dust, ashes”: The burial service commits the body “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust” (Book of Common Prayer).
- “Hewers of wood and drawers of water!”: The Gibeonites were made servants of Israel (Joshua 9:21). See The Bible.
- “Was I not made to be the king of the earth?”: Genesis 1:26 reads, “let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air.” This question is a poignant expression of human aspiration confronted by existential despair and the limitations imposed by mortality and circumstance. It highlights themes of lost potential,

the transience of life, and the universal confrontation with death that pervades the novel. See Genesis.

- “No partridges in these mountains”: David says Saul hunts him “as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains” (1 Samuel 26:20). See The Bible.
- “Roosevelt in the White House?”: Moses asks whether old Doc thinks he is Roosevelt, who seemed never to leave the White House. In Chapter 5 Moses swore not to cut his hair until Roosevelt was gone. It may also refer to the New Deal and Social Security as well as other programs. See the Chapter 5 resources.
- “Don’t believe in free silver”: William Jennings Bryan ran for president in 1896 on free silver and his “Cross of Gold” speech, and Republicans held to the gold standard.
- “Upon a thin steeple, a fish weather vane”: The fish, ichthys in Greek, was an early Christian sign for Christ.
- “Cyclops, men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders”: Othello tells of “the Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders” (Othello 1.3). The Cyclops is the one-eyed giant of the Odyssey, like one-eyed Beatrice. See Shakespeare and Greek Mythology.
- “dead souls”: This may echo Gogol’s Dead Souls (1842), whose hero buys up the names of dead serfs.
- “that dream within the dream”: This may refer to Edgar Allan Poe’s poem “A Dream within a Dream” (1849), which says, “All that we see or seem / Is but a dream within a dream.” The first stanza ends with that statement, and the last stanza turns it into a question: “Is all that we see or seem / But a dream within a dream?” This dream within a dream is a recurring theme throughout the book. The idea that life is a dream goes back to Zhuangzi, who dreamed he was a butterfly and woke not knowing whether he was a man who had dreamed he was a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he was a man (Zhuangzi, chapter 2, 4th century BCE), and to Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes. See Edgar Allan Poe and Taoism and Zhuangzi.

Vocabulary

Aberration

A departure from what is normal or expected.

Amok

In a wild, uncontrolled frenzy.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Antidote

A remedy that counteracts a poison.

Barmy

Crazy, foolish.

Belfry

A bell tower, or the room in a tower where the bells hang.

Benighted

Overtaken by darkness; ignorant.

Bole

The trunk of a tree.

Cardiac

Having to do with the heart.

Chamber pot

A bowl kept under the bed for use as a toilet at night.

Chassis

The frame of a car, on which the body is mounted.

Corporeal

Having a body; physical.

Curdled

Thickened into lumps, like soured milk.

Cyclops

In Greek myth, a one-eyed giant.

Delirium tremens

The trembling delirium of alcohol withdrawal.

Deluge

A great flood or downpour. The Deluge is Noah’s flood.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Effaced

Erased; wiped out.

Festering

Rotting and oozing; growing more corrupt.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Flagstone

A flat paving stone.

Gauze

A thin, transparent fabric.

Gullet

The throat.

Hulk

The body of an old ship; a big, clumsy person or thing.

Impregnable

Unable to be captured or broken into.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Knight errant

A medieval knight who wandered in search of adventure.

Leviathan

A sea monster in the Bible; anything huge.

Marauding

Roaming in search of plunder.

Morsel

A small piece, especially of food.

Ossification

Turning to bone; hardening.

Porous

Full of tiny holes that let water through.

Prophylactic

Preventing disease.

Rejuvenation

Making young again.

Sonorous

Deep and full in sound.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Stethoscope

An instrument for listening to the heart and lungs.

Substratum

An underlying layer or foundation.

Sundered

Split apart.

Tenacious

Holding fast.

Turnstone

A shorebird that turns over stones to find food.

Wan

Pale and sickly.

Chapter 9

Summary

Vera asks whether she caused Miss MacIntosh's death simply by opening her eyes. She recalls their life together: drills in geography and history, the Chicago fire and the glaciers, embroidery hoops and hemmed handkerchiefs, Solomon the turtle dragging a geranium pot across the schoolroom, and the silver dollar watch Miss MacIntosh used to remind her that time was passing. Then comes her fourteenth birthday. Mr. Spitzer sends a party dress, but no guests come. Vera dances alone and declares she is dancing with Death, and Miss MacIntosh sternly corrects her. That night Vera lies awake wondering about the man she might marry and whether a true marriage could ever be dissolved.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Miss MacIntosh · Joachim Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel · Solomon the Turtle

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Clocks and Watches · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Pregnancy, Birth, and Children · The Sea and Water · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Aristotle · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres

Allusions: Astronomy · Deafness and Sign Language · Ecclesiastes · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a haunting reflection on a terrible deed, possibly the death of Miss MacIntosh, and Vera's lifelong torment over whether she was responsible, even as a child. She contemplates whether the death was murder, accident, fate, or suicide, and wrestles with deep remorse and existential questions about life, death, and responsibility. This passage sets the tone of guilt, mystery, and fatalism that permeates the chapter.
- Vera describes Miss MacIntosh's upbringing in What Cheer, Iowa, emphasizing her tough, unprivileged childhood and strict, austere personality. Despite her cheerfulness,

she is portrayed as a forceful, practical woman who imposes discipline and domestic training on Vera. This passage highlights the tension between Miss MacIntosh's rigid worldview and Vera's more dreamlike, rebellious nature.

- Miss MacIntosh's insistence on preparing Vera for a traditional female role (domesticity and marriage) is detailed extensively. She emphasizes sewing skills, housekeeping, thriftiness, and moral discipline, reflecting societal expectations of women at the time. Vera's subtle rebellion against this fate is also revealed. This theme of constrained female roles versus yearning for freedom is central to understanding Vera's inner conflict.
- The presence of an ancient turtle named Solomon in their home, which Miss MacIntosh disapproves of, serves as a symbol. The turtle, slow and slothful, contrasts with Miss MacIntosh's energy and discipline. It may represent endurance, ancient wisdom, or the burdensome nature of their isolated existence. This subtle symbolism enriches the atmosphere of the household.
- When Vera inquires about Miss MacIntosh's ovaries and later her eyebrows, Miss MacIntosh evades these personal questions with unrelated historical or geographical lectures. This avoidance illustrates the emotional distance and repression within their relationship, as well as Miss MacIntosh's discomfort with intimacy and femininity.
- Vera's fourteenth birthday is depicted as a moment of transition and tragedy. Despite preparations and the gift of a party dress, there is no real celebration or guests, and Vera dances alone, imagining a partner. Miss MacIntosh's stern disapproval and the absence of family highlight the loneliness and isolation. This passage symbolizes lost innocence and the beginning of the end in their lives.
- Vera's fanciful statement, "I am dancing with Death," and Miss MacIntosh's severe response underscore the omnipresence of death and the seriousness with which it is regarded. The discussion reveals their differing attitudes toward life and death, with Miss MacIntosh embodying stern reality and Vera caught between fantasy and despair.
- In the darkness after the birthday, Vera contemplates the nature of love and marriage, intrigued and troubled by Miss MacIntosh's assertion that spouses do not truly know each other until after marriage and then it is too late. Vera dreams of a passionate, adventurous union rather than a mundane, poor existence, signaling a deep yearning for meaning and escape from imposed roles.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Vera asks whether she killed Miss MacIntosh "only perhaps by opening my eyes." What does she mean?
- Miss MacIntosh answers the question about her eyebrows with the Chicago fire. What is she refusing to say?
- "The dream was always the lie." Does the chapter agree with Miss MacIntosh?

Characters

- Miss MacIntosh calls herself “the land-locked sailor” who “could not swim an inch.” What does her sea talk reveal about her?
- Vera imagines Miss MacIntosh as a circus ring-master with a mustache and bushy eyebrows. Why give her a man’s face?
- Mr. Spitzer chooses a dress “too mature” for Vera while thinking “of someone else.” Whom does he see when he looks at her?

Connections

- Madge called twelve “the age of wisdom” in Chapter 7, and here Miss MacIntosh does the same. What changes for Vera at twelve, and what does not?
- Vera’s dance with Death echoes Madge’s “dead child dancing” in Chapter 6. Why do the girls in this novel dance with the dead?
- Miss MacIntosh warns that “no wife ever knows her husband… until after she is married to him.” How does Madge’s marriage prove her right?

Reflection

- “If I knew Love, I would not dream of Death.” “What makes you think they are not one?” Who is right?
- Is it kinder to train a child for the life she will probably have, or for the life she dreams of?
- Vera says she “could have dispensed with her company” for seven years and then loved her in one month. Why do people so often know someone only at the end?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- A young girl on the cusp of adolescence, navigating strict domestic training and her own inner dreams.
- Exhibits a tension between obedience and rebellion.
- Yearns for love, adventure, and a meaningful future beyond the mundane expectations set by Miss MacIntosh.
- Reflects deeply on identity, mortality, and the mystery of human relationships.

Miss MacIntosh

- Vera’s guardian, strict and practical, embodying discipline and austere values.
- Holds strong beliefs about women’s roles, marriage, and responsibility.

- Comes from a harsh, unprivileged background in What Cheer, Iowa.
- Acts as a maternal figure but also as a controlling authority.
- Is caring yet unyielding, knowledgeable yet evasive.

Mr. Spitzer

- Gives Vera her first party dress.
- He gives Vera an old Roman coin and goes to Buzzards Bay to trace a lost heir “who had died a decade previously and who claimed to be egregiously alive.”
- Suggests a connection to the past and to Vera’s mother, Catherine.
- His absence at the party emphasizes Vera’s isolation.

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s Mother)

- On Vera’s fourteenth birthday she lies “in an unearthly coma,” entertaining her dead guests, “the many P’s,” from Pythagoras and Proteus to Pandora and pterodactyls.

Solomon the Turtle

- Symbolic companion residing in the schoolroom.
- Represents slowness, wisdom, and perhaps stagnation.
- Miss MacIntosh disapproves of the turtle, reflecting her disdain for inactivity and sloth.

Research: Themes

Loss and Remorse

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Vera grapples with a haunting sense of guilt and loss, possibly linked to Miss MacIntosh’s disappearance or death.
- Questions of responsibility and fate permeate the narrative.

Discipline and Domesticity

See: Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- Miss MacIntosh’s rigorous training prepares Vera for the traditional female role of housekeeping and marriage.
- Emphasis on practical skills (sewing, household chores) contrasts with Vera’s imaginative inner life.
- The discipline is strict, yet there is an undercurrent of rebellion and dissatisfaction.

Dreams and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination

- Vera’s dreams of adventure, romance, and the wider world conflict with Miss MacIntosh’s insistence on practicality and limitation.
- The metaphor of the circus (ringmaster and bareback rider) illustrates the control Miss MacIntosh exerts over Vera’s life.

Mortality and Death

See: Death and Mortality

- Vera dances “with Death,” and the inevitability of mortality is discussed seriously by Miss MacIntosh.
- The chapter contemplates death’s universality and the human responses to it.

Marriage and Gender Roles

See: Women, Gender, and Marriage

- Marriage is portrayed as the “normal state” and a natural institution sanctioned by God and nature.
- Miss MacIntosh emphasizes the importance of preparation for marriage and warns against sexual dangers.
- Vera reflects on the mystery of marriage, love, and the unknown nature of her future husband.

Isolation and Companionship

See: Isolation and Connection

- Vera and Miss MacIntosh live in relative isolation, with only the ancient turtle Solomon as a companion.
- Their relationship is marked by authority and tension but also moments of care.

Nature and Nautical Imagery

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- References to the sea, birds, fog, and weather create a vivid natural backdrop and symbolize change and uncertainty.
- Nautical language reflects Miss MacIntosh’s character and worldview.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Sea and Water Imagery

See: The Sea and Water

- The sea, waves, tides, fog, and shore recur repeatedly as symbols of life's uncertainty, danger, and transition.
- The sea represents the unknown, the subconscious, and the boundary between life and death.
- Miss MacIntosh's identity as a "land-locked sailor" who "could not swim an inch" but who constantly talks in nautical terms symbolizes a life caught between stability and the wild, uncontrollable forces of nature.

Bird Imagery, Especially Seagulls

See: Birds

- Seagulls appear as recurring natural motifs connected with care and injury. They may symbolize vulnerability and healing, but also freedom and the natural world.
- The death of the seagull "when its wound was healed" suggests a paradox of survival and loss, or the cost of recovery.

Embroidery Hoops and Sewing

- Embroidery hoops and sewing serve as symbols of domesticity, discipline, and the preparation for womanhood and marriage.
- Miss MacIntosh's insistence on sewing straight basting stitches and hemming handkerchiefs reflects the imposition of order and control over Vera's life.
- The hoops themselves evoke a circus ring and suggest that Vera's life is a performance under Miss MacIntosh's strict supervision.

The Turtle Named Solomon

- The ancient turtle living in the schoolroom functions as a symbol of slow, deliberate life and possibly wisdom or its apparent absence.
- Miss MacIntosh despises the turtle for its slowness and sees no wisdom in it, associating it with sloth and ignorance.
- The turtle's carrying a clay flower pot with a geranium that smells of tobacco suggests a blend of nature and artifice, endurance, and perhaps the burden of life.

Time and Watches

See: Clocks and Watches

- The silver dollar watch worn by Miss MacIntosh symbolizes the relentless march of time and the pressure of discipline.
- Miss MacIntosh frequently refers to time as deceptive and insists on punctuality and the urgency of preparing for the future, reinforcing the theme of control versus Vera's dreams.

Light and Darkness

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light

- The interplay of light and darkness appears in the descriptions of the house and Vera's inner world.
- The rest of the house, Miss MacIntosh says, is overheated and smells of "cold marbles, like a funeral parlor," emphasizing decay and death.
- Vera's dreams and secret thoughts are contrasted with the harsh reality imposed by Miss MacIntosh, symbolizing the tension between imagination and discipline.

Death and Dancing with Death

- Death is personified as a companion Vera dances with, highlighting a close and intimate relationship with mortality.
- The dialogue with Miss MacIntosh about Death emphasizes its inevitability and commonality but also Vera's youthful fascination and defiance.

Marriage and Reproduction Imagery

See: Weddings and Funerals

- Miss MacIntosh's lectures on marriage, ovaries, and reproduction are laden with symbolic meaning about societal expectations, femininity, and the passage into adulthood.
- Miss MacIntosh's comparison (flowers impregnated only by the wind are colorless, "but with a woman, there must be a man, not merely the wind") symbolizes the necessity of union and procreation in life, reflecting the cultural norms around marriage and gender roles.

The Party Dress and the Birthday Celebration

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Pregnancy, Birth, and Children

- The party dress, described as filmy, sleeveless, and embroidered with seed pearls, symbolizes both Vera's coming of age and the tension between innocence and emerging sexuality.
- The empty birthday party and Vera dancing alone highlight loneliness, unfulfilled expectations, and the absence of community or connection.

Natural Elements and Geography

- Miss MacIntosh's frequent references to geography, natural phenomena, and history (e.g., Chicago fire, glaciers, grasshoppers, rivers) symbolize the structured, factual world she insists on teaching, contrasting with Vera's inner dream world and rebellion.

Research: Resources

- "Was it murder or the key turning of itself in the lock?": Vera asks the question of Chapters 7 and 8, now of Miss MacIntosh. See the Chapter 7 resources.
- "Desire be to thy husband": God tells Eve, "thy desire shall be to thy husband" (Genesis 3:16). See Genesis.
- "All of us are mortal, and some of us are more mortal than others": George Orwell's Animal Farm (1945): "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."
- "What Cheer, Iowa": A real town in Keokuk County. Its name is said to come from Roger Williams's greeting to the Narragansett, "What cheer, netop?" See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- "She was just the cross I had to bear": "Whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). See The Bible.
- "Opportunity, it has been said, knocks only once at the door": John James Ingalls's poem "Opportunity" (1891): "I knock unbidden once at every gate."
- "Sit not there dreaming of Triton among the minnows": Triton is a Greek god of the sea who later evolved into a merman. He is the messenger of his father, the god Poseidon. Wordsworth, in "The World Is Too Much with Us," would rather be a pagan and "hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn." Miss MacIntosh would have none of it. See Greek Mythology and Romantic Poets.
- "Time marches on": The March of Time newsreels (1935-1951) closed with "Time marches on!"
- "naked as in that day when we came from our mothers' wombs": "Naked came I out of my mother's womb" (Job 1:21). See The Book of Job.
- "Hope dies hard in the human breast": Miss MacIntosh turns Pope's "Hope springs eternal in the human breast" (An Essay on Man, 1734).
- "When, Vera Cartwheel, did the first Viking land upon this bleak New England shore?": Leif Erikson reached North America about 1000. The Norse site at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland, was found in 1960, and New Englanders long claimed Vikings had landed there.
- "can you locate its source?": The Mississippi rises at Lake Itasca, Minnesota, named its source by Henry Schoolcraft in 1832.
- "for we were put here to be tested and not found wanting": The writing on Belshazzar's wall reads, "Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting" (Daniel 5:27).

Miss MacIntosh sees life as a rigorous discipline, where even suffering and failure have their place but must be met with fortitude. The phrase underscores her belief in the necessity of accepting life's challenges as part of one's duty and not giving way to despair or weakness. See The Bible.

- "Charles's Wain, the Hair of Berenice": Charles's Wain is the Big Dipper. Berenice's Hair is the queen's hair offered to the gods and set among the stars. Cassiopeia sits in her chair. See Astronomy.
- "Twelve hours in a day, twelve hours in a night": "Are there not twelve hours in the day?" (John 11:9). See The Bible.
- "breaking into two parts like the worm": Flatworms can be cut in two and each half grows into a whole worm.
- "a loving couple need not ratify its bond by marriage": Common-law marriage, by living together as husband and wife, is still recognized in Iowa. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- "the apple was no sweet mackintosh": The McIntosh apple, found in Ontario in 1811, carries Miss MacIntosh's name. Genesis never names the fruit; the apple came from the Latin pun malum, "apple" and "evil." See Genesis.
- "God, Who had divided the light from the darkness and created great whales": "And God created great whales . . . Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas" (Genesis 1:21-22). See Genesis.
- "had been found in the mouth of a dead salmon": In Glasgow's legend Saint Mungo recovered a queen's ring from a salmon's mouth, and Herodotus tells how Polycrates's ring came back in a fish.
- "the G which stood for Georgia": Georgia is a female name from the Greek georgos, farmer, a fitting name for the earthbound Miss MacIntosh. Its masculine form is George.
- "her bloomers, which were red jersey": Amelia Bloomer promoted the loose trousers named for her in 1851.
- "her underclothes had been made of bleached flour bags": Poor families sewed clothes from flour and feed sacks, and by the 1930s mills printed the sacks in patterns for that use.
- "the London Tower where the ravens were chained": Legend says the kingdom will fall if the ravens leave the Tower of London, so their wings are clipped.
- "the dark Satanic mills": William Blake's "Jerusalem" (1804). See Romantic Poets.
- "The old ship would be entombed in an ice block with its captain still on board": In the legend of the Octavius, a whaler found in 1775 drifting off Greenland, the captain sat frozen at his log.
- "all the genealogies of the Moody Bible": The Moody Bible Institute was founded in Chicago in 1886 by the evangelist Dwight L. Moody. It is a conservative, evangelical Bible college.

- “the sons of Levi, Judah, Er, Onan, Issachar, the sons of Tola, Phuvah, Zebulun”: Miss MacIntosh makes Vera memorize the Bible’s genealogies for discipline. See The Bible.
  - Levi was the third son of Jacob and Leah in the Bible.
  - Judah was the fourth son of Jacob and Leah.
  - Er was the eldest son of Judah and a Canaanite wife (Genesis 38).
  - Onan was the second son of Judah. He spilled his seed on the ground (Genesis 38:9), an irony in a chapter about ovaries and seeds.
  - Issachar was the ninth son of Jacob.
  - Tola was a son of Issachar (Genesis 46:13), and he had six sons (1 Chronicles 7:2). A later Tola was one of the Judges of Israel (Judges 10:1).
  - Phuvah was another son of Issachar, like Tola. Zebulun was the last son of Jacob and Leah.
- “the heave shoulder and the breast wave”: “The wave breast and the heave shoulder” are the priests’ portion of the sacrifice (Leviticus 7:34), and Vera turns the phrase around. See The Bible.
- “Hannibal crossing the Alps with his elephants”: Hannibal crossed in 218 B.C. to attack Rome.
- “in some legendary preadamite time”: Pre-Adamism is the belief that there were humans before Adam. Isaac La Peyrère argued in 1655 that men lived before Adam.
- “the whole world on his back”: Vera says the turtle is so old that it might be the “World Turtle.” This myth is found in different parts of the world and different cultures. In Hindu myth the turtle Akupara holds up the world, and the Lenape and Haudenosaunee tell of the earth built on a turtle’s back, Turtle Island.
- “Solomon, Miss MacIntosh objected, had had too many wives”: Solomon may be named after King Solomon of the Bible, who was regarded as a wealthy and wise king. Solomon “had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines” (1 Kings 11:3), and his temple had tables of gold, lamps, snuffers, and pomegranates (1 Kings 7). See The Bible.
- “Wall Street or Threadneedle Street”: Wall Street is the banking center of the U.S., and Threadneedle Street is home of the Bank of England, “the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street.”
- “My twelfth birthday, Miss MacIntosh said, was the dividing line”: Madge named twelve “the age of wisdom” too. See the Chapter 7 resources.
- “Her red, marcelled hair”: The Marcel wave, set with hot irons, was invented by Marcel Grateau in Paris in 1872.
- “Ovaries, I knew, were little brown pods filled with seeds”: Vera gives her own explanation of ovaries where there is a comparison to a school book which showed the anatomy of flowers. In a detailed drawing a flower has ovaries that look similar to the human female reproductive organs. In a flower the ovary holds the ovules, which become seeds. The anthers hold pollen.

- “sixteen bleeding Greek metropolitans”: Greek metropolitans are archbishops who head a province of the Orthodox Church. Some were killed and became martyrs and saints. In 1922, when Smyrna burned, Metropolitan Chrysostomos was handed to a mob and mutilated to death, one bleeding Greek metropolitan the church made a saint.
    - The sixteen metropolitans may refer to the Greek genocide (1914-1922).
- “the great Chicago fire”: It burned October 8-10, 1871, killed about three hundred people, and was blamed on Mrs. O’Leary’s cow, which shares a name with old Doc, Justice O’Leary.
- “Where were those showers of grasshoppers?”: Rocky Mountain locusts swarmed the Plains in 1874-1877 in clouds that darkened the sun.
- “Where were those seven years of lean? Who shall divide the wheat from the tares? Who hid his lantern under a bushel?”: Joseph’s seven lean years (Genesis 41), the parable of the wheat and the tares (Matthew 13:24-30), and the candle under a bushel (Matthew 5:15). See The Bible.
- “There, but for God’s grace, go I”: “There but for the grace of God” is attributed to John Bradford in reference to a group of prisoners being led to execution. John Bradford was an English Reformer, a prebendary of St. Paul’s, and martyr. He was imprisoned in the Tower of London for alleged crimes against Queen Mary I. He was burned at the stake on July 1, 1555. (Wikipedia) Paul writes, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain” (1 Corinthians 15:10). This meaning fits into the broader themes of the novel around fate, suffering, and the search for meaning amidst human vulnerability.
- “the thirteen year old son of a Portuguese fisherman”: Portuguese fishermen from the Azores settled New Bedford, Gloucester, and Provincetown.
- “A blind violinist and a deaf dancer”: There are many blind, deaf, and mute people in the book. This could be a play on the Three Wise Monkeys. The Three Wise Monkeys are a Japanese folk representation of the proverb “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.” They symbolize prudence and purity, and are often seen as a call for discretion or willful ignorance. The three monkeys are Mizaru (see no evil), Kikazaru (hear no evil), and Iwazaru (speak no evil). The concept originates in Japan, with statues of the monkeys found in temples and shrines. The proverb “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” is often interpreted as a way to avoid negative experiences or situations by choosing to ignore them. In Japan, the monkeys are seen as attendants of Koshin, the God of Roads, and their message is used to teach prudence and purity. In the West, the proverb is often used sarcastically to criticize those who deliberately ignore wrongdoing. The idea is rooted in Confucius: “Look not at what is contrary to propriety; listen not to what is contrary to propriety; speak not what is contrary to propriety” (Analects 12.1, trans. James Legge). Some representations include a fourth monkey, Sezaru, who “does no evil.” (Wikipedia) One misses the train by seeing it but not hearing its whistle, the other by hearing but not seeing. See the Chapter 8 resources and Deafness and Sign Language.

- “for tomorrow was another day”: Scarlett O’Hara’s last line in Gone with the Wind (1936): “After all, tomorrow is another day!”
- “Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise”: The proverb praises rising before most others, early and consistently, so as to accomplish more in the day. This method has been recommended since antiquity. The philosopher Aristotle said a phrase very similar to the one Miss MacIntosh used. Within the context of religious observances, spiritual writers have called this practice the heroic minute, referring to the sacrifice which this entails. Benjamin Franklin printed the exact phrase Miss MacIntosh used in Poor Richard’s Almanack (1735). It is a saying that is viewed as a commonsensical proverb. (Wikipedia)
- “this vale of tears”: “In hac lacrimarum valle,” from the hymn Salve Regina, after Psalm 84:6. See The Bible.
- “It would be better to celebrate, not the day we were born into this world but the day we were born out of it”: “The day of death than the day of one’s birth” (Ecclesiastes 7:1). See Ecclesiastes.
- “Was there even a dark angel at the gate? What horseman reining his horse at the door?”: Death rides a pale horse (Revelation 6:8). Lionel Johnson’s poem “The Dark Angel” (1893) is about a tempter who haunts the soul. See The Bible.
- “Pythagoras who had a golden thigh”: Pythagoras was an ancient Greek philosopher. It is believed his teachings were metempsychosis, that every soul is immortal and after death enters another body, and musica universalis where the planets move according to mathematical equations and create an inaudible symphony of music. Legend says he showed a golden thigh at Olympia as a sign of his divinity. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres.
- “Proteus who changed from fish to bird before her eyes”: Proteus was an early Greek, shape-shifting sea-god. In the Odyssey Menelaus holds him fast while he turns into a lion, a serpent, a leopard, water, and a tree. See Greek Mythology.
- “Pandora’s bottomless box”: Pandora was the first woman created and her story is used to explain why there is evil in the world. In Hesiod it was a jar. Erasmus made it a box in 1508. Only Hope stayed inside, and Miss MacIntosh says, “Hope dies hard in the human breast.” See Greek Mythology.
- “Pythian games”: The Pythian Games were held at Delphi every four years in honor of Apollo, two years after each Olympics. They included music, poetry, and dance, and women could participate in some of the events. See the Chapter 6 resources on laurel.
- “the canker eats the rose”: “And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud” (Shakespeare, Sonnet 35). See Shakespeare.
- “There is vomit at all tables”: “For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness” (Isaiah 28:8). See The Bible.
- “the ephemera who last but for a day”: Mayflies, order Ephemeroptera, live as winged adults for a day or less.

- “Died Abner as a fool died”: David’s lament for Abner, murdered by Joab: “Died Abner as a fool dieth?” (2 Samuel 3:33). This phrase is part of a broader meditation in the chapter on the impermanence of human life, the certainty of death, and the idea that all distinctions between people are ultimately erased by death. See The Bible.
- “One died in his full strength. Another died in bitterness of soul. How died the wise man?”: Job 21:23-25, and “how dieth the wise man? as the fool” (Ecclesiastes 2:16). See The Book of Job and Ecclesiastes.
- “When thou diest, I shall die with you”: Ruth 1:16-17 reads, “whither thou goest, I will go . . . Where thou diest, will I die.” See The Bible.
- “Experience, as I have heard, is a much harder teacher”: Franklin: “Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other” (Poor Richard, 1743).
- “What makes you think they are not one?”: Love and death as one is the Liebestod, the love-death of Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde (1865). See Music and Composers.
- “There are many gay deceivers”: A “gay deceiver” was an old name for a rake or seducer. Gay here could mean happy or may be in reference to homosexuals. The term gay to describe immorality or someone addicted to pleasure was in use in the 17th century. Gertrude Stein in 1922 used the word gay to specifically reference homosexuals. In 1950, the earliest reference found to date for the word gay as a self-described name for homosexuals came from Alfred A. Gross who used it in the June 1950 issue of SIR magazine. In a series of interviews with Susan S. Neville, Marguerite Young said she had lovers both male and female. There was a relationship where she would not marry him but said he could visit her every Tuesday for the rest of her life.
- “the Islands of the Blessed”: Islands of the Blessed or the Fortunate Isles are the winterless earthly paradise of the heroes of Greek mythology. See Greek Mythology.
- “the Islands of the Dead”: Arnold Böcklin’s painting Isle of the Dead (1880-1886), a rocky island of cypresses with a white-draped figure arriving by boat, inspired Rachmaninoff’s tone poem (1909). See Music and Composers.
- “all local habitations and all names”: The poet “gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name” (A Midsummer Night’s Dream 5.1). See Shakespeare.
- “Were not true marriages made in heaven”: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6). See The Bible.

Vocabulary

Archipelago

A group of islands.

Basting

Long, loose temporary stitches.

Becalmed

Of a ship: stopped for lack of wind.

Breastplate

A piece of armor covering the chest.

Cambric

A fine, thin white linen or cotton cloth.

Canker

A blight or ulcer that eats away at a plant or the body; anything that corrupts from within.

Carapace

The hard upper shell of a turtle.

Chastisement

Punishment.

Circumspect

Careful; wary.

Conflagration

A great, destructive fire.

Constitutional

A walk taken regularly for the sake of one’s health.

Contraband

Forbidden; smuggled.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Countenance

As a verb, to tolerate or approve of. As a noun, the face.

Darning egg

An egg-shaped form slipped into a stocking to darn it.

Dilatory

Slow; given to delay.

Drouth

Drought.

Egregiously

Outstandingly; shockingly.

Ephemera

Things that last a very short time; the mayflies.

Eyrie

The nest of an eagle or other bird of prey, built high up.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Foolhardy

Recklessly bold.

Genealogy

A record of a family's descent.

Girded

Encircled or bound tightly, as with a belt or girdle.

Hobnailed

Studded with short nails on the sole.

Hooligan

A rough, lawless young man.

Hummock

A small hill or mound.

Imprecation

A spoken curse.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Insolent

Rude and disrespectful.

Jersey

A soft knitted cloth.

Laggard

Slow; falling behind.

Leghorn

A breed of chicken.

Marcelled

Set in deep, regular waves with heated irons.

Metropolitan

In the Orthodox churches, a bishop who presides over the other bishops of a province.

Oxfords

Low, laced leather shoes.

Preadamite

Before Adam.

Pretender

One who pretends; also, someone who claims a throne or title without a rightful claim.

Promontory

A high point of land jutting out into the sea.

Pseudopsia

A false or deluded vision.

Pseudosmia

A false sense of smell.

Quizzically

In a puzzled or questioning way.

Scudding

Moving fast before the wind.

Shorthorn

A breed of cattle with short horns.

Slumberous

Sleepy; inducing sleep.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Tares

Weeds among the grain.

Thimble

A small cap worn on the finger to push the needle in sewing.

Voluminous

Large, full, or great in volume.

Chapter 10

Summary

Unable to picture her own wedding, Vera imagines other weddings and drifts into a dream of one. Mr. Spitzer is the veiled bride and Miss MacIntosh the bridegroom. The preacher’s marriage vows slide into a funeral service before he vanishes. Vera laughs at the dream, then is ashamed of it. She realizes she has been thinking unkindly of Miss MacIntosh as colorless and unwanted, and she feels pity for a woman who gave her life to duty. She is hungry and wants to go to her, but Miss MacIntosh must not be disturbed without good reason, and Vera has been warned not to wander by the sea at night.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Miss MacIntosh · Solomon the Turtle

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Roses and Flowers · The House · Twins and Doubles · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Plato and Platonism

Allusions: Angels and Archangels · Astronomy · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Greek Mythology · Judaism · Milton · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- Vera dreams or hallucinates a surreal wedding ceremony in which Mr. Spitzer and Miss MacIntosh are paired, but the roles and identities are confused and inverted. The preacher’s words blur distinctions between man and woman, human and beast, and even marriage rites and funeral rites become intertwined. This dream culminates in an eerie meditation on death and the fleeting nature of life. The preacher’s speech shifts seamlessly from wedding vows to funeral liturgy, emphasizing the inseparability of marriage and death, union and dissolution. The dream ends with the unsettling image of Mr. Spitzer as the bride and Miss MacIntosh as the bridegroom, highlighting ambiguous identities and roles.
- Following the dream, Vera reflects on Miss MacIntosh’s situation, age, and prospects for marriage. She is portrayed as a somewhat colorless, ordinary woman, past the

prime of youth, who has resigned herself to loneliness. Yet Vera also feels a budding pity and empathy for her, contemplating the pain of being old and unloved and recognizing her human frailty.

- Throughout the chapter, there is a strong undercurrent of existential melancholy. The preacher's speech invokes biblical imagery about the brevity of life, decay, and the inevitability of death. This generalizes human fate and questions the permanence of social institutions like marriage.
- Vera's hunger, both literal and metaphorical, is evident as she contemplates the absence of celebration and the lack of meaningful connection. She regrets not visiting Miss MacIntosh, wishing to reconcile and share intimacy, yet respects her privacy and limitations, underscoring themes of isolation and the human need for companionship.
- The chapter is rich in symbolism. The wedding and funeral imagery combined suggests the cyclical nature of life and death. Mr. Spitzer's twin iron bedsteads symbolize duality or fractured identity; the snow and ice evoke coldness and isolation; the locked bedroom door represents the boundaries of privacy and emotional distance. The preacher's litany names biblical and mythic figures (Lucifer, Beelzebub, Gorgons, Hydras, Chimeras) and cosmic events, creating a vision of a chaotic universe where human rituals struggle for meaning.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- The preacher does not seem "to know who was woman and who was man and who was beast and who was bird." What does the dream undo?
- Mr. Spitzer nods "negatively as he replied affirmatively." What is he really saying?
- When the stars light the scene, "this error was the error of the dream which had begotten nothing." Whose error is it?

Characters

- Vera gives Miss MacIntosh a waxed mustache and a silk hat, as she did in Chapter 9. What does Vera keep seeing in her?
- Mr. Spitzer would marry "no one now but his brother worm." What holds him to his dead brother?
- Vera calls Miss MacIntosh "the most colorless" person in the world, then feels "the first embryonic emotion of pity." What changes in one night?

Connections

- Madge's wedding was a funeral in Chapter 6, and here the preacher slides from one service to the other. Why does the novel keep joining weddings and funerals?

- Miss MacIntosh’s locked bedroom door returns to the locked doors of Chapters 7 and 8. What is behind it?
- The preacher recites the tribes of Israel as Miss MacIntosh made Vera recite them in Chapter 9. Why does the dream use her lessons?

Reflection

- “One who could know us and yet love us was undoubtedly the truest love this world has ever seen.” Is it possible to be fully known and still loved?
- “What would it be like to be old and unloved?” Is it harder to be young and unloved, or old?
- Vera laughs at the dream, then feels ashamed. When does laughing at someone become wronging them?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- She is the central consciousness reflecting on marriage, dreams, and the strange events unfolding.
- She is introspective, sensitive, and somewhat confused by the surreal experiences.

Mr. Joachim Spitzer

- An older man, melancholic and resigned to his fate.
- He is described with an old-fashioned elegance, symbolized by his clothes and the twin beds he shares (in memory) with his deceased brother.
- His identity is ambiguous, shifting between bride and groom in the dream.

Miss MacIntosh

- An older woman, practical and resigned to a life without love or marriage.
- She is portrayed as colorless, ordinary in appearance, yet capable and domestically inclined.
- In the dream, she assumes the role of bridegroom, further blurring gender and identity.

The Preacher

- A mysterious figure who recites ritualistic and apocalyptic language blending wedding rites with funeral orations.
- His speech is symbolic and confusing, reflecting the instability of the event.

- His words come almost entirely from the Book of Common Prayer, the marriage service sliding into the Order for the Burial of the Dead, with verses from Job, Psalms, Corinthians, Jude, and Revelation spliced in.

Solomon the Turtle

- He can be interpreted as a symbol of longevity, endurance, and ancient wisdom.
- Turtles traditionally embody qualities such as patience, stability, and a slow, deliberate approach to life.
- In the context of this chapter, where Vera confronts themes of mortality, the fleeting nature of existence, and the confusion between life's ceremonies (weddings) and rites of passage (funerals), Solomon may represent a counterpoint to human transience and folly.
- The turtle's slow, deliberate presence contrasts with the chaotic, disordered, and surreal wedding-funeral rites, emphasizing the tension between the ephemeral and the enduring.
- The turtle's name, "Solomon," evokes the biblical King Solomon, renowned for his wisdom and judgment. This further amplifies the symbolic weight of the turtle as a figure of insight and contemplation amidst the chaos and absurdity Vera perceives around her.
- Solomon's silent witness role amidst this disarray may suggest the presence of a wise, patient observer within Vera's subconscious, hinting at a deeper understanding or acceptance of life's contradictions and mysteries.

Research: Themes

Marriage and Identity

See: Identity and the Self · Women, Gender, and Marriage

- The confusion and inversion of roles in the dream wedding hint at fluidity in gender and societal roles.
- Marriage is portrayed ambiguously, blending union and separation, life and death.
- The preacher's confusing vows suggest the complexity and sometimes absurdity of social rituals.

Mortality and Impermanence

See: Death and Mortality

- The wedding turns into a funeral, reflecting the inseparability of life and death.
- Biblical and apocalyptic references underscore the transient nature of human life.
- The preacher's speech highlights human frailty and the inevitability of death.

Loneliness and Human Connection

See: Isolation and Connection

- Miss MacIntosh's character symbolizes the loneliness of aging and societal neglect.
- Vera feels pity and empathy, recognizing the shared human condition.
- The dream's isolation (few guests, symbolic objects) stresses the solitude underlying social ceremonies.

Dream versus Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination

- The blurred line between dream and waking life shows the instability of perception.
- Vera's hallucinatory experience reflects inner turmoil and existential questioning.

Social Roles and Expectations

See: Society, Class, and Race

- Miss MacIntosh's resignation to a life without marriage and Vera's reflections reveal societal pressures on women.
- The notion that "none would have her" contrasts with Vera's hope for unexpected companionship.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Twin Iron Bedsteads

See: The House · Twins and Doubles

- Represent memory, duality, and the coexistence of past and present selves (Mr. Spitzer and his deceased brother).

Wedding/Funeral Ceremony

See: Weddings and Funerals

- Symbolizes the intertwined nature of beginnings and endings, union and separation.

Veil and Mustache

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Play with gender roles and identity, challenging traditional expectations.

Turtle Solomon

- Symbolizes wisdom and endurance.

Red Geranium

See: Roses and Flowers

- Might symbolize life, vitality, and domesticity.

Old Empty Shoe

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Could represent emptiness, absence, or abandonment.

Research: Resources

- “some other bride blushing like a red, red rose”: Robert Burns, “O my Luve’s like a red, red rose” (1794). See Romantic Poets.
- “live happily ever after as in an old fairy tale”: The fairy-tale ending, “and they lived happily ever after.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “his brother worm who was under the ground”: Job says “to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister” (Job 17:14), and Hamlet says, “Your worm is your only emperor for diet” (Hamlet 4.3). See The Book of Job and Shakespeare.
- “pots and pans jangling in my ears”: A shivaree, or charivari, was the old custom of banging pots and pans outside newlyweds’ windows on their wedding night. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “it was a funeral march which was played at a perfect wedding”: Chopin’s Funeral March (Piano Sonata No. 2, 1839) in place of Mendelssohn’s Wedding March (1842) or Wagner’s “Here Comes the Bride” (Lohengrin, 1850). See Music and Composers.
- “we are gathered here in the sight of God and of this company to join man and woman together”: The Book of Common Prayer opens the marriage service, “Dearly beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this congregation, to join together this man and this woman in holy matrimony.” See Weddings and Funerals.
    - The marriage vows and priestly blessing in the prayer book came from the Sarum rite, the medieval service of Salisbury Cathedral.
    - The canons long known as the Fourth Council of Carthage (398) are now called the Statuta Ecclesiae Antiqua, a collection compiled in southern Gaul between 476 and 485, probably by Gennadius of Marseille. One canon has the bride and groom presented to the priest for a blessing by their parents or by their attendants, the paranymphs, a custom the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge traces to “the Fourth Synod of Carthage (398).”
- “for the end of the world draweth nigh”: This echoes “The end of all things is at hand” (1 Peter 4:7) and “your redemption draweth nigh” (Luke 21:28). “Lightnings and thunderings and voices” come from Revelation 4:5, and “in the twinkling of an eye”

from 1 Corinthians 15:52: “we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.” See The Bible.

- “when there shall be many gnashings of teeth, many wailings”: Matthew 8:12 reads, “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” This phrase underscores themes of mortality, judgment, and the sorrow that accompanies human existence, blending the sacred with the tragic in Vera’s experience of the marriage ritual. See The Bible.
- “a mighty hurricane is blowing in from the Canary Islands or Hebrides”: Atlantic hurricanes are born off West Africa, near the Canary and Cape Verde Islands. The Hebrides lie in the cold north of Scotland, where no hurricane begins.
  - The Canary Islands are a Spanish archipelago off the coast of northwestern Africa.
  - The Hebrides are an archipelago comprising hundreds of islands off the northwest coast of Scotland.
- “this life is very short and full of mortal sorrow”: Job 14:1 reads, “Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble.” This phrase serves as a sobering meditation on human finitude, the inevitability of death, and the sorrow that colors a brief life. See The Book of Job.
- “Porpoises shall eat the drowned sailor. The waters of this world shall close over his head”: The preacher gives the bride and groom a sailor’s burial at sea. Milton’s “Lycidas” (1638) mourns a friend drowned in the Irish Sea, and Ariel sings of a drowned father in *The Tempest*: “Full fathom five thy father lies.” The line foreshadows Miss MacIntosh lost in the waves. See Milton, Shakespeare, The Sea and Water, and the Chapter 6 resources.
- “Do either of ye know of an impediment to this marriage”: The phrase is from the Book of Common Prayer, which drew on the Sarum rite. It reads, “I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment . . . ye do now confess it,” and calls on anyone who knows a cause to “speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace.” See Weddings and Funerals.
- “St. Michael and of all the holy angels”: The list comes out of Milton’s Paradise Lost, which gives Hell “Gorgons and Hydras, and Chimaeras dire” (2.628) and seats Chaos as umpire with “high arbiter Chance” who “governs all” (2.907-910). See Milton and Angels and Archangels.
  - St. Michael is an archangel, a spiritual warrior in the battle of good versus evil.
  - Lucifer “who was the brightest and is fallen farthest” is the name of different figures in folklore associated with the planet Venus. “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” (Isaiah 14:12). See the Chapter 7 resources.
  - Beelzebub is Baal-zebub, “lord of the flies,” god of the Philistine city of Ekron (2 Kings 1:2), and in the Gospels the prince of devils (Matthew 12:24).
  - Chaos is the void before the forming of the universe in Greek mythology.
  - Gorgons are creatures in Greek mythology. Medusa and her sisters had a gaze that turned men to stone.

    - Hydras are serpentine water monsters in Greek and Roman mythology. Heracles killed the many-headed Hydra as his second labor.
    - Chimeras are monsters made of different parts of animals in mythology. Bellerophon killed the Chimera, part lion, part goat, part serpent.
    - In Aristotle's Physics, chance (automaton) works in nature and luck (tyche) in human affairs.
- "the dreadful Day of Judgment": The Day of Judgment belongs to eschatology, the part of theology that deals with the ultimate destiny of humans. It is found in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Zoroastrianism. The golden thrones and "the sea shall turn to glass" come from Revelation 4:4-6: "a sea of glass like unto crystal." See The Bible.
- "Unadvisedly or lightly, marriage should not be entered in": The prayer book says marriage is "not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly . . . but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly." See Weddings and Funerals.
- "none shall take a wife of whoredoms": God tells the prophet Hosea, "Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms" (Hosea 1:2). See The Bible.
- "to have and to hold from this day forward": The prayer book vows: "to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse . . . in sickness and in health, to love, cherish, and to obey." Mr. Spitzer nods "negatively as he replied affirmatively." See the Chapter 6 resources on "love, honor, and obey."
- "all corporeal and incorporeal hereditaments": Appurtenances are accessories or other items associated with a particular activity or style of living. The preacher slips into the language of property deeds, which pass "hereditaments and appurtenances," everything that can be inherited or that goes with an estate.
- "Man that is born of woman": The burial service opens, "Man, that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery." The preacher adds the swollen stomach, from the trial of the jealous husband's wife in Numbers 5:27. See The Book of Job.
    - "Her belly shall swell, and her thigh shall rot" (Numbers 5:27). This phrase encapsulates the complex interplay of physical condition and the spiritual or emotional state likely reflecting on the human condition's heaviness and vulnerability as portrayed throughout the novel.
- "the rites for the burial of the dead": Funeral rites originated from Jewish and Roman customs. The Order for the Burial of the Dead in the Book of Common Prayer is the service the preacher slides into. See Weddings and Funerals.
- "He cometh up, and he is cut down": Job 14:2 reads, "He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not." This phrase serves as a poignant reminder within the narrative of life's impermanence and the inescapable presence of death even at moments of joy and union. The preacher quotes the burial service word for word: "He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay." See The Book of Job.

- “He has gone from Newport to Mystic, from Wellfleet to Buzzards Bay”: The preacher lists the coast of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Cape Cod, the New England shore where Vera grows up.
- “May God forgive us, for we know not who or where we are”: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). See The Bible.
- “Spare us, Lord most holy, God most mighty, holy and merciful Savior”: The burial service prays, “spare us, Lord most holy, O God most mighty, O holy and merciful Saviour.”
- “the archangel trumpeting the last trump”: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16). See Angels and Archangels.
- “Why stand we in jeopardy every hour?”: Paul asks it in 1 Corinthians 15:30. The phrase conveys a broader theme in the novel of the tension between life and death, the known and the unknown, and the profound uncertainties that define human experience. It is a rhetorical question that underscores the fragile, often perilous journey of life that the characters navigate throughout the narrative. 1 Corinthians 15 is the lesson read at the burial service. See The Bible.
- “Nothing thou hast brought into this world”: “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out” (1 Timothy 6:7), one of the burial service’s opening sentences. See The Bible.
- “Gold and silver rust”: “Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you” (James 5:3). See The Bible.
- “What is man but a poor, two-legged animal?”: Plato defined man as a featherless biped, and Diogenes answered with a plucked chicken. Lear calls man “such a poor, bare, forked animal” (King Lear 3.4). See Plato and Platonism and Shakespeare.
- “His beauty consumeth away, like as if it were a moth fretting a woolen garment”: “Thou makest his beauty to consume away, like as it were a moth fretting a garment” (Psalm 39:12, as the burial service gives it). See The Bible.
- “In the morning it is green and groweth up, but in the evening it is cut down, withered”: “In the morning it is green, and groweth up; but in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered” (Psalm 90:6, in the burial service). See The Bible.
- “All hearts shall melt to water”: “The hearts of the people melted, and became as water” (Joshua 7:5). See The Bible.
- “The weak are the strong”: Paul writes, “for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10). See The Bible.
- “Selah, selah, selah”: In the Bible, the word “selah” typically signifies a pause, a time for reflection, or a musical interlude. It appears most often in the Psalms and Habakkuk, suggesting a moment to stop and consider what has just been said or sung.
- “Where is Nepthalin? Where is Reuben who begot a horde? Where is Manasses?”: Nephthalim and Manasses are the King James spellings of Naphtali and Manasseh in

Revelation 7:6, where twelve thousand of each tribe are sealed. See the Chapter 9 resources on the genealogies.

- “Oh, death, where is thy sting? Oh, grave, where is thy victory?”: Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 15:55, read at the burial service. The phrase encapsulates the struggle to find meaning beyond death and the hope or belief that death may not be the ultimate end. It reflects a yearning for transcendence, where death’s “sting” (its pain and finality) and the “victory” of the grave (the end of life) are questioned or denied. See The Bible.
- “thy womb of morning”: “From the womb of the morning” (Psalm 110:3). See The Bible.
- “Can these bones live?”: God asks Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:3). See The Bible.
- “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust”: The burial service reads, “Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God . . . to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother . . . we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.” The preacher’s “brother to brother, deep calling to deep” adds Psalm 42:7. See the Chapter 1 resources.
- “As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end”: The Gloria Patri, the doxology sung at the end of the psalms.
- “Where is Philemon?”: Philemon was a Christian of Colossae to whom Paul wrote his letter about Onesimus, a runaway slave, asking forgiveness for him. In Ovid, Philemon and Baucis are the old married couple who asked to die at the same hour and were turned into two trees, an oak and a linden. See The Bible and Greek Mythology.
- “Where is Zipporah, a little bird?”: Zipporah was the wife of Moses. Her name means “bird” in Hebrew. See The Bible.
- “Where are those wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever?”: The preacher recites Jude 1:12-13: “clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots . . . wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.” See The Bible.
- “Strike up the music! On with the dance”: Byron’s “On with the dance! let joy be unconfined,” from the ball on the eve of Waterloo (Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Canto III). See Romantic Poets.
- “the turtle Solomon and the red geranium and an old, empty shoe”: An old shoe was thrown after the bride or tied to the carriage for luck. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “Her face was certainly not her fortune”: The nursery rhyme’s milkmaid answers, “My face is my fortune, sir, she said.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “She had stopped it only once, and that was in Spokane”: Miss MacIntosh’s broken nose from a bus in Spokane, from Chapter 9. See the Chapter 9 resources.
- “the oldest fool was the greatest fool”: “There is no fool like an old fool” (John Heywood, 1546).

- “she could be the helpmeet”: “I will make him an help meet for him” (Genesis 2:18). See The Bible.
- “their numbers were legion”: “My name is Legion: for we are many” (Mark 5:9). See The Bible.
- “Familiarity breeds contempt”: Chaucer’s Tale of Melibee has “over-greet hoomlynesse engendreth dispreisynge,” too much familiarity breeds contempt. The Latin proverb “Nimia familiaritas parit contemptum” is credited to Publilius Syrus and repeated by Thomas Aquinas (Hoyt’s New Cyclopedia of Practical Quotations, 1922), and the English wording first appears in Richard Taverner’s Garden of Wysdome (1539). In Hindu tradition the Srimad Bhagavatam (Bhagavata Purana) teaches the same lesson in Canto 6, Chapter 7: Indra, king of the demigods, grows so used to the daily presence of his spiritual master, Bṛhaspati, that he takes him for granted and fails to rise when Bṛhaspati enters the assembly. A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada draws the moral in his purport: “Familiarity sometimes breeds contempt, but one should be very careful in one’s dealings with the acarya” (Srimad-Bhagavatam 6.7.15, purport).
- “One who could know us and yet love us was undoubtedly the truest love this world has ever seen”: Psalm 139 begins, “O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.” The line suggests that the deepest and most genuine form of love is not blind or naive, but rather one that fully comprehends all aspects of a person (their strengths, weaknesses, flaws, and complexities) and loves them in spite of, or even because of, that complete knowledge. This statement highlights the theme of authentic love as acceptance and compassion for the whole person, including their imperfections and vulnerabilities. It contrasts with superficial or idealized love, which might only appreciate a partial or idealized image. The “truest love” is grounded in reality, acknowledging the full truth of the beloved. In the context of the chapter, Vera (the narrator) reflects on the nature of love and marriage, and the idea that true love involves a deep understanding and acceptance of the other person. Miss MacIntosh, who values common sense and reality, would likely agree with this view, emphasizing love based on truth rather than illusion or fantasy. The phrase captures a central insight into the nature of love as something that embraces the whole self (the light and the dark, the certain and the uncertain) and that this kind of love is the most meaningful and enduring.
- “to waste one’s sweetness in the desert air”: Thomas Gray’s Elegy: “Full many a flower is born to blush unseen, / And waste its sweetness on the desert air.” See the Chapter 5 resources.
- “The sands of time were always running low”: The hourglass, and the hymn “The sands of time are sinking” (Anne Ross Cousin, 1857).
- “claws upon her forehead like the claws of a lobster”: The pain from shoulder to hand and the crab’s claws may foreshadow what Vera learns of Miss MacIntosh’s body. Cancer takes its name from the crab, the Greek karkinos.
- “whirling dervishes”: The Mevlevi Sufis, followers of the poet Rumi, worship by whirling.

- “good, true, beautiful”: Plato’s three highest ideas, the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. See Plato and Platonism.

Vocabulary

Cacophonous

Harsh and jarring in sound.

Chimera

A monster of Greek myth, part lion, part goat, part serpent; any wild, impossible fancy.

Consumeth

Archaic for consumes; wastes away.

Corporeal

Having a body; physical.

Dervish

A member of a Sufi order known for whirling in worship.

Diffusedly

In a scattered, spread-out way.

Dubious

Doubtful.

Embryonic

In its earliest stage.

Erratically

Unpredictably; irregularly.

Genealogy

A record of a family’s descent.

Gorgon

In Greek myth, one of three snake-haired sisters whose gaze turned men to stone.

Helpmeet

A helper and companion, especially a wife.

Hereditament

Property that can be inherited.

Hydra

A many-headed serpent of Greek myth.

Impoverished

Made poor.

Incorporeal

Without a body; not physical.

Indetermination

Indecision.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Legion

A vast number.

Manifold

Many and various.

Matrimony

Marriage.

Necromancer

One who calls up the dead.

Negation

Denial; saying no.

Nether

Lower; under.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Rheumatism

Pain and stiffness in the joints and muscles.

Selah

A Hebrew word in the Psalms, perhaps a pause.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Stubble

The short stalks left after a harvest.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Wall-eyed

With eyes that turn outward, staring.

Zenith

The highest point.

Chapter 11

Summary

In this short chapter, Vera wonders how she will bear her isolation. She cannot live on illusion as her mother does, and she trusts herself to know where the dream ends and reality begins, as Miss MacIntosh taught her. She imagines how far her mother has traveled through her opium dream, which runs by the alphabet. The P's must be past by now. The Q's are hard company: the Queen Charlotte Islands, and the Queen Maud Mountains, who visits as a frigid, silent house guest in a lace skirt five hundred miles long. The R's are the charming ones, guests who never met in life: Mr. Res Tacamah, the drug bottle; a pharaoh who unwraps into Rameses I, II, and III; Roland, Rimski-Korsakov, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Rhadamanthus, and Sir Walter Raleigh, who takes off his head with his plumed hat. Mr. Spitzer has missed them all, and Catherine will tell him so.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Miss MacIntosh · Mr. Res Tacamah

Concepts present

Themes: Dreams and Imagination · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Society, Class, and Race

Symbols: Birds · Mountains · Opium · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Bus and the Journey · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica

Allusions: Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Dante · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Sir Walter Raleigh · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- Everything Catherine sees in this chapter is Vera's guess. "She must have reached," "Perhaps my mother had already passed on." Vera, who prides herself on knowing where the dream ends, spends the chapter dreaming her mother's dream for her.
- The chapter opens with Vera pondering how to endure isolation, recognizing that unlike her mother Catherine, mere illusions are insufficient. She is aware of the boundary between dream and reality, a lesson imparted by Miss MacIntosh, who denies the existence of what does not exist. This sets the thematic framework of the

chapter, highlighting the tension between illusion and reality, and the difficulty of coping with solitude without resorting to self-deception.

- Catherine is described as being in a “wakeful coma,” journeying through an opiate-induced voyage through various symbolic “places” starting with the letter P (Pericles, Penelope’s web, the Pleiades, penguins) and moving onto the Q’s and R’s. This voyage represents a surreal and metaphorical experience, suggesting that Catherine’s consciousness moves through layers of history, mythology, geography, and fantasy. These symbolic names imply a vast, intricate mental landscape, blending real and imagined elements.
- The Q’s include the Queen Charlotte Islands, Queen Maud Mountains, and a naval battle, each representing different aspects of isolation, coldness, and distance. Queen Maud Mountains, in particular, is portrayed as an imperious, frigid visitor to Catherine’s bedroom, embodying a chilling and overwhelming presence that silences and immobilizes. The description of her skirt as “five hundred miles long and made of pure Brussels lace” evokes a surreal and vast majesty, emphasizing Catherine’s awe and envy.
- Catherine’s mental journey perhaps continues to the R’s, a group connected by “silken relationships” despite never having met in reality. This assembly includes historical, mythical, and symbolic figures such as Mr. Res Tacamah (a drug bottle), the Egyptian pharaoh Rameses I, II, III (representing fragmented selves and layered identities), runes, royal masts, Roland, Rimski-Korsakov, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and others. The richness of this imagery suggests a complex and paradoxical inner world where time, space, and identity blur.
- Mr. Spitzer appears as a figure who perpetually misses Catherine’s gatherings of extraordinary company, including great composers, painters, and mythological judges like Rhadamanthus. There is a tone of irony and loss here, as Mr. Spitzer is condemned for forgotten crimes and fails to witness Catherine’s vibrant and mysterious social realm, underscoring themes of absence and missed connection.
- Among the remarkable guests, Sir Walter Raleigh stands out, described in a lavish white satin suit and associated with a society devoted to atheistic propositions, such as man existing before Adam and God being an idea or even “dog spelled backward.” This philosophical and irreverent note introduces questions about belief, existence, and the nature of divinity, adding a layer of intellectual challenge to Catherine’s dreamlike world.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Catherine’s calculations admit “no theory of loss in the universe where all things were lost.” Who is right, Catherine or Vera?

- Queen Maud Mountains hides her face behind a parasol “which happened to be my mother’s.” What does Catherine see when she looks at her guest?
- The pharaoh learns he “had been partitioned into many selves without his knowing it.” Who else in the novel has been divided this way?

Characters

- Vera says no “mere illusion would suffice me,” then imagines her mother’s dream in detail. How sure is she of the line between them?
- Catherine is “this great hostess who was in exile.” What is she exiled from?
- Rhadamanthus finds Mr. Spitzer “guilty of many forgotten crimes.” What crime might Catherine charge him with?

Connections

- Mr. Res Tacamah was “the drug bottle with ears” in Chapter 2. What has changed in him?
- Mr. Spitzer’s silent music in Chapter 2 meets Rimski-Korsakov’s music “which was not altogether silent.” Why does Catherine compare them?
- Raleigh asks to be called “Ocean or Water.” How does the sea keep entering Catherine’s closed room?

Reflection

- Is there a kind of loneliness that imagination makes worse rather than better?
- Catherine never leaves her bed, so the mountain comes to her. What is gained and lost by living this way?
- Can a person know where her own dreams end?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- Reflects on isolation and the difficulty of enduring it without resorting to illusions.
- Maintains a clear boundary between dream and reality.

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s Mother)

- Existing in a semi-conscious, dreamlike coma.
- Her mental state is depicted as a voyage through symbolic landscapes and figures.
- Acts as a hostess to a surreal assembly of historical, mythological, and symbolic guests.

- Denies loss, existing in a universe where things are lost but preserved in other forms.

Mr. Spitzer

- Absent from every gathering; Catherine will remind him afterward of all he missed.
- Tied to legal errands and earthly concerns, contrasted with Catherine's ethereal dream world.
- Judged by Rhadamanthus in the dream for forgotten crimes, symbolizing guilt and judgment.

Miss MacIntosh

- Her denial of "those things which did not exist" is the lesson Vera leans on to tell dream from reality.

Research: Themes

Isolation and Endurance

See: Isolation and Connection

- Vera contemplates how to endure isolation, contrasting herself with her mother, who copes differently through dreams and illusions.
- Vera is grounded in reality, aware of the dividing line between dream and reality, unlike her mother who dwells in a liminal, dreamlike state.

Dream versus Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination

- Catherine inhabits a dream world where places and people symbolize different stages or elements of her mental and emotional journey.
- Her dream is a voyage through alphabetic symbolic "stations" (P's, Q's, R's), each representing complex ideas, places, or characters.
- Catherine's dream reflects a universe where loss is denied or transformed rather than accepted.

Memory and Loss

See: Memory and the Past · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Catherine's dream denies loss, imagining a universe where things are lost but not lost forever.
- This suggests a coping mechanism for dealing with grief or fading consciousness.

Identity and Multiplicity

See: Identity and the Self

- Catherine's dream involves figures like Rameses I, II, and III, representing fragmented selves and layered identities.
- The dream hints at disjointed time and space, and the coexistence of past and present selves.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Alphabetical Journey (P's, Q's, R's)

See: The Bus and the Journey

- Represents a symbolic progression or mental voyage.
- P's include Pericles, Admiral Peary, Penelope's web, the Pleiades, and formal penguins.
- Q's include Queen Charlotte Islands, Queen Maud Mountains, and a naval battle.
- R's include a wide array of figures and concepts: Mr. Res Tacamah (a drug bottle, Catherine's opium/laudanum), Egyptian pharaohs (Rameses I-III), runes, roulades, rubrics, royal masts, rose windows, Roman numerals, riddles, red-caps in Grand Central Station, Roland, Rimski-Korsakov, Sir Joshua Reynolds, the Great Ram constellation, Rhadamanthus, Sir Walter Raleigh, and more.

Queen Maud Mountains

See: Mountains

- Personified as a cold, snobbish, imperious houseguest, symbolizing perhaps a harsh, distant presence.
- The detail of her five-hundred-mile-long Brussels lace skirt evokes grandeur, coldness, and isolation.

Mr. Res Tacamah

See: Mr. Res Tacamah · Opium

- A symbolic figure representing a drug bottle and shifting identities, suggesting notions of altered consciousness or dependency.

Rameses I, II, III

See: Ancient Egypt

- Symbolize fragmented identities and the confusion of time within the dream.
- The pharaoh unwrapping himself reveals the layered nature of self and memory.

Sir Walter Raleigh

See: Sir Walter Raleigh

- Imagined with a white satin suit embroidered with pearls and gems.
- His decapitation and request to be called “Ocean or Water” suggest themes of transformation, fluidity, and martyrdom or sacrifice.
- Raleigh was beheaded in 1618.
- Represents atheistic propositions and philosophical skepticism within the dream.

Research: Resources

- “entertaining the P’s, the Q’s, the R’s”: “Mind your P’s and Q’s,” the old warning to watch one’s manners, suits a hostess who greets every guest by letter.
- “her opiate voyage through nowhere”: Thomas De Quincey’s opium dreams in Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1821) carried him to Egypt and the East: “I was buried, for a thousand years, in stone coffins, with mummies and sphinxes.” See Opium, The History of Opium, and the Chapter 4 resources.
- “Pericles”: Pericles (c. 495-429 BC) led Athens in its golden age and had the Parthenon built. See Shakespeare.
  - Shakespeare’s Pericles, Prince of Tyre (c. 1608) is a voyage play. Its hero loses his wife, buried at sea in a chest, and his daughter, and finds both again.
- “Admiral Peary”: Robert E. Peary claimed the North Pole in 1909 and was made a rear admiral in 1911. Matthew Henson, the Black explorer beside him, by his own account reached the spot first and got little credit for decades. In 1897 Peary brought six Inuit from Greenland to New York for the American Museum of Natural History, and four died within months. The museum staged a fake burial for the boy Minik while it kept his father Qisuk’s skeleton. See Exploration and the Poles, Society, Class, and Race, and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “Penelope’s web”: In the Odyssey, Penelope weaves a shroud for Laertes by day and unravels it by night to hold off the suitors. See Homer’s Epics and the Chapter 5 resources.
- “the Pleiades”: The Pleiades are the seven daughters of Atlas, set in the sky as a star cluster in Taurus. They return at the end of the chapter in Ronsard’s Pléiade. See Astronomy and Greek Mythology.
- “a naval battle, an island, and a continent”: The battle is never named. Quiberon Bay (1759) is the famous Q: Admiral Hawke chased the French fleet into a rocky bay off Brittany in a November gale.
- “Queen Charlotte Islands”: The Queen Charlotte Islands, off the Pacific coast of Canada, were named in 1787 for the ship Queen Charlotte, which was named for George III’s queen. They are the home of the Haida and are now called Haida Gwaii. See Birds.

    - The gyrfalcon is the largest of the falcons, a bird of the Arctic. White gyrfalcons were gifts for kings, and Catherine kept falconer's gloves in Chapter 2.
    - Goldeneyes are diving ducks called "whistlers" for the sound of their wings in flight.
- "a wild swan absent, one wild swan more": In Andersen's "The Wild Swans" (1838), eleven brothers are turned into swans, and their sister weaves nettle shirts to free them. The last shirt is unfinished, and the youngest is left with a swan's wing. See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Birds.
- "the proud, cold, utterly snobbish Queen Maud Mountains": The Queen Maud Mountains rise at the head of the Ross Ice Shelf, on the south edge of the Ross Sea. Roald Amundsen found them in 1911 on his way to the South Pole and named them for Queen Maud of Norway, a daughter of King Edward VII of England. Queen Maud Land is a different region of Antarctica, claimed by Norway. See Exploration and the Poles, Mountains, and Snow, Ice, and Winter.
    - The Ross Sea, a deep bay of the Southern Ocean, is named for James Clark Ross, who sailed into it in 1841.
- "colder than Boston society": John Collins Bossidy's toast (1910): "And this is good old Boston, / The home of the bean and the cod, / Where the Lowells talk only to Cabots, / And the Cabots talk only to God." See Society, Class, and Race.
- "coming like the mountain to Mahomet": The proverb comes from Francis Bacon's essay "Of Boldness" (1625). Mahomet called a hill to come to him, and when it would not, he said, "If the hill will not come to Mahomet, Mahomet will go to the hill." Here the mountain comes to Catherine, who never leaves her bed. See Mountains.
- "made of pure Brussels lace": Brussels lace is well known for its delicacy and beauty. Originally it was only made from the finest spun linen thread, which was spun in dark damp rooms to keep the thread from becoming too brittle. Only one ray of light was allowed into the room, and it was arranged so that it fell upon the thread. (Wikipedia) See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- "pyramid-shaped ices": Ices were molded into shapes for grand dinners. The pyramids Catherine serves come just before the pharaoh arrives. See Ancient Egypt.
- "Mr. Res Tacamah who was the drug bottle": His name may join Rx to tacamahac. Rx stands for the Latin recipe, "take," at the head of a prescription, and tacamahac is an aromatic resin used in ointments and incense. In Chapter 2 he was "the drug bottle with ears to hear her ravings." See Mr. Res Tacamah, Opium, and the Chapter 2 resources.
- "Rameses I, II, III": The royal mummies were found in 1881 in a hidden tomb at Deir el-Bahri, where priests had moved and rewrapped them, some in other kings' coffins. Shelley's "Ozymandias" (1818) takes its name from the Greek form of Ramesses II's throne name, User-maat-re. See Ancient Egypt, Romantic Poets, and the Chapter 2 resources.
    - Menpehtyre Ramesses I (or Ramses) was the founding pharaoh of ancient Egypt's 19th Dynasty. The dates for his short reign are not completely known but the

timeline of late 1292-1290 BC is frequently cited as well as 1295-1294 BC. While Ramesses I was the founder of the 19th Dynasty, his brief reign mainly serves to mark the transition between the reign of Horemheb, who had stabilized Egypt in the late 18th Dynasty, and the rule of the powerful pharaohs of his own dynasty, in particular his son Seti I, and grandson Ramesses II. (Wikipedia)

  - Ramesses II, commonly known as Ramesses the Great, was an Egyptian pharaoh. He was the third ruler of the Nineteenth Dynasty. Along with Thutmose III of the Eighteenth Dynasty, he is often regarded as the greatest, most celebrated, and most powerful pharaoh of the New Kingdom, which itself was the most powerful period of ancient Egypt. (Wikipedia)
  - Usermaatre Meryamun Ramesses III was the second pharaoh of the Twentieth Dynasty in ancient Egypt. Some scholars date his reign from 26 March 1186 to 15 April 1155 BC, and he is considered the last pharaoh of the New Kingdom to have wielded substantial power. (Wikipedia) He took Ramesses II's throne name and modeled his temple at Medinet Habu on Ramesses II's, one king dreaming another's dreams.

- "partitioned into many selves without his knowing it": The Egyptians held that a person was made of many parts: the ka, the life force; the ba, the soul that flies from the tomb; the name; the shadow; and the heart, weighed at judgment. See Ancient Egypt and Identity and the Self.
- "runes, roulades, rubrics, royal masts, rose windows, Roman numerals, many riddles, many red-caps in the Grand Central Station": Catherine's R's run from letters and songs to ships, churches, and numbers.
  - Runes are letters from ancient Germanic alphabets, also called runic alphabets or futharks, which were used primarily to write Germanic languages before the adoption of the Roman alphabet. They are also recognized as symbols with mysterious or magical significance, often used in divination and fortune-telling. Runes were typically carved into wood, stone, or bone.
  - A roulade is an elaborate embellishment of several notes sung to one syllable.
  - A rubric is a word or text written in red ink for emphasis. In the Book of Common Prayer, the rubrics are the instructions printed in red, the stage directions of the services in Chapter 10.
  - A royal mast is the topmost section of a sailing ship's mast, above the topgallant.
  - A rose window is a round window of stained glass found in churches and cathedrals.
  - Roman numerals are a numeric system created by ancient Romans. They number Rameses I, II, III.
  - A red-cap is a railroad porter. Grand Central's red caps were mostly Black men from 1909 on. The terminal did not pay them, and they lived on tips until the 1940s. In 1937 red caps organized the International Brotherhood of Red Caps.

    - Grand Central, officially Grand Central Terminal (1913), stands at 42nd Street and Park Avenue in Midtown Manhattan.
- “Roland who was killed at Roncevalles”: Roland was a military leader under Charlemagne who died at the Battle of Roncevaux Pass in 778, when Basques ambushed Charlemagne’s rear guard. The Song of Roland (c. 1100) turns them into Saracens and has Roland blow his horn too late. In Dante’s Divine Comedy, Roland is named Orlando and placed in the Heaven of Mars with others who fought for the faith (Paradiso 18). See Dante.
- “Rimski-Korsakov who never came except in Mr. Spitzer’s absence”: Rimski-Korsakov was a prominent Russian composer, a member of the Mighty Handful, five composers who drew on Russian folk music, and a significant figure in shaping Russian classical music. He is known for his operas, orchestral pieces like Scheherazade (1888), named for the bride who tells a tale night after night to stay alive, and Capriccio Espagnol. He sailed around the world as a young naval officer. See Music and Composers and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
    - “music which was not altogether silent”: Mr. Spitzer has written “only silent music, that which, for many years now, no one else had ever heard” (Chapter 2).
- “Sir Joshua Reynolds”: Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-1792) was an English painter who specialized in portraits. He promoted the “Grand Style” in painting, which depended on idealization of the imperfect. He was a founder and first president of the Royal Academy of Arts and was knighted by George III in 1769. (Wikipedia)
- “the constellation known as the Great Ram”: The Great Ram is Aries, the first sign of the zodiac, the golden ram whose fleece Jason sought. See Astronomy and Greek Mythology.
- “Raphael’s tomb”: Raphael (1483-1520), the Italian painter, is buried in the Pantheon in Rome. Pietro Bembo’s epitaph reads, “Here lies Raphael, by whom Nature feared to be outdone while he lived, and when he died, feared that she herself would die.”
- “the songs of Ronsard”: Ronsard was a prominent French Renaissance poet, born in 1524. He was often called the “prince of poets” and was influential in developing the French sonnet and other poetic forms. Ronsard, with his friend Joachim du Bellay, founded the group of poets known as La Pléiade, which aimed to elevate the French language through poetry inspired by classical works. His most famous works include Les Odes (1550) and Les Amours (1552), which helped establish him as a leading poet. His sonnets are particularly admired, with “Mignonne, allons voir si la rose” being one of his most famous poems. He is credited with perfecting the 12-syllable Alexandrine line of French verse and is known for his rich imagery, classical references, and exploration of themes like love, beauty, and the fleeting nature of life. Ronsard also served as a poet and chaplain to King Charles IX and was a major literary figure during the French Renaissance. He continued to revise and publish his works throughout his life. The group took its name from the Pleiades, the seven stars among Catherine’s P’s. Ronsard wrote his poems to be sung, and composers set them in his lifetime.

- “Tracing a lost heir to no property”: Mr. Spitzer has “practiced law in only the most desultory fashion, often without fee, preferring the lost causes” (Chapter 2). See Joachim Spitzer and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “Rhadamanthus”: Rhadamanthus, son of Zeus and Europa and brother of Minos, was a king of Crete who became a judge of the dead. In Virgil’s Aeneid (Book 6), he forces the dead to confess the crimes they hid on earth, as he finds Mr. Spitzer “guilty of many forgotten crimes.” He returns in Chapter 14. See Greek Mythology.
- “the sister ravens, the brother doves”: The Grimms’ “The Seven Ravens” and Giambattista Basile’s “The Seven Doves” (1634-36) both tell of brothers changed into birds and a sister who saves them. Young makes the ravens sisters. See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Birds.
- “Sir Walter Raleigh in his marvelous white satin suit embroidered with seed pearls”: Sir Walter Raleigh (c. 1552-1618) was an English statesman, soldier, spy, writer, poet, and explorer. (Wikipedia) He was famous at Elizabeth’s court for the pearls and jewels on his clothes, even his shoes. See Sir Walter Raleigh and Exploration and the Poles.
    - Raleigh’s poetry is known as the plain style. His writing contains strong personal treatments of themes such as love, loss, beauty, and time. Most of his poems are short lyrics that were inspired by actual events. In poems Raleigh expresses a contempt-of-the-world attitude more characteristic of the Middle Ages than of the dawning era of humanistic optimism. But his lesser-known long poem, The Ocean’s Love to Cynthia, expresses a melancholy sense of history. The poem was written during his imprisonment in the Tower of London. (Wikipedia) Raleigh answered Christopher Marlowe’s “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” with “The Nymph’s Reply to the Shepherd.” Raleigh gives an almost line-for-line refutation of Marlowe’s sentiments. Centuries later, William Carlos Williams added “Raleigh Was Right” (1940) to the conversation. It begins, “We cannot go to the country / for the country will bring us / no peace.”
- “when he removed his white plumed hat, removed also his head”: Raleigh was beheaded at Westminster on October 29, 1618. Of the axe he said, “This is sharp medicine, but it is a physician for all diseases.” His widow kept his embalmed head for the rest of her life. The poem he wrote the night before begins, “Even such is Time, that takes in trust / Our youth, our joys, our all we have, / And pays us but with earth and dust.” See Sir Walter Raleigh.
- “his intimate name, Ocean or Water”: Elizabeth called him “Water.” Spenser named him “the Shepherd of the Ocean” in Colin Clouts Come Home Againe (1595), and Raleigh wrote The Ocean’s Love to Cynthia, with the Queen as the moon who rules the tides. See Sir Walter Raleigh and The Sea and Water.
- “a society of night devoted exclusively to atheistic propositions”: “The school of night” comes from Love’s Labour’s Lost (4.3): “Black is the badge of hell, / The hue of dungeons and the school of night.” The phrase became a name for Raleigh’s circle with Thomas Harriot and Christopher Marlowe, men accused of doubting Genesis and

God. In 1594 an inquiry at Cerne Abbas examined charges of atheism against Raleigh's circle. See Sir Walter Raleigh, Shakespeare, and Genesis.

- "man had existed before Adam": The Baines note (1593) charged Marlowe with saying that ancient authors "have assuredly written of above 16 thousand years agone whereas Adam is proved to have lived within 6 thousand years." See the Chapter 9 resources on pre-Adamites.
- "God is dog spelled backward": The word read backward is the last of the R's "many riddles."

Vocabulary

Atheistic

Denying the existence of God.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Brussels lace

Fine lace made by hand in Brussels, Belgium, from linen thread.

Congealed

Thickened or stiffened, as with cold.

Courtier

An attendant at a royal court.

Frigid

Very cold; stiffly unfriendly.

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Goldeneye

A diving duck with bright yellow eyes, called a whistler for the sound of its wings.

Gyrfalcon

The largest falcon, a bird of the Arctic.

Imperious

Proud and commanding.

Lustrous

Shining with a soft glow.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Opiate

A drug made from opium; anything that dulls the senses.

Parabolic

Curved like a parabola; also, like a parable.

Paradox

A statement or situation that seems to contradict itself and yet may be true.

Parasol

A light umbrella carried for shade from the sun.

Phantasmal

Ghostly; like a phantom or an illusion.

Plumed

Decorated with feathers.

Proposition

A statement put forward as true, to be argued.

Red-cap

A railroad porter who carries luggage.

Rose window

A round church window of stained glass, with tracery spreading from the center like petals.

Roulade

A rapid run of notes sung to one syllable.

Royal mast

The topmost section of a sailing ship’s mast, above the topgallant.

Rubric

A heading or instruction printed in red, as in a prayer book.

Rune

A letter of the old Germanic alphabets, often thought to hold magic.

Seed pearl

A very small pearl.

Tactlessly

Without tact; bluntly.

Chapter 12

Summary

It is past ten at night. Vera lies awake beside the Big Ben alarm clock, the one reliable clock in a house of clocks stopped one by one as Catherine withdrew to her bed. Wanting human company, she sets out for Miss MacIntosh’s bedroom. On the way she crosses the garden of the blind, planted by her grandfather for his blind wife to be touched and smelled rather than seen, and she feels a joy she will not know again: this first clear vision of the world will also be her last. She looks back on the child she was at seven, who bayed at the moon, heard the dead through a wireless in her head, and believed she was Chopin reborn, and on Miss MacIntosh, who brought her to her senses with a plain creed of daylight and duty. There were signs Vera did not read: Miss MacIntosh’s short breath, her blue lips, her threats to retire. The chapter closes on Catherine’s suspicion that Mr. Spitzer sometimes imagines himself to be his dead brother, betting on dark horses.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Miss MacIntosh · Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · The Black Coachman

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Freedom and Escape · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Love · Memory and the Past · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · The Search for Meaning · Time

Symbols: Birds · Clocks and Watches · Eyes and Blindness · Fog and Mist · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Horses and Carriages · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Moon and Stars · Roses and Flowers · Shadows · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Plato and Platonism · Spiritualism and the Occult

Allusions: Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Music and Composers · Shakespeare · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a meditation on time, describing the Big Ben alarm clock as “Old Reliable,” contrasted with other clocks in the house that have stopped at different hours, symbolizing a suspended or fragmented perception of time, linked with Catherine’s gradual withdrawal from the world. This sets the objective measurement of

time (servants' clocks) against subjective experience (stopped clocks), reflecting how personal grief or change distorts time.

- Vera's unplanned visit to Miss MacIntosh's bedroom is described as a sporadic, almost dreamlike moment that is "blurred" in memory and "told only through a veil of oblivion," emphasizing the elusive nature of memory and how absence reveals what is hidden. This passage sets the tone for the exploration of consciousness and the limits of human understanding.
- A long, lyrical reflection on the human senses and the body's design celebrates the unity and beauty of nature. The eye is described as the organ of sight placed perfectly in the skull, with hair acting as a protective and sensory element, and the skin as a "drum of all our senses." This passage praises the human body as a masterpiece of nature and highlights the interconnectedness of all living things.
- Vera finds herself in a garden created for a blind person, her grandmother. She insists the place "could surely in no way have influenced" her own clarity of vision, yet she wonders, "what is the influence of place?" The garden is full of sensory experience beyond sight: textures, smells, and forms without color. This metaphor illustrates the theme of perception beyond the visible, and the coexistence of joy and sorrow, as the garden's sadness contrasts with Vera's boundless happiness.
- Vera contemplates how her earlier dreams and visions experienced as musical discourses with ghosts, reincarnations, and fantastical experiences contrast with the harsh reality taught by Miss MacIntosh. The nursemaid's admonition to accept that "nothing had happened" and that mortals are not omniscient introduces a sobering perspective. This tension between dream and reality, imagination and practicality, is a central philosophical conflict in the chapter.
- Miss MacIntosh represents a grounded, no-nonsense worldview where she emphasizes moral clarity, the distinction between what is real and unreal, and the rejection of dreaming. Her views on love are practical, seeing it as "greatest love which could see another's face in daylight and hear another's voice." She embodies endurance, frugality, and a refusal to indulge in illusions, contrasting with Vera's imaginative tendencies.
- Near the end, Vera sets out Miss MacIntosh's creed in the face of divine mystery: the world is a flawed creation, and God has "been filled with the greatest remorse" over its imperfections. Humans should attend to their own lives and not "meddle in His remote business," highlighting themes of humility and acceptance of the unknowable.
- The long passage on hair ("The most beautiful ladies of history had been noted for their hair") and the warning that "the first vision would also be the last" both prepare for Chapter 17, when Vera finds Miss MacIntosh bald.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “Though time was an illusion, it was not the illusion of servants.” Who can afford to stop the clocks?
- The details come “through a veil of oblivion which is itself a medium of memory.” How can forgetting be a way of remembering?
- “Without eyelids, one would stare at the face of one’s love, even as one stares at death.” Why does Vera join love and death here?

Characters

- The blind grandmother is “the most immediate of persons,” with no fancy at all. Why is the garden of the blind planted for her, of all people?
- Miss MacIntosh “held my attention by yelling louder than the dead, louder than the waves.” What did she save Vera from, and what did it cost?
- She “had not two faces.” Is that true of anyone in this novel?

Connections

- Miss MacIntosh’s prophecy that Vera might be “a poor little shoemaker’s humble wife” (Chapter 9) now has her as a “wooden wife.” What has changed?
- The thimble carved “Juliet, 1899” returns to the Romeo and Juliet dream of Chapter 6. Who was Juliet?
- The twelve white swans recall Chapter 11’s “one wild swan more.” Why do bewitched brothers keep appearing?

Reflection

- “What is the influence of place?” Are there places that hold sorrow?
- Was Vera at seven, who preferred the dream to “the cause and effect sequences of the waking life,” wrong?
- Is happiness more fragile when it cannot see what is coming?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- Reflective, imaginative, and sensitive.
- Struggles between embracing imagination and dreams and confronting reality.

- Experiences moments of joy and freedom but also faces the harsh truths of life and mortality.
- At seven she bayed like a dog, dug for bones, heard the dead, and believed she was Chopin reborn, until Miss MacIntosh “restored me to my senses.”

Miss MacIntosh

- The practical, no-nonsense caretaker who keeps the “Old Reliable” clock.
- Represents pragmatism, moral clarity, and a grounded worldview.
- Cautions against illusion and flight of fancy; emphasizes duty and reality.
- Her perspective contrasts with Vera’s imaginative nature.
- Her short breath, blue lips, and stone-grey skin are signs Vera does not yet read.
- She threatens to retire, taps Vera with a silver thimble carved “Juliet, 1899,” and saves soap coupons “to exchange for crockery.”

Catherine Cartwheel

- Catherine is mentioned as retiring slowly from the world, symbolized by the stopped clocks.
- She suspects Mr. Spitzer sometimes imagines himself to be his dead brother.

Vera’s Grandfather and Grandmother

- The grandfather who planted the garden for his blind wife represents the effort to create a world accessible through other senses.
- The grandmother’s blindness and her practical nature are contrasted with Vera’s imaginative vision.
- The grandmother argued with “her voluble black coachman” about the clouds, and touched the stone faces only once she was blind. See The Black Coachman.

Mr. Spitzer

- A figure with an ambiguous nature and identity.
- Catherine suspects he sometimes imagines himself to be his dead brother (Peron), blurring reality and fantasy.
- Catherine once danced with “pigeon-toed, ambiguous Mr. Spitzer, perhaps with two Mr. Spitzers, one who had died, one who had lived.”

Research: Themes

The Illusion and Reality of Time

See: Illusion and Reality · Time

- Vera reflects on time as both a practical necessity and an illusion.
- The Big Ben alarm clock symbolizes reliable, practical time, set for servants who must rise at certain hours.
- Other clocks in the house are stopped at different times, symbolizing frozen moments or hesitation in the past, especially linked to Catherine's retreat from the world.

The Life of the Imagination versus Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination

- Vera contrasts a "life of the imagination" with the waking world, pondering the significance of dreams and whether they hold more truth than reality.
- Dreams are described as limitless and bridging life and death, whereas waking life is governed by cause and effect.
- Miss MacIntosh's pragmatic attitude opposes Vera's dreamy perspective, emphasizing practical reality and cautioning against illusions.

The Role and Limits of the Senses

See: Eyes and Blindness · The Search for Meaning

- There is an extended meditation on the human senses (sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch) as the means by which humans experience reality.
- Vera highlights the design and function of eyes, eyelashes, eyelids, and hair as protective and sensory mechanisms.
- The garden of the blind symbolizes a world without vision, emphasizing other ways of perceiving such as touch (Braille, texture), and questioning how place and perception influence sorrow and happiness.

Freedom, Innocence, and Joy

See: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Freedom and Escape

- There is a moment of profound joy and freedom as Vera walks out into the night, celebrating the beauty and unity of nature.
- This freedom is described as innocence and clarity of vision, untainted by past sorrow or fear.
- Vera feels connected to the natural world, sensing stars, flowers, and animals as real and meaningful.

The Limits of Human Understanding and Divine Mystery

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural · The Search for Meaning

- Vera reflects on the limitations of human knowledge, emphasizing that humans are not omniscient and should not try to tamper with God's mysteries.
- God is portrayed as remorseful over creation's imperfections, but humans are advised to focus on their own lives rather than cosmic mysteries.

Love and Human Relationships

See: Isolation and Connection · Love

- Miss MacIntosh's perspective on love is pragmatic and grounded; love is about seeing and hearing another in daylight and tested by harsh experience.
- She is portrayed as a plain and practical woman, devoid of romantic illusions or flights of fancy.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Clocks and Time

See: Clocks and Watches · Keys, Doors, and Locks

- Clocks stopped at different hours symbolize frozen moments, hesitation, or the past lingering in the present.
- The Big Ben, "Old Reliable," wound daily by Miss MacIntosh, stands against the stopped clocks of Catherine's retreat.

The Garden of the Blind

See: Eyes and Blindness

- Represents a sensory world without sight, emphasizing the importance and limitations of perception.

Eyes and Eyelashes

See: Eyes and Blindness

- Represent the function and fragility of vision and perception; Vera meditates on their biological and symbolic significance.

Moonlight and Mist

See: Fog and Mist · Moon and Stars · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- The pregnant moonlight and mist create an atmosphere of mystery, illumination, and ambiguity.

Hair

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- Symbolic of protection and sensitivity; also connected to historical and biblical references.
- The meditation on hair foreshadows Miss MacIntosh's baldness in Chapter 17.

Flowers

See: Roses and Flowers

- Sensual, tactile flowers in the garden illustrate the blending of senses and the threshold between perception and imagination.

Research: Resources

- "As I had missed my birthday party": The birthday party that never happened in Chapter 10, where "we had not even cut the birthday cake." See the Chapter 10 resources.
- "the Big Ben alarm clock": The Big Ben was the Western Clock Company's alarm clock, sold from 1909 and the first alarm clock advertised across the country (1910). It takes its name from the great bell in London. See Clocks and Watches and Time.
  - Big Ben is the nickname for the Great Bell of the Great Clock of Westminster, and, by extension, for the clock tower itself, which stands at the north end of the Palace of Westminster in London, England. The clock is a striking clock with five bells. (Wikipedia)
- "for our rising up and for our lying down": "When thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:7). See The Bible.
- "no Tritons dreaming around the clock, no ladies weeping over dead birds, no sporting cupids": French mantel clocks were crowded with gilded sea gods, nymphs, and cupids. Triton, son of Poseidon, blows a conch shell. See Clocks and Watches and Greek Mythology.
  - Jean-Baptiste Greuze's painting Girl Weeping over Her Dead Bird (1765).
  - Catullus wrote of his beloved Lesbia's dead sparrow: "Mourn, O Venuses and Cupids."
- "It did not repeat the hours": Repeater clocks and watches chime the last hour again at the pull of a cord or the press of a button, so the hour can be heard in the dark. See Clocks and Watches.
- "though time was an illusion, it was not the illusion of servants": Einstein wrote in 1955 that the distinction between past, present, and future "is only a stubbornly persistent illusion." Servants still had to rise on time. See Time.

- “each clock having been stopped at a different hour”: In Dickens’s Great Expectations (1861), Miss Havisham stops every clock at twenty minutes to nine, the hour she was jilted, and never leaves her room. Mourners once stopped the clocks at a death. See Clocks and Watches, Memory and the Past, and the Chapter 4 resources.
- “Drink Coca-Cola”: Cardboard advertising fans printed with “Drink Coca-Cola” were handed out in churches and stores, especially in the South. See the Chapter 1 resources.
- “that we are not as shadows”: “What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue” (Edmund Burke, 1780), and “our days upon earth are a shadow” (Job 8:9). See Shadows and Plato and Platonism.
    - Prospero: “the great globe itself… shall dissolve, / And, like this insubstantial pageant faded, / Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff / As dreams are made on” (The Tempest 4.1).
    - The theme of shadows runs through the novel. It brings to mind Plato’s work, The Allegory of the Cave, or Plato’s Cave. It is an allegory presented by the Greek philosopher Plato in his work, Republic. The Cave describes a group of people who have lived chained to the wall of a cave all their lives, facing a blank wall. The people watch shadows projected on the wall from objects passing in front of a fire behind them and give names to these shadows. The shadows are the prisoners’ reality, but are not accurate representations of the real world. The shadows represent the fragment of reality that can normally be perceived through the senses, while the objects under the sun represent the true forms of objects that can only be perceived through reason. The philosopher is like a prisoner who is freed from the cave and comes to understand that the shadows on the wall are actually not the direct source of the images seen. A philosopher aims to understand and perceive the higher levels of reality. However, the other inmates of the cave do not even desire to leave their prison, for they know no better life. (Wikipedia) See the Chapter 3 resources.
- “The eyeball was made to see with”: William Paley’s Natural Theology (1802) made the eye his proof of design: “there is precisely the same proof that the eye was made for vision, as there is that the telescope was made for assisting it.” The book opens with a watch found on a heath. See Eyes and Blindness.
    - Darwin admitted that the evolution of the eye “seems, I freely confess, absurd in the highest possible degree,” then showed how it could arise by small steps (On the Origin of Species, 1859). See the Chapter 3 resources.
- “the spot on a peacock’s tail”: Juno set the hundred eyes of the slain watchman Argus in the peacock’s tail (Ovid, Metamorphoses 1). See Greek Mythology, Birds, and the Chapter 5 resources.
- “the hole through the needle”: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24). See the Chapter 3 resources.

- “the brain was but the infoldings of the skin”: In the embryo, brain and skin both grow from the same outer layer, the ectoderm, which folds inward to form the neural tube.
- “we were the masterpieces of nature”: “What a piece of work is a man! … the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals!” (Hamlet 2.2). See Shakespeare.
- “the hair raising to warn us of our mortal danger”: “Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up” (Job 4:15). See Hair, Wig, and Baldness and The Bible.
- “The most beautiful ladies of history had been noted for their hair”: Queen Berenice gave her hair to the gods for her husband’s safe return, and it was set among the stars as Coma Berenices. See Hair, Wig, and Baldness, Miss MacIntosh, and the Chapter 9 resources.
- “Absalom was caught among the apple boughs and hanged by his hair”: In 2 Samuel 18:9, Absalom’s “head caught hold of the oak.” Vera makes it an apple tree. His heavy hair was cut once a year (2 Samuel 14:26). See Hair, Wig, and Baldness, The Bible, and the Chapter 5 resources.
- “walks in the eye of the wind”: A sailor’s phrase for heading straight into the wind.
- “dead men are usually found with their eyes open”: “Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes” (Genesis 46:4). The living close the eyes of the dead and once weighted them with coins. See Death and Mortality and Eyes and Blindness.
- “Leonardo had forgotten to give eyebrows to his Mona Lisa”: The Mona Lisa (c. 1503-1519) is a half-length portrait by Leonardo da Vinci. (Wikipedia) The painting shows no eyebrows or lashes, though Giorgio Vasari (1550) praised its eyebrows, “the manner in which the hairs spring from the flesh.” See Eyes and Blindness and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “the garden of the blind”: Fragrance gardens for the blind were planted to be touched and smelled. The Brooklyn Botanic Garden opened one in 1955. Vera and Miss MacIntosh walk through this garden in Chapter 3. See Eyes and Blindness, Roses and Flowers, and the Chapter 3 resources.
- “what is the influence of place?”: The Romans spoke of the genius loci, the spirit of a place. John Ruskin named the “pathetic fallacy” (1856), the habit of lending human feeling to nature.
    - “making the stones cry out”: “I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out” (Luke 19:40).
- “the stumbling stone to the blind”: “Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind” (Leviticus 19:14). See Eyes and Blindness and The Bible.
- “the Braille texture of flowers”: Louis Braille, blinded as a child, published his raised-dot alphabet in 1829. See Eyes and Blindness.
- “darkness moved on the face of the deep”: “And darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). See Genesis.

- “sweet william, cosmos, rose geranium, phlox, nasturtium, nicotiana”: Scented garden flowers. Rose geranium gives off its scent at a touch, and nicotiana, flowering tobacco, opens and perfumes the air at night. See Roses and Flowers.
- “flowers of the old Jerusalem, flowers of the new Jerusalem”: “I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys” (Song of Solomon 2:1), and the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down “as a bride adorned for her husband” (Revelation 21:2). See Roses and Flowers and The Bible.
- “the first vision would also be the last”: Foreshadowing of Chapter 17, when Vera finds Miss MacIntosh bald. See Miss MacIntosh.
- “the beauty of that horror more beautiful than life”: “For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror” (Rilke, Duino Elegies, 1923).
- “Mr. Chandelier or Mr. Chanticleer”: Chanticleer is the proud rooster of Chaucer’s “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale” and the fables of Reynard the Fox. Mr. Chandelier is Catherine’s companion from Chapter 2. See Mr. Chandelier, Birds, and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “a place for everything”: “A place for everything, and everything in its place,” the old household rule. See Order, Chaos, and Discipline.
- “her lips turned blue and her skin lost its natural color, turning to saffron”: Blue lips and short breath are signs of a failing heart or lungs, a warning Vera does not read. See Miss MacIntosh.
- “saving even the soap coupons to exchange for crockery”: Companies such as the Larkin Soap Company gave coupons that buyers traded for dishes and furniture.
- “a poor little shoemaker’s wooden wife”: Miss MacIntosh’s prophecy in Chapter 9 was “a poor little shoemaker’s humble wife.” See the Chapter 9 resources.
- “Juliet, 1899”: Maude Adams played Juliet at the Empire Theatre in New York in May 1899, opposite William Faversham. A dream in Chapter 6 has “She was Juliet, and I was Romeo.” See Shakespeare and the Chapter 6 resources.
- “baying like a dog at the moon”: “I had rather be a dog, and bay the moon, / Than such a Roman” (Julius Caesar 4.3). See Shakespeare and Moon and Stars.
- “a rooster crowing when there was no rooster”: “Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice” (Matthew 26:34). See The Bible and Birds.
- “a wireless was attached to my head so that I might hear the voices of the dead”: In 1920 Thomas Edison told interviewers he was working on a machine to speak with the dead. See Spiritualism and the Occult.
- “the reincarnation of Chopin”: Chopin wrote some sixty mazurkas, the Polish dance. The polka is Czech, and he wrote none. See Music and Composers and the Chapter 10 resources.
- “perhaps with two Mr. Spitzers, one who had died, one who had lived”: Joachim and Peron Spitzer, the twins. See Peron Spitzer and Twins and Doubles.
- “twelve white swans like brothers or suitors bewitched”: Andersen’s eleven brothers turned into swans, and the bewitched swan maidens of Tchaikovsky’s Swan Lake

(1877). See Fairy Tales and Folklore, Birds, and the Chapter 11 resources.

- “should stir no feather in the air”: Lear holds a feather to Cordelia’s lips: “This feather stirs; she lives!” (King Lear 5.3). See Shakespeare, Death and Mortality, and the Chapter 5 resources.
- “to be nothing but an old humbug”: “Death, thou shalt die” (John Donne, Holy Sonnet 10, “Death, be not proud”). See Death and Mortality.
- “headless horsemen ride about in purple fog”: Washington Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820). See Fairy Tales and Folklore and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “filled with the greatest remorse”: “And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart” (Genesis 6:6). See Genesis and Faith, God, and the Supernatural.
- “attend to our own knitting”: “Mind your own knitting,” the old way of saying mind your own business. “Study to be quiet, and to do your own business” (1 Thessalonians 4:11). See The Bible.
- “The wisest man was a fool in God’s eyes, and there was a fool bound in the heart of every child”: 1 Corinthians 3:19 reads, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God,” and Proverbs 22:15, “Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him.” The phrase captures the paradox of human existence: the striving for knowledge and meaning amid inherent limitations, and the acceptance that all are bound to folly in the grander cosmic scheme. See The Bible.
- “We could not command the waters to stand still”: The waters of the Jordan “stood and rose up upon an heap” for Joshua (Joshua 3:16), and he commanded, “Sun, stand thou still” (Joshua 10:12). See The Bible.
- “They were already moving”: Galileo is said to have muttered “And yet it moves” of the earth after he was forced to recant (1633).
- “rather to endure ourselves than to test God”: “Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God” (Deuteronomy 6:16). See The Bible.
- “the honest man was he who walked upright”: “He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart” (Psalm 15:2). See The Bible.
    - Diogenes is said to have walked Athens by day with a lamp, looking for an honest man.
- “Love was undoubtedly greatest love which could see another’s face in daylight”: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12). See the Chapter 10 resources on “One who could know us and yet love us.”
- “her face was not, it was simply not her fortune”: The nursery rhyme’s milkmaid: “My face is my fortune, sir, she said.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore and the Chapter 10 resources.
- “perhaps it was we who passed through time”: Austin Dobson, “The Paradox of Time” (1877): “Time goes, you say? Ah no! / Alas, Time stays, we go.” See Time.

- “She could not soar upward on wings of words to heaven”: Claudius: “My words fly up, my thoughts remain below: / Words without thoughts never to heaven go” (Hamlet 3.3). See Shakespeare.
- “she was a middle brow”: The word was coined in Punch in 1925, between highbrow and lowbrow. See the Chapter 3 resources.
- “She had not two faces”: Janus, the Roman god of doorways and beginnings, looks two ways at once. See Twins and Doubles.
- “put his bet on the dark horse”: The phrase comes from Disraeli’s The Young Duke (1831): “a dark horse, which had never been thought of.” See Horses and Carriages and Peron Spitzer.
- “those of the tramontane regions”: Tramontane, from the Latin transmontanus, means “beyond the mountains,” here the lands beyond the Alps. It is also the name of a cold north wind.

Vocabulary

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Becalmed

Of a ship: stopped for lack of wind.

Candor

Frankness; openness.

Caustic

Biting and sarcastic; also, able to burn.

Chimerical

Imaginary, fanciful, or wildly unrealistic. From the Chimera, the fire-breathing monster of Greek myth made of a lion, a goat, and a serpent.

Clammy

Damp, cold, and sticky.

Cockle

A small saltwater clam with a ribbed, heart-shaped shell. A cockleshell boat is a small, flimsy one.

Cognizance

Awareness; notice.

Commingling

Mixing together.

Concavity

A hollow; an inward curve.

Diadem

A jeweled crown or headband worn as a sign of royalty.

Disrelation

A lack of relation between things.

Errant

Wandering; straying from the proper course.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Filament

A fine thread or fiber.

Fortitude

Courage in bearing pain or trouble.

Frugal

Sparing; careful with money.

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Horologer

A clockmaker.

Humbug

A fraud; nonsense.

Imploring

Begging earnestly.

Imponderable

Something that cannot be measured, weighed, or judged.

Imposture

A deception; passing oneself off as someone else.

Inconspicuous

Not easily noticed.

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Innocuous

Harmless.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Malignance

Deadly harmfulness; the quality of a disease that spreads.

Mazurka

A lively Polish dance in triple time.

Middlebrow

Of conventional, middling taste.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Peaked

Thin and pale, as from illness.

Peruke

A powdered wig of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Phantasmal

Ghostly; like a phantom or an illusion.

Polka

A lively couple dance from Bohemia.

Pontiff

A high priest; the pope.

Presentiment

An intuitive feeling that something is about to happen.

Preternatural

Beyond what is natural.

Quiescent

Still; at rest.

Refulgent

Shining brightly; radiant.

Retribution

Punishment given in return for a wrong.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Rueful

Sorrowful; regretful.

Saffron

Orange-yellow, the color of the spice.

Shirtwaist

A woman’s blouse tailored like a man’s shirt.

Spinster

An unmarried woman, especially an older one. The word first meant a woman who spun thread.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Stamen

The pollen-bearing part of a flower.

Suffusion

A spreading through, as of color or light.

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Thimble

A small cap worn on the finger to push the needle in sewing.

Tramontane

Beyond the mountains; foreign.

Transmogrified

Changed completely, often strangely.

Triton

A sea god of Greek myth, half man and half fish, who blows a conch shell.

Voluble

Talkative.

Whorl

A spiral or ring of leaves or petals.

Chapter 13

Summary

On the night of her fourteenth birthday, Vera says farewell in advance to her last certainty. After this night Miss MacIntosh, the one person who never seemed to change, will be a stranger Vera has lived with for seven years. Vera compares herself to the rider who crossed frozen Lake Constance in the dark and dropped dead when he learned where he had been. She bids farewell to the old moralities, the rote questions and answers, and What Cheer, Iowa, all of which now seem a lie. She wanders through her mother's imagined gardens, where Galen, Harvey, Goldsmith, and Ben Jonson stroll at a perpetual garden party and life-sized chessmen move on a board of light and fog, until she reaches the garden of the deaf. There, as Catherine would tell Mr. Spitzer, the ear is dead. Catherine insists the dead ear is his, though he hears a roaring in his right ear that does not come from this world, and that this is why his music is silence.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Miss MacIntosh · Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Fate and Chance · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Cards, Games, and Chance · Moon and Stars · Roses and Flowers · Silence and Deafness · Snow, Ice, and Winter · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Aristotle · Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Augustine and Christian Theology · Epicureanism · Heraclitus and Flux · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · Deafness and Sign Language · Homer's Epics · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Shakespeare · The Bible · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a poignant farewell to Miss MacIntosh, a figure who had seemed ordinary and unchanging but is now revealed to be mysterious and complex. Vera reflects on having taken her for granted, washing and ironing her clothes without understanding who she truly was. This passage symbolizes the moment of awakening to the deeper, often hidden realities beneath familiar aspects. The metaphor of the weary traveler crossing the frozen but never fully frozen Lake Constance powerfully

conveys the shock of realizing that what seemed solid and known is actually fragile and deceptive. The traveler's death upon comprehending the impossible crossing parallels Vera's own transformation in perception. This passage marks the loss of innocence and the beginning of a more complex understanding of life and people.

- Following the initial farewell to Miss MacIntosh, Vera bids farewell to the stability of past certainties: the "old moralities," "proverbial wisdom," and the "fabric of self-deception" that both she and Miss MacIntosh had lived by. This passage underscores a profound existential rupture where the past, reason, purpose, and future become unreliable, even illusory. The imagery of cherry blossoms, peach orchards, and dusty lanes as if they were lies evokes a sense of disillusionment with the world as it was once understood. This farewell is not just to a person but to an entire worldview, highlighting the theme of awakening to a more ambiguous and unsettling reality.
- Vera wanders through a surreal, neglected garden that is described as "the garden of the deaf," a place where "the ear is dead." On the way she passes through Catherine's "immortal gardens," where Dr. Galen and Dr. Harvey stroll among the guests. The garden of the deaf is filled with vivid, ghostly images: statues, flowers that fly away like moths, and chessmen moving invisibly. The garden symbolizes a realm where sound and communication are absent, reflecting a profound isolation. The metaphor of the "deaf ear" extends into the relationship between Vera's mother and Mr. Spitzer, emphasizing themes of silence, unhearing, and the inability to connect or be heard. Catherine's insistence that the ear is dead and the world is soundless captures the tragic condition of isolation and the fading of meaningful communication.
- The exchanges between Vera's mother and Mr. Spitzer are significant for illustrating the tension between reality and perception. Mr. Spitzer represents a figure trying to engage with the world, arguing the possibility of sound and communication despite Catherine's firm belief in their absence, even as he hears a roaring in his right ear that "did not come from this world." Their dialogue about whose ear is dead (literal or metaphorical) introduces the theme of death not only of the physical ear but also of the heart and spirit. This passage deepens the motif of silence and the loss of voice, highlighting human suffering and the struggle to maintain connection amid internal and external voids.
- Throughout the chapter, there is a recurring motif of things appearing familiar but becoming "increasingly unfamiliar," such as the Venus statue "bearded by patriarchal fog," flowers that fly away when touched, and shadows cast by barnacle-formed cherubim faces. These images evoke the fragility of memory and the instability of reality as perceived by Vera, underscoring how the past and present intertwine in confusing ways. The luminous yet ghostly descriptions of the garden and the figures within suggest a world where the boundaries between life and death, reality and dream, presence and absence blur.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- The rider “dropped dead with the shock of the after-knowledge.” Why is knowing worse than the danger itself?
- Vera says her “ignorance had been perhaps my salvation.” Is it?
- “One should see the bird and the shadow of the bird, but one should not hear the song.” What does Catherine lose by choosing silence?

Characters

- Miss MacIntosh walked through cloudbursts with “her lips blue,” her face “twisted with unuttered pain.” What was Vera not seeing?
- Catherine “feigned death because it was an enchantment greater than fleeting existence.” What does she gain by it?
- Mr. Spitzer is “trying to learn not to turn his head every time he heard a traffic horn.” What is he trying not to hear?

Connections

- Chapter 12 ended in the garden of the blind, and this chapter ends in the garden of the deaf. What does each garden take away?
- The life-sized chessmen stood in the garden in Chapters 1, 2, and 3. Who are the invisible players?
- Mr. Spitzer’s “music was the silence.” How does that answer Chapter 2’s “silent music”?

Reflection

- Is it better not to know where one has been?
- Can a person live with someone for seven years and not know her?
- Which would be harder to lose, sight or sound?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- She begins with a poignant farewell to the “last certitude,” including the tender moment of her fourteenth birthday and the figure of Miss MacIntosh, who had been a constant presence for seven years.

- This farewell symbolizes a significant psychological and emotional shift: a departure from innocence and an acknowledgement that the familiar is no longer certain or reliable.
- Vera admits to having taken Miss MacIntosh for granted, thinking her the most ordinary person, only to realize she was mysterious and unknowable. This signals an awakening to the complexity and ambiguity of human beings and relationships.
- She compares her previous ignorance to a weary traveler crossing a frozen lake under unbearable conditions, unaware that the ice beneath is treacherous and that survival was against all odds.
- This metaphor vividly captures the precariousness of Vera's former worldview: one that was sheltered and unknowing, yet preserved her from the shock of truth.
- The crossing into awareness is described as a moment of death and rebirth, forever altering perception: "Everything . . . would be different . . . the simplest gesture having a different meaning."
- Following this awakening, Vera experiences a profound fragmentation of reality, where the familiar world loses its coherence and reliability.
- The surrounding environment, including natural elements like moons, stars, and waters, fails to provide reassurance.
- Vera explicitly bids farewell to "old moralities," "proverbial wisdom," and "the past and its illusion," highlighting a rejection of previously accepted truths and a plunge into existential uncertainty.
- Her farewell to the past is not simple nostalgia but a confrontation with the past as a "dream" that must be "laid bare like a corpse."
- This suggests a critical and almost forensic examination of memory, recognizing that the past is layered with deception as well as unexpected truths. Vera anticipates surprise and shock in discovering the absence of qualities once assumed and the presence of others previously unrecognized.
- Vera's reflections are imbued with elaborate, poetic imagery. These images evoke a dreamlike, liminal space between reality and illusion, life and death, sound and silence.
- The "garden of the deaf," where "the ear is dead," becomes a powerful symbol of isolation, silence, and possibly the failure or refusal of communication.
- Her environment is suffused with paradox and ambiguity, reflecting Vera's inner turmoil and the collapse of conventional understanding.
- Vera wrestles with themes of presence and absence, sound and silence, life and death.
- Throughout the chapter, Vera's tone is melancholic, marked by a sense of loss, estrangement, and an almost mournful awareness of change.
- The farewell to Miss MacIntosh and the past, the dissection of memory, and the surreal descriptions of the garden convey a profound alienation from the world once known, both external and internal.

Miss MacIntosh

- Miss MacIntosh, once a fixed star in Vera's life, becomes like a "perfect stranger."
- Lips blue and face "pale and twisted with unuttered pain," she walked through cloudbursts on her constitutional.
- Her rote questions: "Where is North Dakota, and what is a monsoon, and what is a mirage, Vera Cartwheel?"

Catherine Cartwheel

- The recurring motif of the "dead ear," especially in relation to Mr. Spitzer and Catherine, underscores a world where communication fails and the essence of existence is isolated from meaning.
- Catherine's insistence that "the ear was dead" and that "there was not a sound to be heard" suggests a bleak vision of human experience as disembodied from relational and sensory engagement.
- Catherine is depicted as a woman caught between life and a kind of suspended existence.
- Catherine is enveloped in a self-imposed or circumstantial state of near-death or withdrawal from reality, an enchantment that protects her but also alienates her from the world around her.
- The "garden of the deaf" is a powerful metaphor for Catherine's mental and emotional state.
- This deafness is not just literal but symbolic of a disconnection from the external world and from meaningful human interaction.
- In this garden, "one should see the bird and the shadow of the bird, but one should not hear the song," encapsulating Catherine's experience of perceiving the world without fully engaging with it or being able to communicate effectively.
- Her interactions with Mr. Spitzer, an old friend and legal professional, further reveal her state of mind.
- Despite his efforts to speak and argue, Catherine insists that the "ear was dead," and that no sound truly reaches them. This exchange highlights her detachment and the barrier she has erected between herself and others, emphasizing her internal silence and the futility of communication.
- Mr. Spitzer's "subdued roaring" in his ear, a noise which "did not come from this world," parallels Catherine's own internal condition, suggesting shared but differently manifested forms of alienation.
- Catherine's fear of the silence "unbroken by the sound" and her particular dread "when a frog screamed" indicate deep psychological distress. The silence is oppressive, a void that she cannot endure, and the rare disruptive sounds become sources of terror

rather than comfort. This paradox of fearing both silence and sudden noise points to a troubled mind caught between extremes, fragile and haunted.

- Throughout the chapter, images of decaying flowers, fading colors, and ghostly sounds surround Catherine, reinforcing the themes of impermanence and dissolution.
- She is part of a world slipping away from life into something spectral or unreal. This imagery parallels her mental state which is caught in a liminal space between reality and illusion, life and death.
- Despite her distance, Catherine remains a focal figure in Vera's consciousness. Her presence is felt strongly even as she withdraws, indicating Catherine's paradoxical role as both a source of life and a symbol of loss and mystery.

Mr. Spitzer

- Mr. Spitzer is described as "pompous" and "beclouded," suggesting a man who carries a certain self-importance or authority, yet his thoughts and arguments are somewhat confused or unclear. He is "many-valved," implying layers or complexities in his personality or reasoning, which are not easily penetrable.
- He is a lawyer who argues cases and makes decisions, which indicates a rational, structured mind accustomed to logic and human argument. Yet this external rationality contrasts sharply with the surreal, silent garden environment where "the ear is dead."
- The repeated motif of deafness is central to his character. While Mr. Spitzer physically experiences a kind of internal "roaring" in his right ear, a noise which "did not come from this world," he is metaphorically deaf to true communication or sound in the broader existential sense described by Catherine.
- The conversations with Catherine underline Mr. Spitzer's role as a symbol of human limitation and isolation. Despite his attempts to speak and reason, he is trapped in a world where "there was no sound" and "he could not hear another's voice, not even his own voice speaking." This frames him as a figure caught between the rational world of law and argument and a deeper, more profound silence that challenges or negates those faculties.
- Their interaction reveals a tension between denial and acceptance of this silence and deafness. Mr. Spitzer tries to argue against the idea that his ear is dead, pointing out that, if she means his dead brother's ear, his brother was not buried anywhere on the estate, yet Catherine remains insistent that "the ear was dead," emphasizing a metaphysical or symbolic deafness beyond just physical hearing.
- Mr. Spitzer's character embodies the tragic human predicament of isolation and the failure of communication. The novel suggests that even in his legal profession, where voice and argument are paramount, his voice is unheard in the cosmic or existential sense. This heightens the pathos of his character as someone who functions in society but is fundamentally cut off from true connection or understanding.

Research: Themes

Transformation and Loss of Certitude

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- The chapter begins with a farewell to the last certainty Vera held, symbolized by the tender memory of her fourteenth birthday and the figure of Miss MacIntosh.
- Vera realizes that Miss MacIntosh, once considered an ordinary and stable presence, is in fact mysterious and unknowable. This realization marks a profound change in her perception of reality.
- The metaphor of crossing a frozen Lake Constance, an impossible feat, symbolizes the transition from ignorance to knowledge and the shock of awakening to a new reality that alters all previous understandings.

Illusion versus Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- Vera describes the world and past experiences as fabrications or illusions, comparing the past to a corpse laid bare to reveal its true nature, which often contradicts prior assumptions.
- This theme is emphasized through the farewell to familiar places, routines, and moralities that now seem deceptive or false.

Memory and Change

See: Memory and the Past

- Miss MacIntosh, once a familiar figure, will henceforth be seen as almost a stranger due to Vera's new awareness.
- Vera anticipates that all memories and familiar objects will be differently understood, weighted with new meanings.
- This reflects the theme that memory is mutable and that new knowledge reshapes how the past, and people once thought known, are perceived.

The Garden of the Deaf

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Vera wanders gardens where, in Catherine's visions, historical and literary figures stroll at a perpetual garden party, a symbol of the mind's landscape where past and present, life and death intermingle.
- The garden is where the "ear is dead," meaning silence reigns and sound is absent, which symbolizes isolation, the limits of communication, and the finality of death.

- The dialogue between Catherine, who insists on the silence, and Mr. Spitzer, who argues against it yet cannot escape it, dramatizes the struggle to find meaning or connection in a silent, soundless world.

Life, Death, and Silence

See: Death and Mortality · Music, Sound, and Silence

- The chapter frequently reflects on mortality and the disappearance of sound, which metaphorically represents the death of communication and presence.
- The silence is described as pervasive and absolute, underscoring the theme of existential isolation and the ineffability of certain experiences.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Miss MacIntosh

See: Miss MacIntosh

- Initially a symbol of stability and ordinariness, she transforms into a mysterious figure, representing the unknowability of others and the fragile nature of relationships.

Frozen Lake Constance

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Symbolizes impossible journeys, transition from ignorance to painful knowledge, and the shattering of illusions.

Garden of the Deaf

See: Silence and Deafness

- Represents a mental or spiritual space where sound (life, communication) is absent, evoking death, silence, and isolation.

Chessboard and Chessmen

See: Alice in Wonderland · Cards, Games, and Chance · Fate and Chance

- Symbolize the complexity and hidden order of life’s movements and events despite apparent confusion.

Silence and Dead Ear

See: Silence and Deafness

- Represent the limits of perception and communication, the inevitability of death, and the isolation of the self.

Research: Resources

- “my fourteenth birthday”: The birthday party that never happened, in Chapters 10 and 12. See the Chapter 10 and Chapter 12 resources.
- “a perfect stranger I had lived with for seven years”: “From my seventh to my fourteenth birthday” (Chapter 9). See Miss MacIntosh and the Chapter 9 resources.
- “the weary traveller who rode over Lake Constance”: The legend is Gustav Schwab’s ballad “Der Reiter und der Bodensee” (The Rider and Lake Constance, 1826), later set to music by Robert Schumann. A horseman crosses the frozen lake in a snowstorm without knowing it and, told on the far shore where he has been, drops dead of fright. See Snow, Ice, and Winter.
  - Lake Constance is made up of three bodies of water on the Rhine at the foot of the Alps.
  - The lake seldom freezes over. It froze in 1830, 1880, and the winter of 1962-63.
- “terra firma”: Latin for “solid ground.”
- “a trembling sea of glass”: “And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal” (Revelation 4:6). See Revelation and the Apocalypse and the Chapter 10 resources.
- “Where is North Dakota, and what is a monsoon, and what is a mirage”: Schoolbooks of the time taught by rote question and answer, as the catechism did.
- “fixed like the North star”: “But I am constant as the northern star, / Of whose true-fix’d and resting quality / There is no fellow in the firmament” (Julius Caesar 3.1). See Shakespeare and Moon and Stars.
- “my mother feigned death”: Juliet drinks the Friar’s potion to lie as if dead (Romeo and Juliet 4.1). See Shakespeare and the Chapter 12 resources.
- “farewell to What Cheer”: What Cheer, Iowa, Miss MacIntosh’s hometown. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest and the Chapter 9 resources.
- “immortal gardens”: In Plato’s Apology, Socrates looks forward to death as a chance to converse with Orpheus, Homer, and Hesiod. See Plato and Platonism.
- “Dr. Galen”: Galen (129-c. 216), born Aelius Galenus, was a Greek physician, surgeon, and philosopher. He was one of antiquity’s most influential medical researchers, making significant contributions to anatomy, physiology, and pharmacology, among other fields. His work, based on animal dissections and detailed observations, dominated Western medicine for more than 1,300 years. His anatomy stood until Andreas Vesalius published De humani corporis fabrica in 1543, and in 1242 the Arab physician Ibn al-Nafis had already described the pulmonary circulation Galen missed. Galen saw himself as both physician and philosopher, as he wrote in That the Best Physician Is Also a Philosopher. (Wikipedia) He built his theory of temperament on the four humors. He taught that the liver makes blood and the body uses it up, which Harvey overturned.

- “Dr. Harvey”: William Harvey was the first known physician to describe in detail the human circulatory system, in De Motu Cordis (1628).
    - “sublunar mysteries”: Aristotle divided the cosmos into the changing, mortal world below the moon and the unchanging heavens above it.
- “Oliver Goldsmith”: Oliver Goldsmith was an Irish writer, poet, playwright, and novelist known for works like the novel The Vicar of Wakefield and the play She Stoops to Conquer. He was a versatile author who also achieved success as a poet. The Deserted Village is a poem by Goldsmith published in 1770, a lament for a lost country village, as Vera bids farewell to What Cheer. It is a work of social commentary that condemns rural depopulation and the pursuit of excessive wealth. (Wikipedia)
- “Ben Jonson”: Ben Jonson was a significant early modern English poet and playwright, known for his satirical comedies, masques, and poetry. He was a contemporary of Shakespeare, received a royal pension in 1616, which has led some to call him England’s first Poet Laureate, and is celebrated for plays like Volpone (a dark comedy about greed and corruption) and The Alchemist (a satire about fraud and human folly). “To Celia,” also known as “Drink to me only with thine eyes,” is a famous love song by Ben Jonson, first published in his 1616 collection The Forest. (Wikipedia) See Shakespeare.
- “a perpetual garden party omitting the tragic spirit”: The Epicureans met in the Garden, the school Epicurus founded in Athens. See Epicureanism and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
    - Marguerite Young loved Anatole France’s writing and read him widely, in French as well as in English. When her grandmother died, her first thought was that “now she can tell Anatole France that she has a little granddaughter on Earth who adores him” (Marguerite Young, interview with Charles Ruas, “The Art of Fiction No. 66,” The Paris Review 71, Fall 1977). Anatole France was a French author, poet, and critic who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1921. His short story “Marguerite” first appeared in book form in Paris in 1920, with woodcuts by Siméon, and in J. Lewis May’s English translation in 1921 (Project Gutenberg edition of the John Lane translation, 1921). France had socialist sympathies and was an outspoken supporter of the 1917 Russian Revolution, and in 1920 he backed the newly founded French Communist Party. (Wikipedia)
    - The Garden of Epicurus by Anatole France is a book of short essays and reflections (1894) that explores the nature of happiness, the pursuit of knowledge, and the struggle for personal freedom. France doubts that anyone can be known, even to himself: “What a foolish phrase, the ‘know thyself’ of the Greek philosopher! Why, we can never know either ourselves or others.” No one, he says, has ever told everything: “It would be so profoundly interesting to listen to a confession that was absolutely sincere! Yet since the world began, nothing of the kind has ever been heard.” The past, too, comes to us shaped by art: the historian presents facts “stripped of almost all the individual peculiarities that constitute them facts,” for “History is not a science, it is an art,” and “Beauty undraped is no beauty, and what

we love the best is always the unknown" (The Garden of Epicurus, trans. Alfred Allinson, 1908, pp. 67, 93-94, 123-124, 128). One of his favorite periods was the transition from paganism to Christianity (Catharine Savage Brosman, Dictionary of Literary Biography). His English publisher called him "a pagan, but a pagan constantly haunted by the preoccupation of Christ" (John Lane, 1908).
    - The Epicurean "fourfold remedy," handed down by Philodemus: Don't fear the gods. Don't worry about death. What is good is easy to get. What is terrible is easy to endure.
- "anti-masks and masks": The antimasque, a grotesque comic dance before the stately masque, was Ben Jonson's invention in The Masque of Queens (1609).
- "the life-sized chessmen": In Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking-Glass (1871), Alice crosses a countryside laid out as a chessboard with living pieces. The chessmen have stood in this garden since Chapter 1. See Alice in Wonderland, Cards, Games, and Chance, and the Chapter 2 resources.
- "as if played by invisible players who could perceive an order in multiple confusions of movements and sounds, a secret plan": "'Tis all a Chequer-board of Nights and Days / Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays" (Edward FitzGerald's Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, 1859). Heraclitus wrote, "Time is a child playing draughts," and "The hidden harmony is better than the obvious." See Fate and Chance and Heraclitus and Flux.
    - Heraclitus taught the unity of opposites: "The straight and the crooked path of the fuller's comb is one and the same"; "The way up is the way down"; "Beginning and end, on a circle's circumference, are common"; and "Thou shouldst unite things whole and things not whole, that which tends to unite and that which tends to separate, the harmonious and the discordant; from all things arises the one, and from the one all things." "Mortals are immortals and immortals are mortals, the one living the others' death and dying the others' life"; "As the same thing in us is living and dead, waking and sleeping, young and old. For these things having changed around are those, and those in turn having changed around are these"; and "Cold things warm up, the hot cools off, wet becomes dry, dry becomes wet." Diogenes Laërtius summarizes Heraclitus's philosophy as follows: "All things come into being by conflict of opposites, and the sum of things ('the whole') flows like a stream." (Wikipedia) His river fragment has survived in three different forms:
        - "On those who step into the same rivers, different and different waters flow" (Arius Didymus, quoted in Stobaeus)
        - "We both step and do not step into the same river, we both are and are not" (Heraclitus Homericus, Homeric Allegories)
        - "It is not possible to step into the same river twice" (Plutarch, On the E at Delphi)
    - Heraclitus said "strife is justice" and "all things take place by strife." He called the opposites in conflict "strife," and theorized that the apparently unitary state, "justice," results in "the most beautiful harmony."

- “the Venus was bearded by patriarchal fog”: Velázquez’s Venus at Her Mirror (1647-51), the Rokeby Venus, hangs in the National Gallery, London. On March 10, 1914, the suffragette Mary Richardson slashed it with a meat cleaver. “I have tried to destroy the picture of the most beautiful woman in mythological history as a protest against the Government for destroying Mrs Pankhurst, who is the most beautiful character in modern history. Justice is an element of beauty as much as colour and outline on canvas. Mrs Pankhurst seeks to procure justice for womanhood, and for this she is being slowly murdered by a Government of Iscariot politicians. If there is an outcry against my deed, let every one remember that such an outcry is an hypocrisy so long as they allow the destruction of Mrs Pankhurst and other beautiful living women, and that until the public cease to countenance human destruction the stones cast against me for the destruction of this picture are each an evidence against them of artistic as well as moral and political humbug and hypocrisy.” (Mary Richardson’s statement, The Times, London, March 11, 1914). See Women’s Suffrage.
    - The bearded Venus of Cyprus, a double-sexed Aphrodite, is described by Macrobius (Saturnalia 3.8).
- “The mist flowers drooped their purple, langorous heads”: Mistflower, a real wildflower of the American South, blooms in soft purple heads in late summer. See Roses and Flowers.
- “flew away like luna moths”: The pale green luna moth lives about a week as an adult and has no mouth to eat with. See Butterflies and Moths and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “I had come to the garden of the deaf”: The companion to the garden of the blind in Chapter 12. See Silence and Deafness and the Chapter 12 resources.
- “A frog screamed”: Frogs scream when seized by a predator. Bashō’s haiku (1686): “An old pond / a frog jumps in / the sound of water.”
- “It was not even so much as a straw blowing in the wind”: “They are as stubble before the wind, and as chaff that the storm carrieth away” (Job 21:18). See The Bible.
- “not even the creaking of starlight”: Aristotle reports the Pythagorean answer: the spheres do make music, and people do not hear it because they have heard it since birth (On the Heavens 2.9). Lorenzo tells Jessica, “Such harmony is in immortal souls; / But whilst this muddy vesture of decay / Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it” (The Merchant of Venice 5.1). See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres, Aristotle, and Shakespeare.
- “his brother had not been buried anywhere on this vast, amorphous estate”: Peron Spitzer, Joachim’s twin, lies elsewhere and is not among Catherine’s dead guests. See Peron Spitzer and Twins and Doubles.
- “a subdued roaring, a noise which came from the head only”: Tinnitus, a ringing or roaring in the ears with no outside source. Beethoven described it in the Heiligenstadt Testament (1802). See Joachim Spitzer, Deafness and Sign Language, and the Chapter 4 resources.

- “his music was the silence”: John Cage’s 4′33″ (1952) is a piece of silence, in which the audience hears only the sounds of the room. Mr. Spitzer has written “only silent music” (Chapter 2). See Joachim Spitzer, Music, Sound, and Silence, and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “One should see the bird and the shadow of the bird, but one should not hear the song”: Wallace Stevens, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird” (1917): “The blackbird whistling / Or just after.” See Birds.
- “never hear his voice speaking farewell”: The chapter that opened “Farewell to the last certitude” closes on a farewell no one hears.

Vocabulary

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Antimasque

A grotesque or comic dance performed before the stately masque at court.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Beclouded

Clouded over; confused.

Brood mare

A mare kept for breeding.

Certitude

Certainty.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chimerical

Imaginary, fanciful, or wildly unrealistic. From the Chimera, the fire-breathing monster of Greek myth made of a lion, a goat, and a serpent.

Congealed

Thickened or stiffened, as with cold.

Constitutional

A walk taken regularly for the sake of one’s health.

Coruscated

Sparkled; flashed.

Crystalline

Clear and sparkling, like crystal.

Delusive

Misleading; giving a false impression.

Egregiously

Outstandingly; shockingly.

Feigned

Pretended.

Fish hawk

The osprey, a hawk that dives for fish.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Gossamer

A fine film of cobweb; anything light and delicate.

Indisposed

Slightly ill; unwell.

Languorous

Oppressive stillness or tiredness, inactivity of a pleasurable kind. Young spells it “langorous.”

Luna moth

A large pale green moth of North America with long tails on its hind wings.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Moldering

Slowly crumbling into decay.

Monsoon

A seasonal wind in South Asia that brings months of heavy rain.

Ominous

Threatening; foreboding.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Patriarchal

Of or ruled by fathers or men; venerable like a patriarch.

Pigeon-breasted

Having a chest that juts forward like a pigeon’s.

Pompous

Self-important; puffed up.

Proverbial

Of proverbs; widely known.

Sentient

Able to feel and perceive.

Slumberous

Sleepy; inducing sleep.

Snood

A hairnet or band worn to hold the hair at the back of the head.

Somnambulist

A sleepwalker.

Sonority

Fullness of sound.

Sublunar

Beneath the moon; earthly.

Supernumerary

Extra; more than the number needed. In the theater, an extra with no lines.

Terra firma

Solid ground.

Turgid

Swollen; also, pompous in style.

Unassuming

Modest.

Undergrowth

Shrubs and plants growing beneath trees.

Whaler

A whaling ship or a man who hunts whales.

Chapter 14

Content note: *This chapter deals with suicide: Mr. Spitzer's twin brother Peron killed himself, perhaps, Mr. Spitzer thinks, in order to kill the other twin.*

Summary

Vera comes to the grave of the black coachman, who drove the carriage and four white horses for her grandfather, his blind mother, his unmarried sister, and his blind wife, and outlived them all. Catherine, who had not visited the grave for years, perhaps never, cannot stop asking Mr. Spitzer about it: whether the coachman was buried, as she ordered, with the carriage and horses so that he could go on driving her in death, and in his livery. She insists the arrangement was his idea, though he had no wages for years and she cannot remember his name. Her questions turn on Mr. Spitzer himself. His twin Peron, the quick, brilliant gambler, fell from a tall building, and Joachim lives on in his brother's shadow, finding his cigarette still burning in a coat pocket and an ace dropping from his sleeve, and being taken for him in the street. Catherine counts four Mr. Spitzers, mocks his train journeys, and accuses him of losing the coachman. She talks on after he has gone and, at dawn, asks for the grave of "the slow one, the sick musician she had always loved," reversing which twin she lost.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · The Black Coachman · The Old Clam Digger · Mr. Chandelier · Mr. Res Tacamah

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Duality and Doubles · Fate and Chance · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · Society, Class, and Race

Symbols: Birds · Cards, Games, and Chance · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Dogs · Horses and Carriages · Roses and Flowers · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Sea and Water · Twins and Doubles · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Aristotle · Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Augustine and Christian Theology · Descartes and Dualism · Hinduism · Kant and Hegel · Phenomenology · Plato and Platonism · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres · Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory

Allusions: American Writers · Astronomy · Dante · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Music and Composers · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job · The Civil War · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with Vera’s reflection on the grave of the black coachman, a figure who drove the family carriage with four white horses. Catherine, in her illness and hallucinations, obsessively wonders about the black coachman’s grave and whether he was buried with the carriage and horses as she had instructed, by the sea where one might still hear the sounds of hooves and carriage wheels. This passage sets the tone of uncertainty and haunting memory, questioning the final resting place and fate of the coachman and symbolizing the fragile boundary between life, death, and memory.
- Catherine believes in “two Mr. Spitzers,” referencing a duality or doubling that permeates the narrative. Mr. Spitzer himself is portrayed as a figure caught between realities as possibly the survivor of a tragic loss, burdened by his brother’s death and his own diminished existence. His silence about the black coachman and other mysteries reflects his internal conflict and the blurring of identities, especially between himself and his deceased brother.
- The narrative delves deeply into Mr. Spitzer’s troubled life: his failed law practice, his haunted memories, and the confusion between himself and his brother. He is pursued by people who mistake him for his dead brother, and he carries the burden of that mistaken identity. His life is marked by a sense of loss, failure, and existential ambiguity, symbolized by repeated motifs such as the playing cards (four aces), the silent music he composes, and his futile attempts to make sense of his past and present.
- Catherine’s hallucinations and visions serve as a counterpoint to Mr. Spitzer’s silence. She imagines vast, surreal scenes (funeral gondolas, angels, floating faces, and shifting landscapes) reflecting her mental state and the dissolution of clear boundaries between reality and illusion. Her insistence on the black coachman’s significance and her questioning of Mr. Spitzer highlights the themes of memory, loss, and the search for meaning in chaos.
- The idea of multiple Mr. Spitzers (four in total) and the tragic fate of one brother killing himself to erase the other introduces a metaphysical layer about identity, fate, and the cosmic balance between opposites (life and death, presence and absence, order and chaos). The chapter explores the instability of self and the universe, where even laws (human and divine) seem uncertain or contested.
- Throughout the chapter, both Catherine and Mr. Spitzer grapple with what is real and what is illusion. Catherine challenges Mr. Spitzer on his stories of travel, on the whereabouts of the black coachman, and on the nature of the world around them, pointing out contradictions and impossibilities, suggesting that much of what is accepted as real is mutable and uncertain. Mr. Spitzer’s evasiveness and Catherine’s accusations of his lying deepen this uncertainty.

- The description of the brother’s funeral, with its symbolic white roses and horse racing imagery, stands out as a poignant moment that crystallizes the theme of mourning and the loneliness of the surviving Mr. Spitzer. The image of the corpse as the only mourner is a powerful metaphor for isolation and the burden of memory.
- Mr. Spitzer’s retreat into composing “silent music,” music not heard by living ears but meant for the dead, symbolizes his withdrawal from the world and the limits of communication between the living and the dead, between reality and dream. This motif ties into the overarching theme of failed communication and the ineffability of certain experiences.
- “Her body was the carriage, and her soul, now it seemed, was the passenger, and her horses were her will, and the coachman was her conscience.” Catherine’s own map of herself is the ancient chariot of the soul.
- Catherine orders her Black servant buried with her carriage to serve her in death, claims it “had been the coachman’s idea, not hers,” cannot recall his name, and admits he “had had no wages for years.” She is the mistress who will not let even death end his service.
- At dawn she asks for “the grave… of the other Mr. Spitzer, the slow one, the sick musician she had always loved.” The living twin is now the dead one.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “If she could find him, she could perhaps find herself, the bewildered passenger.” Why does everything depend on the coachman?
- “He could not say no unless he should say yes.” What does this say about Mr. Spitzer’s silence?
- “The loser was the victor.” Who won the game between the twins?

Characters

- “What, my mother would ask, had been that black coachman’s name? … but what was a name?” What does Catherine’s forgetting reveal?
- Joachim lets strangers believe he is his brother: “Thus his brother lived.” Is this love, guilt, or something else?
- Catherine “was very much confused by clarities.” What is she clear about?

Connections

- Mr. Spitzer’s “dead ear” from Chapter 13 has moved from right to left. Why does Catherine keep changing which ear is dead?

- The life-sized chessmen and invisible players of Chapter 13 become the Devil playing “with man for man’s soul.” Who is playing here?
- Rhadamanthus judged Mr. Spitzer in Chapter 11, and now Catherine tries “Spitzer versus Spitzer.” What is the charge?

Reflection

- Can a person go on serving someone past death? Should anyone be asked to?
- Is it possible to live another person’s life to keep him alive?
- “One understands the mystery only by proposing the greater mystery.” Is that true?

Research: Characters

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s Mother)

- Ailing and often delirious, she is obsessed with locating the black coachman and understanding the fate of her family’s legacy.
- She experiences visions and hallucinations, blurring the line between reality and fantasy.
- She is deeply distrustful of Mr. Spitzer and concerned that her last wishes have been ignored or betrayed.
- In “codicil after codicil” she left the coachman first one thing and then “everything,” even her old, empty gowns, though he was dead or unpaid.

Joachim Spitzer

- Joachim Spitzer is depicted as one of two Mr. Spitzers (twins or doubles) each reflecting and haunting the other. The chapter explores the idea that there were “four Mr. Spitzers,” due to reflections and mirrored images, and that the boundaries between them blur, creating a complicated identity crisis.
- This duality extends to the notion that one Mr. Spitzer is “vacant and slow and smiling,” while the other had died by suicide, attempting to “kill the Mr. Spitzer who was the pale reflection in his own heart.”
- The surviving Spitzer is burdened by his brother’s shadow, the “dark counterpart running through all his nights and days,” which disrupts his peace and confounds his existence.
- Joachim is portrayed as a man who has not achieved conventional success.
- He is described as a “failure,” living “the most retired, the most unassuming life” in the shadow of his brother’s more colorful and gregarious personality.
- Despite his literal-mindedness and conservative habits, he is haunted by self-doubt and confusion, often unsure of his own actions and memories.

- Instances such as finding his brother’s belongings in his coat pockets, or the mysterious “second cup of coffee” he supposedly drank but cannot explain, illustrate his fragmented sense of self and reality.
- Joachim’s relationship with Vera’s mother is complex. He is her lawyer, executor, and companion in her illness, yet she doubts his trustworthiness and resents his evasiveness and silence.
- Catherine’s obsession with the black coachman (a symbolic figure representing continuity, memory, and conscience) serves as a foil to Joachim’s own failures and ambiguities.
- She accuses him of neglecting or betraying the black coachman and the family’s legacy, suggesting that he may have “cheated the black coachman out of his employment and inheritance” and failed to honor her dying wishes.
- Joachim’s inability or unwillingness to answer her questions about the black coachman and other matters deepens the tension and highlights his evasive nature.
- Joachim is a man of silence and restraint, in contrast to his brother’s vibrant life.
- He has ceased composing “oral music” and instead writes “silent music, a dirge for a dead clam,” symbolizing his withdrawal from active life and communication.
- This self-imposed silence and his “utter self-forgetfulness and selflessness” suggest a man resigned to obscurity and loss, attempting to protect himself and others from the chaos that surrounds him.
- His life is overshadowed by the death of his brother, an event that has left him “hopelessly benumbed” and struggling to keep up with time and reality.
- He is pursued by people who mistake him for his deceased brother, and he attempts to shield his brother’s memory, sometimes maintaining the illusion that the brother still lives.
- This haunting presence causes him distress but also a certain pride in having “preferred the last footstep, the last doorway,” indicating a preference for quiet endurance over dramatic exit.
- Joachim is enveloped in mystery and ambiguity. His actions and whereabouts are uncertain; he is sometimes imagined wearing the black coachman’s livery, sometimes unable to explain trivial facts like train journeys.
- His existence blurs the line between the living and the dead, the real and the illusory.
- He is “a man who did not know himself” and whose life is marked by “minor but palpable discrepancies” and “things which did not add up.”
- Joachim’s character is embedded in a cosmic framework where ordinary human concerns intersect with metaphysical questions.
- He and Catherine speak of “the music of the spheres,” “the silent music,” and the “lawless image of the dream,” suggesting a man grappling with the ultimate nature of reality and existence.

- His legal work, particularly the “case of Spitzer versus Spitzer,” symbolizes his internal conflict and the unresolved tensions of his identity.
- Joachim shows a degree of faithfulness and compassion, toward Catherine.
- He visits Catherine regularly, tries to please her, and protects her interests “to the best of his present legal ability.” However, his “slumberous inertia” and evasiveness frustrate her, revealing a gap between his intentions and her expectations.
- Joachim Spitzer’s life is inextricably linked to the death of his brother Peron. The brother’s suicide or accidental death seems to have precipitated a crisis in Joachim’s identity and existence.
- He is described as having taken up his brother’s mantle in some respects: wearing his brother’s cufflinks, carrying his cane, and even being mistaken for him by acquaintances. Yet he is also deeply burdened by the consequences, trying to protect his brother’s reputation while simultaneously being haunted by his brother’s unresolved, chaotic life.
- This complicated relationship fuels Joachim’s feelings of inadequacy and deepens his tendency toward silence and withdrawal.

Peron Spitzer

- The quick, brilliant twin, a gambler “in the horse circles,” who “had fallen from a tall building.”
- Catherine calls him the one “loved by her, yet never loving her,” yet at dawn she mourns “the slow one, the sick musician,” confusing which twin she lost.

The Old Clam Digger

- The clam-digger is Mr. Spitzer’s manservant.
- He swears Mr. Spitzer drank the second cup of coffee himself.

The Black Coachman

- A symbolic and somewhat mythical figure associated with the family’s carriage and horses.
- Represents continuity, memory, and the link between life and death.
- Catherine’s wish was for the black coachman to be buried with the carriage and horses so that she might continue to “go driving” even after death.
- His actual fate and whereabouts are uncertain, and this uncertainty fuels much of Catherine’s anguish.
- Catherine has also defined the Black Coachman as her conscience.
- Catherine insists the burial was “the coachman’s idea, not hers,” that “money had meant nothing to him,” though he had no wages for years, the old excuses of those who kept Black servants unpaid.

- She cannot remember his name, only his “white, rolling eyes.”

Research: Themes

Memory, Identity, and Duality

See: Memory and the Past · Identity and the Self · Duality and Doubles

- The chapter explores fractured identities, especially through the figure of Mr. Spitzer and his deceased brother.
- Catherine perceives multiple overlapping realities and versions of Mr. Spitzer, reflecting her confusion and the blurred boundaries of life and death.
- The motif of “four Mr. Spitzers” suggests layered selves and mirrored images, raising questions about selfhood and existence.

Death and the Afterlife

See: Death and Mortality

- Catherine’s visions often revolve around death, funerals, and the journey beyond life.
- The black coachman and the family carriage symbolize passage and continuity after death, and also her conscience and her body.
- There is a persistent questioning of what happens after death and whether true peace or harmony exists beyond.

Illusion versus Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- Catherine’s hallucinations and the shifting perceptions of Mr. Spitzer’s reliability highlight the tension between what is real and what is imagined.
- Mr. Spitzer’s evasiveness and Catherine’s accusations create a dynamic where truth is elusive and layered with doubt.

Law and Order versus Chaos

See: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- Mr. Spitzer embodies legal order but is portrayed as overwhelmed by the disorder of life and his own ghosts.
- Catherine’s world is chaotic, filled with shifting images, ghosts, and memories that resist neat categorization.

Family Legacy and Betrayal

See: Memory and the Past

- Catherine suspects Mr. Spitzer of betraying the black coachman and mishandling her will and the family estate.
- There is a theme of lost inheritance, broken promises, and the failure of caretakers to uphold traditions.

Race and Servitude

See: Society, Class, and Race

- The black coachman is unpaid, nameless, and ordered to serve in death.
- He is described by the minstrel-show stereotype of “white, rolling eyes.”
- Catherine’s slip, “the carriage and the white coachman and the four black horses, what had become of the color line?” turns the whole arrangement inside out.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Black Coachman and the Family Carriage

See: Horses and Carriages

- Symbolizes continuity beyond death, the passage of time, and the family’s legacy, Catherine’s conscience and body.
- The mystery of his grave and whether he was buried with his horses signifies Catherine’s fear of disruption and loss.

White Horses (King, Queen, Prince, Spade)

See: Horses and Carriages

- These horses have personified names and represent stability and tradition.
- Their fate is ambiguous, mirroring the uncertainty in the narrative.

Mr. Spitzer’s Hat and Garments

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- The black cape, high silk hat, silver buttons evoke the image of the coachman, suggesting blurred identities and roles.

Playing Cards (Aces)

See: Cards, Games, and Chance

- The four aces that drop from Mr. Spitzer’s sleeve symbolize the four Mr. Spitzers and the layered selves.
- The cards also represent fate, chance, and the game of life and death.

The Funeral and the Graveyard

See: Weddings and Funerals

- The funeral scenes, especially Mr. Spitzer's brother's funeral, symbolize mourning, loss, and the passage of time.
- Catherine's absence from funerals and the details of the mourning rituals emphasize her detachment and the fragmented nature of her existence.

Imagery of Water, Snow, and Night

See: The Sea and Water · Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Recurring references to water, foaming seas, snowflakes, and darkness evoke a liminal, otherworldly atmosphere.
- These natural elements symbolize change, decay, and the boundary between life and death.

Research: Resources

- "the four white horses": White horses in mythology are often associated with the sun chariot, warrior-heroes, fertility, and an end-of-time savior. The white horses symbolize the solemn, mystical journey of the soul from life into death and beyond, carrying Catherine through the shifting landscapes of memory, dream, and existence by her will. They are a powerful emblem of transition, purity, fate, and the ethereal nature of mortality in the novel. In Revelation, "behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him" (Revelation 6:2). See Horses and Carriages and Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- "the barkings of spotted coach dogs running beside the wheels": Dalmatians were bred to run beside carriages, clearing the road and guarding the horses. See Dogs and Horses and Carriages.
- "a dark porte-cochere": A porte-cochere is a covered entrance where a carriage stops so its passengers can step down out of the weather.
- "Nothing should be missing from the chaos, not one leaf that ever fell": "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father" (Matthew 10:29). See The Bible.
- "her Seeing Eye dogs": The Seeing Eye, the first American guide dog school, was founded in 1929. See Dogs and the Chapter 2 resources.
- "she had asked, long, long ago, that the black coachman be buried with the carriage and the white horses": Chariot burials are tombs in which the deceased was buried together with their chariot, usually including their horses and other possessions. An instance of a person being buried with their horse (without the chariot) is called horse burial. (Wikipedia)

    - In the royal tombs of Ur, Leonard Woolley found (1920s) grooms, attendants, and oxen buried with their masters' carts, servants sent to serve in death.
- "himself the food of worms": "Your worm is your only emperor for diet" (Hamlet 4.3). See Shakespeare and the Chapter 10 resources.
- "but what was a name?": "What's in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other word would smell as sweet" (Romeo and Juliet 2.2). Catherine says it of a servant whose name no one kept. See Shakespeare and The Black Coachman.
- "King and Queen, Prince and Spade": The horses are named like playing cards, and the aces fall later in the chapter. See Horses and Carriages and Gambling and Playing Cards.
- "The black coachman had had no wages for years": The history of domestic work in the United States is deeply intertwined with the exploitation of Black women, men, and immigrant laborers through systemic racism, limited economic opportunities, and discriminatory labor practices. Enslaved Black women performed essential, unpaid domestic labor before emancipation, with conditions often leading to sexual abuse and the work continuing in a similar vein after abolition. For both Black and immigrant workers, this path was one of few available options, resulting in low pay, long hours, and a lack of protections, while modern policies continue to perpetuate a cycle of vulnerability. See The Black Coachman and Society, Class, and Race.
- "the black coachman with the white, rolling eyes": The "white, rolling eyes" are the stock caricature of minstrel shows and early films, which made Black servants figures of fear and comedy. See The Black Coachman and Society, Class, and Race.
- "instead of a winding sheet": A winding sheet is a cloth to wrap a body with for burial. The winding sheet here serves as a powerful symbol of the inevitable mortality that envelops all, including the black coachman and the other characters intertwined in the narrative's exploration of life, death, and memory. It is a reminder of the mortality underlying the novel's dreamlike and sometimes surreal atmosphere. See Death and Mortality.
- "in codicil after codicil": A codicil is an amendment added to a will.
- "she had not been unduly influenced or coerced, and she had been possessed of all her mental faculties": The language of a will: "being of sound mind," free of "undue influence." A will can be overturned if its maker lacked capacity or was coerced.
- "the twelve moons shining over Jupiter": Galileo found four of Jupiter's moons in 1610. The twelfth was found in 1951, so twelve was the count when Young wrote. See Astronomy.
- "Did his right hand know what his left hand did": "But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth" (Matthew 6:3). See The Bible.
- "the law of gravity defied and golden apples falling upward": Newton's falling apple, and the golden apples of the Hesperides. See Greek Mythology.
- "the excellent clam-digger": Mr. Spitzer's manservant, who swears Mr. Spitzer drank the second cup of coffee himself. See The Old Clam Digger.

- “the Manchurian or some other conflict”: Manchuria is a region of northeast China. The conflict is likely Japan’s seizure of it in 1931, or the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, fought there.
- “suits for heart’s balm”: Breach-of-promise and alienation-of-affection suits, which many states abolished in the 1930s.
- “their cosmic union in the womb of time”: “There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered” (Othello 1.3). See Shakespeare, Twins and Doubles, and the Chapter 5 resources.
- “the plural melody which was not Mr. Spitzer’s composition or choice”: His “melody moving or attended by one or more related but independent arrangements of sounds” is nearly the dictionary definition of polyphony, or counterpoint, several independent melodies sounding at once. See Music and Composers.
- “he had spoken to her out of the whirlwind”: “Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind” (Job 38:1). See The Book of Job.
- “There should be the same divisions and multiplications”: Multiplicity is a philosophical concept developed by Edmund Husserl and Henri Bergson from Riemann’s description of the mathematical concept. Bergson distinguished two kinds: a countable multiplicity of distinct parts, and a qualitative one whose parts interpenetrate. (Wikipedia)
- “the Battle of the Roses”: The Wars of the Roses (1455-1487) were a series of civil wars in England between the houses of York, with its white rose, and Lancaster, with its red. See Roses and Flowers.
- “the funeral gondola with the corrugated angel at its helm”: Venice carries its dead by black gondola to the cemetery island of San Michele. Liszt wrote “La lugubre gondola” (1882) foreseeing Wagner’s death in Venice, and Wagner’s body left by gondola in 1883. See Weddings and Funerals and Music and Composers.
- “the golden cock perched at the foot of her bed, that it was really Pythagoras shedding his golden feathers”: In Lucian’s dialogue “The Dream, or the Cock,” a cobbler’s rooster reveals that it is Pythagoras reborn. Pythagoras was said to have a golden thigh. Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera The Golden Cockerel (1909), from Pushkin’s tale (1834), has a golden cock that warns a tsar. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres, Birds, and the Chapter 11 resources.
    - The teaching most securely identified with Pythagoras is the “transmigration of souls” or metempsychosis, which holds that every soul is immortal and, upon death, enters into a new body. He may have also devised the doctrine of musica universalis, which holds that the planets move according to mathematical equations and thus resonate to produce an inaudible symphony of music. (Wikipedia)
    - Alectryomancy is a form of divination involving roosters and a method of seeking answers or predictions by observing the behavior of roosters.
    - Weissenbach saw such a bird. Young was with her “when the golden bird, which was the spirit of Heraclitus, came and perched upon the bedpost” (Marguerite Young, interview with Charles Ruas, WBAI radio, New York), and remembered “a

beautiful golden cockerel perched at the foot of her bed, sometimes emitting messages in the Greek language" (Marguerite Young, interview, WNYC radio, New York).

- "Isabella of Spain": Isabella I of Castile backed Columbus, established the Spanish Inquisition, and expelled Spain's Jews in 1492.
- "imaginary street Arabs": "Street Arab" was the Victorian name for homeless children, a slur drawn from the image of Arabs as rootless wanderers. See Society, Class, and Race.
- "a palimpsest of many hieroglyphic writings": A palimpsest is a parchment scraped and written over, the old text still faintly showing. Thomas De Quincey called the human brain one in "The Palimpsest of the Human Brain" (1845). See The History of Opium.
- "the appearance beyond the appearance": Plato's Allegory of the Cave, in which prisoners take the shadows on a wall for reality. See Plato and Platonism and the Chapter 12 resources.
- "knew that the dog was Socrates": Socrates was a Greek philosopher who wrote no texts of his own but is credited as one of the founders of Western philosophy. In the work Republic, written by Plato, there is a Socratic dialogue. In it Socrates argues that the dog is very much like a philosopher because the dog distinguishes the face of a friend and of an enemy only by the criterion of knowing and not knowing. (Wikipedia) Socrates swore "By the dog, the god of the Egyptians" (Gorgias 482b). See Plato and Platonism and Dogs.
- "she had a third eye in her forehead": The third eye is a mystical and esoteric concept of an invisible eye on the forehead that provides perception beyond ordinary sight. In Indian spiritual traditions it is the ajna, or brow, chakra, and Buddhists regard it as the "eye of consciousness." (Wikipedia) The third eye symbolizes a mystical insight and a deeper understanding of the unseen worlds as an insight that both enlightens and alienates Catherine from ordinary human experience. Descartes placed the soul's seat in the pineal gland, which some have called the third eye. See Descartes and Dualism, Hinduism, and the Chapter 43 resources.
- "a skeleton with an hour-glass in his hands": Death's figure in the Dance of Death, carrying the hourglass of a life's measured time. See Death and Mortality and the Chapter 6 resources.
- "her peacocks": Aristotle referred to the peacock's vain reputation. The Roman poet Ennius, following the Pythagorean teaching of rebirth, dreamed that Homer's soul had passed into a peacock and then into himself. See Birds.
- "Mrs. Astor could not go, and Mrs. Vanderbilt would not be seen": Mrs. Astor is Caroline Schermerhorn Astor, a famous American socialite who led the Four Hundred, the list of New York society in the Gilded Age. Mrs. Vanderbilt is likely Grace Graham Wilson Vanderbilt, another American socialite of the Vanderbilt family. In 1883 Alva Vanderbilt's costume ball forced Mrs. Astor to call on the Vanderbilts, a famous defeat for old society. See Society, Class, and Race.

- “Czar Kolokol, the King of the Bells”: It is known as the Tsar Bell. It is the largest bell in the world that has never rung. It was cast in 1733-35 and cracked in the Kremlin fire of 1737 when cold water struck the hot metal. (Wikipedia)
- “Was it before or after the Revolution”: The Russian Revolution of 1917 refers to two distinct revolutions that occurred in that year, ultimately leading to the end of the Tsarist regime and the rise of Bolshevik rule in Russia. The first, the February Revolution, overthrew the Czar Nicholas II, while the second, the October Revolution, saw the Bolsheviks seize power. February Revolution (March 1917): Widespread strikes and protests in Petrograd (St. Petersburg) against food shortages and World War I led to the Tsar’s abdication and the establishment of a provisional government. October Revolution (November 1917): The Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, seized control of the government, ending the provisional government and paving the way for a socialist state (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The Bolsheviks’ seizure of power ignited a civil war with anti-communist forces, ultimately resulting in the Bolshevik victory and the establishment of the Soviet Union. The United States did not recognize the Soviet Union until 1933, the point of Catherine never breaking “her diplomatic relations with Moscow.”
- “the coachman was her conscience”: The Katha Upanishad: “Know the Self as the lord of the chariot, the body as the chariot, the intellect as the charioteer, the mind as the reins, and the senses as the horses.” In Plato’s Phaedrus, the soul is a charioteer driving two horses. See Hinduism, Plato and Platonism, and Horses and Carriages.
    - G. I. Gurdjieff likened a person to a horse and carriage: the horse is the emotional body, the carriage the physical body, and the driver the mind. (“Horse-and-buggy,” not “horse and carriage,” is the idiom for something outdated.) Funerals were traditionally drawn by horse and carriage before being replaced by automobiles. Even in the present day they are still used by the wealthy, for a famous person or significant death, or by someone wanting a special funeral procession.
    - A conscience is a cognitive process that elicits emotion and rational associations based on an individual’s moral philosophy or value system. In common terms, conscience is often described as leading to feelings of remorse when a person commits an act that conflicts with their moral values. (Wikipedia)
- “the case of Spitzer versus Spitzer”: A case in which he “must appear as both the defender and the accuser.” See Joachim Spitzer, Peron Spitzer, and Twins and Doubles.
- “Which was alpha, and which was omega?”: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord” (Revelation 1:8). See Revelation and the Apocalypse and the Chapter 8 resources.
- “a papal divorce from her dead husband”: The Church grants annulments, not divorces, and a husband’s death already ends a marriage.
- “a fundamental human weakness which was the desire to be deceived”: “The world wants to be deceived, so let it be deceived.” Mundus vult decipi, ergo decipiatur. The saying is first found in Sebastian Franck (1534).

- “the financial bubbles”: The South Sea Bubble of 1720, when shares in the South Sea Company soared and collapsed and ruined thousands.
- “the Admiralty Law, the Lords Justices, the Vice-Chancellors, the Masters of the Rolls”: These are offices of the English courts: Admiralty law governs ships and the sea, the Vice-Chancellors sat in the Court of Chancery, and the Lords Justices and the Master of the Rolls sit in the Court of Appeal. Gilbert and Sullivan satirized this world of wigs and titles in *Iolanthe* (1882), which features the Lord Chancellor as a leading comic character.
- “the pettifoggers”: A pettifogger is a lawyer whose methods are petty, underhanded, or disreputable.
- “what had become of the color line?”: W. E. B. Du Bois: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line” (The Souls of Black Folk, 1903). Catherine has just turned the coachman white and the horses black. See Society, Class, and Race and The Black Coachman.
- “the stone fleet manned by stone figures”: In 1861 the Union sank old New England whaling ships, loaded with stone, to block Charleston harbor. They were known as the Great Stone Fleet. See The Civil War.
- “the antinomies, both true, each contradicting the other”: Kant set out four antinomies in the Critique of Pure Reason (1781). An antinomy is a real or apparent contradiction between two conclusions, both of which seem justified. It is a term used in logic and epistemology, particularly in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant. Kant’s antinomies are four: two “mathematical” and two “dynamical.” They are connected with (1) the limitation of the universe in respect of space and time (whether the universe has a beginning or is infinite), (2) the theory that the whole consists of indivisible atoms (whereas, in fact, none such exist), (3) the problem of free will in relation to universal causality (free will vs determinism), and (4) the existence of a necessary being. The first two antinomies are dubbed “mathematical” antinomies, presumably because in each case the concern is the relation between what are alleged to be sensible objects (either the world itself, or objects in it) and space and time. The second two are dubbed “dynamical” antinomies, presumably because the proponents of the thesis are not committing themselves solely to claims about spatio-temporal objects. (Wikipedia) See Kant and Hegel.
- “the octave, the eighth day of the week”: Early Christians called Sunday “the eighth day,” the day of the resurrection. A liturgical octave is a feast kept for eight days.
- “a delusion and a snare”: From Lord Denman’s judgment in O’Connell v. The Queen (1844): “a mockery, a delusion, and a snare.”
- “driving a coach and six through a legal statute”: Attributed to the Irish judge Stephen Rice in the 1680s: “I will drive a coach and six through the Act of Settlement.” See Horses and Carriages.
- “a short life but a merry one”: “A merry life and a short one,” the motto of the pirate Bartholomew Roberts (1720s).

- “a long weekend in Newport”: Newport, Rhode Island, where Gilded Age families summered in marble “cottages.” See Society, Class, and Race and the Chapter 10 resources.
- “Mr. Spitzer had attended Mr. Spitzer’s funeral”: Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn watch their own funeral from the church gallery (The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, 1876). See American Writers.
- “a horseshoe of white roses”: Floral horseshoes and saddles of roses honored racing men. Since 1932 the Kentucky Derby winner has worn a garland of roses. See Roses and Flowers, Horses and Carriages, and the Chapter 43 resources.
- “the Phoenician fleet”: The Phoenicians, a seafaring people of the eastern Mediterranean, were the great sailors of the ancient world. Herodotus reports that Phoenician sailors went around Africa for Pharaoh Necho (c. 600 BC).
- “the Thirty Years’ War”: The Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648) was fought in Central Europe by different countries and included fighting between Catholics and Protestants.
- “Dr. Galen”: Galen was a Greek doctor in the Roman Empire. See the Chapter 13 resources.
- “Copernicus, the author of that great celestial revolution”: Nicolaus Copernicus formulated a model of the universe that placed the Sun rather than Earth at its center. (Wikipedia) His findings triggered the Copernican Revolution. His book was De revolutionibus (1543). Freud named Copernicus, with Darwin and psychoanalysis, as one of three blows to human pride (“A Difficulty in the Path of Psycho-Analysis,” 1917). See Astronomy.
- “He had dreamed that he had climbed a tensile rope to heaven”: The Indian rope trick, in which a rope rises into the air and a boy climbs it out of sight, and Jacob’s dream of a ladder “set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven” (Genesis 28:12). See The Bible and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “the music of the spheres, the silent music”: Boethius was a Roman senator, consul, magister officiorum, polymath, historian, and philosopher of the Early Middle Ages. He sought to reconcile the teachings of Plato and Aristotle with Christian theology. He broke logic into three parts: that which defines, that which divides, and that which deduces. There are three types of arguments: those of necessity, of ready believability, and sophistry. In De Musica there are three classifications: Musica mundana, Musica humana, Musica instrumentalis. In Dante’s Divine Comedy, the spirit of Boethius is pointed out by Saint Thomas Aquinas and is mentioned further in the poem. In his book De Institutione Musica (Fundamentals of Music) his drawings appear striking and may be an inspiration for the organization of Young’s novel. Musica universalis or music of the spheres or harmony of the spheres is a Greek philosophical concept founded by Pythagoras. This metaphysical principle stated that mathematical relationships could produce ‘tones’ of energy that could produce, among other things, sounds. Pythagoras proposed that the celestial bodies all have their own unique hum based on their orbital revolution. This idea influenced many scholars until the end of the Renaissance. Johannes Kepler, a German astronomer from the 1600s wrote extensively on the

subject. (Wikipedia) Later astronomy set it aside. Boethius wrote The Consolation of Philosophy in prison awaiting execution, with its Wheel of Fortune. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres and Dante.

- “one understands the mystery only by proposing the greater mystery”: The Latin obscurum per obscurius, explaining the obscure by the more obscure.
- “paper-backed dream books sold by fortunetellers”: Dream books matched dreams to numbers for the policy, or numbers, game played in poor neighborhoods, as in Aunt Sally’s Policy Players’ Dream Book (1889). See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “They placed the planets forty degrees off their course”: Because of the precession of the equinoxes, the signs of Western astrology have drifted from their constellations by nearly a whole sign since antiquity. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.
- “The playing card dropping from his sleeve each morning had nearly always been an ace”: The “ace up the sleeve” is the cardsharp’s hidden card. In most fortune-telling, the ace of spades is the death card. See Gambling and Playing Cards and Cards, Games, and Chance.
    - In fortune telling the Ace of Hearts when among hearts implies love, friendship, and affection; with diamonds, money and news of distant friends; with clubs, festivities, and social or domestic rejoicing; with spades, disagreements, misunderstandings, contention, or misfortune; individually, it stands for the house; Ace of Diamonds means a ring or paper money; Ace of Clubs means wealth, a peaceful home, industry, and general prosperity; Ace of Spades means love affairs, or conveys a warning that troubles await the inquirer through bad speculations or ill-chosen friends (P. R. S. Foli, Fortune-Telling by Cards, 1915).
    - The mystical meaning of cards for fortune telling are the fifty-two cards in the pack correspond with the fifty-two weeks in the year. The thirteen cards in each suit symbolize the thirteen lunar months, and the thirteen weeks in each quarter. There are four suits, as there are four seasons in the year. There are twelve court cards in the pack, just as there are twelve calendar months and twelve signs of the Zodiac. Counting ace as one and king as thirteen, the four suits add up to 364, and with the joker, 365, the days of the year (P. R. S. Foli, Fortune-Telling by Cards, 1915; Manly P. Hall, The Secret Teachings of All Ages, 1928).
- “the Devil plays with man for man’s soul”: Moritz Retzsch’s painting The Chess Players (1831) shows Satan playing chess with a young man for his soul while an angel watches. See Fate and Chance.
- “The club, which was trifoliate, might be transformed into the sign of the cross”: The club suit is a trefoil, and the shamrock was said to teach the Trinity. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “There were many transformations, many butterflies”: Steven Shaviro writes of the novel, “The difficulty of interpretation in this novel is that in a certain sense, there is nothing to interpret, since everything is right there; but the difficulty comes in grasping and holding onto just how these entirely clear phrases metamorphose into one another, intensify or double one another, contradict one another, derail one another,

and so on” (Steven Shaviro, “Lost Chords and Interrupted Births: Marguerite Young’s Exorbitant Vision,” Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction, 1990).

- “a place set for the dead”: The “dumb supper,” a folk custom of setting a place at table for the dead. See Death and Mortality.
- “a horse doctor talking as if he were an argumentative centaur”: Chiron, the wise centaur, was a healer and teacher of heroes. See Greek Mythology and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “at shrouded parimutuel windows”: The parimutuel, a betting pool shared among the winners, was invented by Joseph Oller in Paris in 1867. See Gambling and Playing Cards and Peron Spitzer.
- “incongruent harpers harping congruously”: “I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps” (Revelation 14:2). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “changed trains at Hartford”: The New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad electrified its lines from 1907. Hartford was “the insurance capital,” home of Aetna and Travelers, and Wallace Stevens worked there as an insurance executive. See the Chapter 13 resources.
- “Queen Victoria was dead”: She died January 22, 1901.

Vocabulary

Acquiescence

Quiet acceptance; going along without protest.

Antinomy

A contradiction between two conclusions that both seem true.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Avid

Eager or greedy.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Brackish

Of water: slightly salty, as where a river meets the sea.

Candor

Frankness; openness.

Capacious

Roomy; able to hold much.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Chagrin

Distress or annoyance at having failed or been humiliated.

Chameleon

A lizard that can change the color of its skin.

Clavichord

An early keyboard instrument with a soft, delicate sound.

Codicil

An amendment added to a will.

Constitutional

A walk taken regularly for the sake of one’s health.

Corporeal

Having a body; physical.

Cortege

A funeral procession.

Countenance

As a verb, to tolerate or approve of. As a noun, the face.

Covert

Hidden; secret.

Crenelated

Having battlements, with gaps along the top of a wall.

Cuttlefish

A sea creature related to the squid that can change color and squirt ink.

Diadem

A jeweled crown or headband worn as a sign of royalty.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Dubious

Doubtful.

Effaced

Erased; wiped out.

Executor

The person named to carry out a will.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Flaccid

Soft and limp.

Gregarious

Fond of company; sociable.

Hawking

Hunting with trained hawks or falcons.

Helm

The wheel or tiller that steers a ship.

Hermit crab

A crab that lives in an empty shell borrowed from another creature.

Hubbub

A noisy commotion.

Hypothetical

Supposed; existing only as an idea.

Incongruous

Out of place; not in keeping with its surroundings.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Interstellar

Between the stars.

Knave

A dishonest man; a rogue. Also the jack in a deck of cards.

Livery

The uniform worn by a servant, such as a coachman.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Lucid

Clear; clear-headed.

Magnate

A wealthy, powerful businessman.

Manifold

Many and various.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Mitre

The tall pointed hat of a bishop.

Moonstone

A milky, pearly-blue gemstone.

Moribund

Dying; near death.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Nag

An old or worn-out horse.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Palimpsest

A parchment scraped and written over, the old writing still faintly visible.

Palpable

Able to be touched or felt; plain to see.

Parasol

A light umbrella carried for shade from the sun.

Parimutuel

A form of betting in which the winners share the total amount bet.

Peregrinations

A journey, especially a long or meandering one.

Pettifogger

A petty, quibbling, or dishonest lawyer.

Phantasmal

Ghostly; like a phantom or an illusion.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Ponderous

Heavy; slow and labored.

Porte-cochere

A covered entrance where a carriage stops to let passengers out.

Postern

A back or side gate.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Presentiment

An intuitive feeling that something is about to happen.

Quizzically

In a puzzled or questioning way.

Roué

A pleasure-seeking man of loose morals.

Sarcophagus

A stone coffin, often carved, placed above ground. The plural is sarcophagi.

Sepulchral

Of the tomb; gloomy and deathly.

Simulacrum

An image or likeness; a mere imitation.

Sleight of hand

Skillful tricks done with the hands, such as a magician’s.

Slumberous

Sleepy; inducing sleep.

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard. Spar is also the name for certain shiny, easily split crystalline minerals, such as Iceland spar.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Stultified

Dulled; made foolish or useless.

Surreptitiously

Secretly, by stealth.

Taciturn

Habitually silent; saying little.

Tatterdemalion

A ragged person; tattered.

Tenement

A crowded, run-down apartment building.

Tetrachord

A series of four notes, the building block of Greek scales.

Tracery

Delicate lacework of interlacing lines.

Tuberose

A Mexican plant with heavily fragrant white flowers.

Turbid

Muddy, cloudy; confused.

Turnstone

A shorebird that turns over stones to find food.

Unassuming

Modest.

Vapid

Dull and empty of life or interest.

Verbatim

Word for word.

Vicariously

Experienced through another person.

Winding sheet

The cloth a corpse is wrapped in for burial.

Chapter 15

Summary

Still on the night of her fourteenth birthday, Vera stands by a roaring sea under a moon like a white skull and runs laughing into the surf. For the first time she judges Miss MacIntosh: her proverbs, her umbrella carried indoors, her windows thrown open in winter, her bare, cold bedroom, and above all that she “could not swim a stroke” and would be dragged down by the first great wave. Vera recalls the day’s long sermon of sayings, Death as “the bridegroom,” marriage as a lottery, the warnings to keep close to the house, and laughs at her dream of a false wedding. The sea flares into colors like the end of time, then rolls back into blackness. Once the tide carried the marble Saul out to sea and he never returned. Far off, the old blind sheep dog barks at the waves.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Miss MacIntosh · The Old Blind Sheep Dog · Catherine Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Freedom and Escape · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Order, Chaos, and Discipline

Symbols: Birds · Dogs · Eyes and Blindness · Moon and Stars · Roses and Flowers · The House · The Sea and Water · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Aristotle · Augustine and Christian Theology · Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) · Stoicism

Allusions: American Writers · Ecclesiastes · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- Vera stands by the tumultuous sea on her fourteenth birthday, overwhelmed by the “immensity of life” and the idea that imperfection might weave a “higher perfection” than the flawless days she had known. The imagery of the bloodless moon “like a white, thin skull,” the “black waters,” and waves that “broke like primal memories” evokes a sense of mystery, mortality, and awakening. This passage expresses Vera’s complex and heightened emotions about life, truth, and the unknown. It sets a tone of existential questioning and adolescent revelation.
- Vera muses on the paradox of truth and falsehood, considering the possibility that “all false things should be true” and, conversely, that “all true things should be false,” exemplified by her thoughts about Miss MacIntosh’s truthfulness versus her “false

mother" who doubts the external world. This passage delves into the elusive nature of reality and perception, a central theme in the chapter.

- Vera critically examines Miss MacIntosh's practical knowledge and emotional coldness, noting her inability to swim or face the "roaring tide" and her peculiar habits like carrying an umbrella indoors or keeping windows open in winter. Miss MacIntosh represents a kind of rigid, conventional wisdom and order, yet Vera perceives her as lacking a deeper understanding of life's unpredictability and vitality. This passage contrasts youthful openness with adult caution and limitation.
- Through Miss MacIntosh, the chapter explores themes of death, order, and the human condition. Death is described metaphorically as a "bridegroom" and an "old harpoonist," inevitable and ever-present. Miss MacIntosh's sayings such as "He is bare whom virtue hath not clothed," and "The night is no man's friend" reveal a worldview grounded in caution, morality, and acceptance of life's hardships. Her warnings about dangers for a young girl emphasize societal fears and protective control.
- Miss MacIntosh's practical and sometimes cynical teachings about marriage, housekeeping, and life's challenges highlight the limitations imposed on Vera's future. The advice to "keep one's eyes open" before marriage but "half shut" afterward underscores the compromises and disillusionments expected in adult life. This passage reflects societal expectations and gender roles, as well as the tension between youthful dreams and harsh realities.
- The chapter closes with vivid, almost supernatural descriptions of the sea and sky: "the sea was like a crucible of glass," with "colors so intense" and "myriads of sparks like fireflies." Vera perceives a cosmic, spiritual dimension to the natural world, imagining "harpers harping on those seas of glass which man shall behold at the end of time." This passage evokes a sense of awe, transcendence, and the fleeting nature of life, culminating in the image of the dead seagull and the engulfing black waters. It symbolizes the impermanence of existence and the eternal struggle between life and death.
- "She could not swim a stroke… she would have been dragged down at the first blow by her rainproof, her oilskin hat, her sea boots water-logged, and so many needles and pins and safety pins." Vera's scorn is also a warning of how Miss MacIntosh will die.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "If all false things were true, however, then all true things should be false." Where does Vera's paradox leave her?
- "If she had and had still been sane, then she would have been insane." What does Vera think it costs to understand the deeper things?
- "Death, she had said, is the bridegroom." Why does Vera laugh?

Characters

- Miss MacIntosh answers every personal question with the date of a sinking or a lost battle. What is she hiding?
- She “never looked at herself in any mirror if she could help it,” yet keeps the blind grandmother’s triple mirror. Why?
- She warns Vera that “ignorance is no protection.” Is she right?

Connections

- Vera’s dream of the false wedding in Chapter 10 returns with seals and northern lights for guests. What has changed in how she sees it?
- Miss MacIntosh cannot swim. What does this foreshadow?
- The sea once took the marble Saul and returned “a strange marble head.” What else does the sea take and return in this novel?

Reflection

- Is a life of proverbs a way of living or a way of not living?
- “The heart of youth… would rather die than live in a vacuum.” Is that wisdom or recklessness?
- What does it mean to judge for the first time someone who raised you?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- On the cusp of adolescence, filled with a mix of excitement and fear.
- Seeks deeper truths and experiences beyond the mundane and controlled life offered by adults.
- Exhibits a strong connection to nature and a rebellious attitude towards imposed limitations.
- Reflects a philosophical mind, questioning truth, life, and death.
- She runs laughing into the surf and calls the older generation “as crazy as loons.”

Miss MacIntosh

- Represents the adult world’s order, prudence, and caution, but also coldness and emotional distance.
- She is methodical, practical, and somewhat resigned, embodying a worldview that emphasizes survival and control over passion or mystery.

- Her repeated warnings about danger and death show concern but also a limiting worldview.
- Her peculiar habits suggest underlying fragility or unresolved fears.
- She cannot swim, keeps her windows open in winter, and sleeps in a bare room under a harp-framed bed with “no angels to play these harps.”
- She answers every personal question with a date, such as “the sinking of the Titanic.”

The Old Blind Sheep Dog

- The sheep dog’s barking is repeatedly mentioned as an ominous sign, something that “had not barked for nothing,” unlike a young dog who barks merely for pleasure. This suggests that the dog’s barking is a deliberate warning of danger lurking nearby, perhaps a threat to Vera’s innocence or safety.
- Miss MacIntosh explicitly warns Vera to be careful because “someone who would take a young girl by the hair and drag her into the shadows where her cries should not be heard” might be near.
- The dog’s barking seems to symbolize a protective instinct, alerting to the presence of real dangers in the night that Vera might be tempted to ignore or not fully understand.
- The dog is described as “old” and “blind,” which adds complexity to its symbolism. Blindness here can be interpreted as a metaphor for the limitations of perception that come with age or experience.
- While the dog cannot see, it still hears and senses danger, which may suggest that wisdom or vigilance does not solely depend on sight or youthful alertness.
- The dog’s blindness could also represent the older generation’s partial understanding of dangers, aware but not fully able to prevent them. This aligns with Vera’s reflections on how older people, including Miss MacIntosh, fail to grasp the “heart of youth” and the deeper currents of life and death.
- The dog’s old age and blindness also evoke mortality and the approach of death, consistent with the chapter’s pervasive meditation on death as a “bridegroom” and the many faces of death.
- The old blind sheep dog is isolated in the night, barking at waves and wind, much like Vera’s own sense of separation from the older generation and their “adult fantasies.”

Research: Themes

Youth and Experience versus Adult Convention

See: Freedom and Escape · Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- Vera experiences a moment of awakening, realizing the vastness and complexity of life beyond the restrictive, controlled world she has known.

- She contrasts her youthful desire for experience and freedom with the narrow, methodical, and often fearful mindset of the adults, especially Miss MacIntosh.
- The tension between youthful exploration and adult caution is central: Vera laughs at the warnings and rules, craving life's fullness despite risks.

Truth and Falsehood

See: Illusion and Reality

- Vera muses on the nature of truth, suggesting a paradox where if everything seen by adults is false, then the false must somehow be true.
- This philosophical questioning reflects her struggle to understand reality and the reliability of those around her, especially Catherine and Miss MacIntosh, who represent different kinds of truth and falsehood.

Death and Mortality

See: Death and Mortality

- Death is a recurring motif, discussed through Miss MacIntosh's grim but practical philosophy.
- Death is described as the inevitable "bridegroom" and harpoonist capturing the old and young alike, a force that is both feared and accepted.
- Vera's reflections on death are intertwined with natural imagery of the sea and night, symbolizing the unknown and the boundary between life and afterlife.

Nature and the Sublime

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- The powerful sea and the night sky dominate the narrative, filled with vivid, almost mystical descriptions.
- The sea's "long, melancholy roarings" and the "bloodless moon" evoke a primal, almost spiritual experience for Vera.
- Nature is both beautiful and terrifying, a symbol of life's immensity and mystery beyond human control.

Isolation and Alienation

See: Isolation and Connection

- Vera feels isolated from the adults, especially Miss MacIntosh, whose coldness and detachment contrast with Vera's passionate engagement with life.
- Miss MacIntosh's peculiar habits (keeping windows open in winter, carrying an umbrella indoors) symbolize a disconnect from practical reality and warmth.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Sea

See: The Sea and Water

- Symbolizes life's vastness, mystery, and power.
- The "black, whirling waters" and "primal memories" suggest subconscious depths and timeless forces.
- The sea's roar and the waves breaking evoke both danger and excitement.

The Moon

See: Moon and Stars

- Described as "bloodless," "white," and like a "thin skull," symbolizing death, the passage of time, and the eerie, detached observer of human life.
- The moon, sea, and death imagery function symbolically to explore deeper themes.

Nature's Contrasts

See: Roses and Flowers

- The "humped, naked dunes" with "seaweed," "Queen Anne's lace," and "wild grass" represent the wildness and beauty of life.
- The "low, stunted, blackened spruce and hemlock" suggest decay and resilience simultaneously.

The House and Its Contents

See: The House

- The "old, sea-blackened house" with "empty paddocks," "marble statues," and "granite birds" reflects decay, history, and the passage of time.
- Miss MacIntosh's sparse bedroom symbolizes emotional barrenness and detachment.

Research: Resources

- "bayberry and beach rose and meadows of billowing Queen Anne's lace": Bayberry wax made the colonists' Christmas candles. Legend says Queen Anne pricked her finger making lace, and the one dark floret at the center of the flower is her drop of blood. See Roses and Flowers.
- "my false mother who postulated merely as her theory the outer world": Descartes doubted the existence of the outer world (Meditations, 1641), and Berkeley held that "to be is to be perceived" (1710). See Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) and the Chapter 2 resources.

- “my body gleaming with finny phosphorescence”: Late summer seas glow with bioluminescent plankton when the water is stirred. See The Sea and Water.
- “a mustard poultice placed across my chest”: The mustard plaster was a household remedy for chest colds, hot enough to blister the skin.
- “the dark angel of death with whom a prophet met upon a barren hill”: Perhaps Jacob, who wrestled the angel through the night at Peniel (Genesis 32:24), though Young’s prophet meets “the dark angel of death” upon a barren hill. See Genesis and the Chapter 6 resources.
- “old Benjamin Franklin had ever said about early to bed and early to rise or a bird in the hand”: “Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise” (Poor Richard’s Almanack, 1735). “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush” is older, in John Heywood’s proverbs (1546). See American Writers and the Chapter 9 resources.
- “old John Bunyan had said on the evils of swearing and lying and gambling”: Bunyan confessed his youthful swearing and Sabbath games in Grace Abounding (1666) and drew a whole life of sin, including the seduction of maids, in The Life and Death of Mr. Badman (1680).
- “as crazy as loons”: The loon’s wild, laughing cry gave the phrase. See Birds.
- “She could not swim a stroke”: Foreshadowing of Miss MacIntosh’s death in the sea. See Miss MacIntosh and the Chapter 6 resources.
- “Men and melons, she herself had often said, are hardest to know”: An old proverb: “Men and melons are hard to know.”
- “still water runs deep”: “Still waters run deep” is a proverb of Latin origin now commonly taken to mean that a placid exterior hides a passionate or subtle nature. Formerly it also carried the warning that silent people are dangerous, as in Suffolk’s comment on a fellow lord in Shakespeare’s Henry VI, Part 2: “Smooth runs the water where the brook is deep” (3.1). (Wikipedia) See Shakespeare.
- “that old Ecclesiastes and of Exodus and of the Farmer’s Almanac”: The Old Farmer’s Almanac, published since 1792, with weather forecasts, planting tables, and proverbs. See Ecclesiastes.
- “a crazy quilt”: A Victorian quilt of irregular scraps of silk and velvet, the craze of the 1880s.
- “my grandmother’s mahogany dressing table with its three stained mirrors”: The blind grandmother of the garden of the blind in Chapter 12. See Eyes and Blindness and the Chapter 12 resources.
- “the sinking of the Titanic”: The Titanic struck an iceberg and sank on April 15, 1912.
- “one swallow does not make a summer”: Aristotle uses the saying in the Nicomachean Ethics (1.7) to discuss happiness and eudaimonia (living well or flourishing). He argues that a brief period of happiness or a single good deed doesn’t make a person truly happy or blessed. Happiness, for Aristotle, is a state of being that develops over a lifetime through virtuous activity. See Aristotle.

- “a thin meadow is soon mowed, and winter is summer’s heir”: Many of Miss MacIntosh’s sayings are found in George Herbert’s Outlandish Proverbs (1640) and John Ray’s English Proverbs (1670).
- “a straight line cannot be made straighter and is the shortest distance between two points”: Archimedes took it as a postulate in On the Sphere and Cylinder.
- “the apple falls not far from the apple tree”: An old proverb, as in the German “Der Apfel fällt nicht weit vom Stamm.” Emerson wrote in 1839 that “the apple never falls far from the stem.”
- “Our cradle stands in the grave”: Bishop Joseph Hall (1574-1656), English moralist and devotional writer. See Death and Mortality.
- “that we know not who or what we are, not even when the hour is late”: Ophelia says, “Lord, we know what we are, but know not what we may be” (Hamlet 4.5). Miss MacIntosh’s version denies even the first half. See Shakespeare.
- “none should ever see it and live”: “There shall no man see me, and live” (Exodus 33:20). See The Bible and the Chapter 43 resources.
- “Death loves a young maid and an old man”: Ralph Waldo Emerson’s poem “Illusions”: “Sleep is not, death is not; / Who seem to die live. / House you were born in, / Friends of your spring-time, / Old man and young maid, / Day’s toil and its guerdon, / They are all vanishing, / Fleeing to fables, / Cannot be moored.” See American Writers and Death and Mortality.
- “Death loves a shining mark”: Edward Young, Night Thoughts (1742-45). See Death and Mortality.
    - “. . . Death’s approach (if orthodox my song) Is hasten’d by the lure of Fortune’s smiles. . . . Death loves a shining mark, a signal blow; / A blow, which, while it executes, alarms; / And startles thousands with a single fall.”
- “there being so many doors to let out life”: “Death hath so many doors to let out life,” from The Custom of the Country (c. 1620) by John Fletcher and Philip Massinger. Webster’s Duchess has the same thought: “death hath ten thousand several doors / For men to take their exits” (The Duchess of Malfi 4.2). See Death and Mortality.
- “is always the bridegroom”: The old image of Death and the Maiden, set to music by Schubert. See Weddings and Funerals, Death and Mortality, and the Chapter 6 resources.
- “wedlock is padlock”: From John Ray’s English Proverbs (1670). See Weddings and Funerals.
- “Man was but a bubble breaking on a dark shore”: Homo bulla, “man is a bubble,” Varro’s saying, gathered by Erasmus in his Adages.
- “Man was but a shadow and a breath”: “Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away” (Psalm 144:4). See The Bible.
- “Man was but a poor, forked animal”: Lear: “unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art” (King Lear 3.4). See Shakespeare.

- “black hens were still doing well, laying white eggs”: The old proverb “A black hen lays a white egg,” meaning good can come from a dark source.
- “eggs and oaths were soonest broken”: A Danish proverb.
- “The old sheep dog barking in the night had not barked for nothing”: The proverb is “An old dog barks not in vain,” from George Herbert’s Outlandish Proverbs (1640). See The Old Blind Sheep Dog and Dogs.
- “the fairest flower is plucked the earliest”: The Passionate Pilgrim (1599), published under Shakespeare’s name, has “Sweet rose, fair flower, untimely pluck’d, soon vaded.” See Shakespeare and Roses and Flowers.
- “the grasshoppers are always surprised by winter”: Aesop’s “The Ant and the Grasshopper,” and “Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise” (Proverbs 6:6). See Fairy Tales and Folklore and The Bible.
- “she had been a good shepherd”: “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11). See The Bible.
- “the crooked crab which can never be taught to walk a way that is not crooked”: Aesop’s “The Crab and Its Mother,” in which the mother tells her child to walk straight and cannot do it herself. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “children should be seen but not heard”: The oldest form, from about 1450, is “A maid should be seen, and not heard.”
- “the apples of speech were silver, but the apples of silence were golden”: “Speech is silver, silence is golden.” The proverb most likely began in Arabic writing, where al-Jahiz wrote in the ninth century, “if speech were of silver, then silence would be of gold,” and a related Aramaic saying runs, “if a word be worth one shekel, silence is worth two.” Thomas Carlyle brought it into English: “Speech is silvern, Silence is golden” (Sartor Resartus, 1833-34). (Wikipedia) Young’s apples come from Proverbs 25:11: “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver.” See The Bible.
- “Better a castle of bones than of stones”: An old Scottish saying: better a garrison of strong men than stone walls.
- “woman’s heart is folly and deception”: “A foolish woman is clamorous: she is simple, and knoweth nothing” (Proverbs 9:13). See The Bible.
- “man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward”: “Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). See The Book of Job.
- “man is a little soul carrying around a heavy corpse”: Marcus Aurelius is quoting Epictetus: “Thou art a little soul bearing about a corpse, as Epictetus used to say” (Meditations 4.41). See Stoicism.
- “man is a substance clad in shadows”: John Sterling (1806-1844), English poet and essayist, friend of Carlyle.
- “Men are fallen”: The Fall of man is the Christian term for the passage of the first man and woman from innocent obedience to God to guilty disobedience. See Genesis and Augustine and Christian Theology.

- “this life was a way of thorns”: “The way of the slothful man is as an hedge of thorns” (Proverbs 15:19). See The Bible.
- “one should keep one’s eyes open, but after marriage, one should keep them half shut”: Poor Richard: “Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards” (1738). See American Writers and Weddings and Funerals.
- “the sheet anchor was gone”: A ship’s largest anchor, kept for emergencies, and so a last hope.
- “harpers harping on those seas of glass”: “And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire… having the harps of God” (Revelation 15:2). See Revelation and the Apocalypse and the Chapter 14 resources.
- “when the sky rolls back like a scroll”: “And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together” (Revelation 6:14). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “darkness without face and void upon the deep”: “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep” (Genesis 1:2). See Genesis.
- “for this earth was but the testing ground”: The Christian idea of life as a probation, called “a probationary state” in the Book of Mormon (Alma 12:24).
- “the marble Saul”: Saul was, according to the Hebrew Bible, the first king of Israel, and his reign marked the transition from a scattered tribal society ruled by judges to organized statehood. (Wikipedia) Facing defeat by the Philistines on Mount Gilboa, “Saul took a sword, and fell upon it” (1 Samuel 31:4). After Saul’s death the Philistines “cut off his head” (1 Samuel 31:9). The sea takes the marble Saul and returns “a strange marble head.” See The Bible and the Chapter 43 resources.

Vocabulary

Aphorism

A short, pointed saying that states a general truth.

Athwart

Across, from side to side; also, against.

Bayberry

A shrub of the Atlantic coast whose waxy berries were boiled to make fragrant candles.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Bespeak

To show or indicate.

Blear

Dim and watery, as eyes are with age or weeping.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Corpuscular

Made of tiny particles.

Crazy quilt

A quilt pieced from irregular scraps of fabric.

Crucible

A heat-resistant pot for melting metals. Figuratively, a severe test that changes a person.

Curlicue

A fancy twist or curl.

Drouth

Drought.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Effaced

Erased; wiped out.

Equivocation

The use of vague or double-edged words to avoid committing oneself.

Genealogy

A record of a family’s descent.

Hackneyed

Worn out by overuse; trite.

Harpoonist

One who hurls a harpoon.

Headland

A high point of land jutting into the sea.

Laconically

Using very few words.

Myriad

A countless number.

Nimbus

A halo or glow of light.

Oilskin

Cloth made waterproof with oil; a raincoat of it.

Paddock

A small field where horses are kept.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Phosphorescent

Glowing faintly in the dark.

Postulated

Assumed as true, as the basis for an argument.

Poultice

A soft, warm mass spread on cloth and laid on the body as a remedy.

Queen Anne’s lace

Wild carrot, a weed with flat white flower clusters like lace.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Sheet anchor

A ship’s largest anchor, kept for emergencies; a last hope.

Shingle

A beach of small, rounded stones.

Skulking

Lurking or moving about in a sneaking way.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Tumultuous

Loud, wild, and disorderly.

Undertow

A current beneath the surface that pulls back out to sea.

Wayward

Willful and hard to control.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Chapter 16

Summary

On the night of her fourteenth birthday, Vera rides her old black pony, Falada, bareback through the moonlit grounds, laughing, imagining herself a circus rider in pink tights, and whispering her secrets into his ear: that she is an orphan, that Miss MacIntosh is “an old witch who kept me enchained in a dark tower.” Mr. Spitzer gave her the pony, which had been sent to him by an admirer of his dead brother, and he named its pedigree: the horse that inspired merry-go-rounds and Queen Anne chair legs, and the speaking head of an old fairy tale. Vera rides Falada into the house, past the doge’s lions, the funeral gondola, and the tapestries of angels healing the blind and the deaf. She does not dare enter her mother’s room, for fear Catherine would know they were real. She rides on to Miss MacIntosh, who would. The door, usually barred from inside, swings open. In the moonlight Miss MacIntosh stands by the window, “unbelievably not herself,” and yet Vera knows her at once.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Miss MacIntosh · Falada · Joachim Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Freedom and Escape · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Dogs · Eyes and Blindness · Horses and Carriages · Moon and Stars · Silence and Deafness · The House · The Sea and Water · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Freud and Jung

Allusions: Angels and Archangels · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Greek Mythology · Shakespeare · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter begins with a powerful, almost dreamlike description of Vera Cartwheel riding her black pony, Falada, on the night of her fourteenth birthday. This passage captures the fierce pride and exhilaration of youth, the connection between rider and horse, and the blurring of reality and fantasy. The pony, though old and worn, moves with a spirit and grace that transcends its physical limitations, symbolizing both endurance and the imagination’s power to transform the mundane into the magical. This sets the tone for the chapter’s exploration of innocence, freedom, and escape.

- As Vera and Falada ride through the dark allees, the narrative paints a haunting picture of the estate: burned trees, untended gardens, broken statues, faded tennis courts, gargoyles, and fountains. This imagery evokes decay, neglect, and the passage of time, contrasting with Vera's youthful vitality. The path circles "like an eye through the garden of the blind," the real garden the grandfather planted for his blind wife in Chapter 12.
- Vera's intimate bond with Falada is a central passage. She confides her deepest secrets to the horse about her orphanhood, her view of Miss MacIntosh as "an old witch who kept me enchained in a dark tower," her hopes for the future. This reveals Vera's vulnerability and longing for understanding and companionship. The horse is not just a companion but almost a confidant and extension of her inner world. The symbolic act of tying blue ribbons on Falada's tail and whispering secrets reflects her need for connection and expression.
- Another significant passage is the explanation of Falada's pedigree and the importance Mr. Spitzer places on names. Falada is linked to what Mr. Spitzer calls "an old Arabic fairy tale which had its parallels in many countries, in many ages," best known in the West as the Grimms' "The Goose Girl," whose horse's head spoke oracles after death, and also to historical influences on furniture design. This passage layers the narrative with mythic and historical resonance, emphasizing the power of names and stories to shape identity and legacy. It also ties the horse, and by extension Vera, to a continuum of cultural memory and symbolism.
- Vera and Falada's passage through the shadowy, cavernous house filled with marble statues, mosaics, and relics creates a surreal atmosphere, blending dream and reality. The house is described as a tomb or underwater castle, with muted sounds and mysterious forms, evoking themes of death, memory, and entrapment. Vera's hesitation to confront her mother, who may be lost in her own dreams or visions, underscores the emotional distance and isolation within the household. This passage poignantly captures the tension between presence and absence, life and death, reality and fantasy.
- The chapter reaches an emotional climax when Vera and Falada enter Miss MacIntosh's bedroom. The door opens creakily, the pony whinnies, and Vera observes Miss MacIntosh standing by the window, bathed in moonlight. The description of Miss MacIntosh as changed and "unbelievably not herself," yet instantly recognizable, suggests a profound, possibly unsettling transformation. This moment encapsulates the themes of recognition, change, and possibly impending confrontation or revelation. Vera's reflection that this recognition affirms an older shock buried beneath layers of time adds a layer of mystery and foreshadowing.
- Falada's head speaks after death from above the gate. Vera's pony carries her to the door behind which Miss MacIntosh is about to be revealed bald, in Chapter 17.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “I often did not know what I thought until I heard myself speaking the words.” What does Vera learn by telling Falada her secrets?
- “He seemed to be my head, my intelligence. I was the headless rider.” Who is leading whom?
- “Water knew no echo.” Why is the house so silent?

Characters

- Vera tells Falada that Miss MacIntosh is a witch, yet rides to her because she “would know that we were real.” What does Vera need from her?
- Mr. Spitzer believes “all things were in their names.” How does that fit a man who is mistaken for his brother?
- Falada came from someone who “had not known… that Mr. Spitzer’s brother was dead.” What else in Mr. Spitzer’s life comes from Peron?

Connections

- Falada’s head, nailed above a gate, speaks after death, and the sea returned “a strange marble head” for Saul in Chapter 15. Why do heads keep speaking in this novel?
- The tapestries show angels who “restored sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf,” after the gardens of the blind and the deaf in Chapters 12 and 13. What is being healed?
- Vera is “the headless rider,” after the headless horsemen of Chapter 12. What is she riding toward?

Reflection

- Is a secret real before it is spoken?
- Why might someone fear that being real would frighten another person more than being a phantom?
- What is the first moment someone you knew became a stranger?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- Vera, the protagonist, a fourteen-year-old girl.

- She is imaginative, free-spirited, and deeply connected to her pony, Falada.
- She reflects on her orphaned status, her struggles, and her dreams.
- Mr. Spitzer gave her Falada and looked carefully into the pony's pedigree.
- She whispers to Falada that she is an orphan who never knew her father, that pink is her favorite color, and that she will have "seven stairstep children with long blonde hair."
- She dares not visit her mother, fearing Catherine "might die of shock" if she knew horse and rider were real.

Miss MacIntosh

- Miss MacIntosh is her caretaker, described as an "old witch" by Vera, who holds a controlling influence over Vera's life.
- Her door, "usually locked and barred from the inside," opens of itself, and she stands by the window, "greatly changed… unbelievably not herself."

Falada

- Vera's old black pony, described with affection, mythic qualities, and a symbolic presence.
- Falada is both a real animal and a figure of imagination and myth.
- Old, wind-broken, with "dish eyes" and a "diseased, withered mane," sent to Mr. Spitzer by an admirer of his dead brother.

Research: Themes

Imagination and Childhood Freedom

See: Dreams and Imagination · Freedom and Escape

- Vera's ride on Falada is a metaphor for freedom and escape from her restrictive life.
- The imaginative descriptions of the pony's capabilities and their adventures reflect the boundless nature of a child's mind.

Memory and Identity

See: Memory and the Past · Identity and the Self

- Vera reflects on her orphanhood, her lack of parents, and her future hopes.
- She shares her secrets aloud, many of which she herself is only understanding as she speaks.

Reality versus Fantasy

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination

- The chapter blurs the line between what is real and what is imagined.
- Falada transitions from a tired old horse to a mythical creature.
- The house is both a physical place and a surreal, dreamlike environment.

Death and Legacy

See: Death and Mortality · Memory and the Past

- The imagery of marble statues, tombs, and silent fountains suggests mortality and the passage of time.
- Falada's pedigree connects him to historical and mythical lineage, suggesting the persistence of memory and identity beyond death.

Isolation and Connection

See: Isolation and Connection

- Vera's solitary ride and whispered secrets highlight her isolation.
- Her bond with Falada offers companionship and understanding.
- Themes of childhood, freedom, memory, death, and identity are intricately woven through poetic language and symbolism.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Falada

See: Horses and Carriages

- Falada, the little black pony given to Vera by Mr. Spitzer, carries rich symbolic meaning that intertwines with Vera's inner world and her journey.
- Falada is described as an old, tired, wind-broken pony, light as a spirit, with a sagging back, a scrappy mane, and a knotted tail. Despite his physical frailty and advanced age, Falada moves with grace and seems almost magical, responding to Vera's desires as if he were her own intelligence or head. The pony is said to be descended from a horse that inspired the jewel-studded horses of merry-go-rounds and carousels, connecting him to themes of childhood innocence and the cyclical nature of life and dreams.
- Falada embodies a loyal, gentle companion who carries Vera through her internal struggles and the uncertain landscapes of her life. His responsiveness to her unspoken commands suggests an intimate connection between Vera's mind and her means of navigating reality and illusion.

- Although Falada is physically frail, he continues to carry Vera with grace and resilience. This mirrors Vera's own vulnerability and strength as she faces the challenges of growing up and understanding complex realities.
- Falada's origin as a model for carousel horses evokes childhood fantasy and cyclical repetition, resonating with Vera's oscillation between dream and reality. His presence blurs the lines between the tangible and the imaginary, reflecting the novel's themes of perception and illusion.
- Given by Mr. Spitzer, Falada also symbolizes a connection to a past that is both real and mythical, and perhaps a hope for guidance and stability amid chaos. His lineage to historical and artistic forms evokes continuity and the search for meaning.
- Falada is described as seeming like Vera's head or intelligence, suggesting that the pony is an extension or manifestation of her self-awareness and agency, her "headless rider" identity where the horse seems to guide the rider as much as the rider guides the horse.
- Falada is a potent symbol of Vera's complex inner life: her innocence, her challenges, her search for identity and direction, and the interplay between dream and reality that defines her experience in the novel.

The Moonlit Ride

See: Moon and Stars

- The ride through the dark garden, past statues, fountains, and old tennis courts, symbolizes a journey through memory and imagination, a "circle like an eye through the garden of the blind."

The House as a Tomb and Water Castle

See: The Sea and Water · Weddings and Funerals · The House

- The grand house is described with imagery of tombs, water, and underwater life, creating a sense of mystery and timelessness. The references to the phoenix and musical tomb further emphasize themes of death and rebirth.

Miss MacIntosh's Bedroom Scene

See: The House

- Vera charges in on horseback, and Miss MacIntosh stands silent by the window, changed. This scene contrasts the fantastical ride with a stark moment of reality.

The Night and the Grounds

See: Moon and Stars

- The story is set at night, under the moonlight, creating a dreamlike atmosphere.

- The surroundings include dark allées, stunted trees, an old stable, gardens, fountains, statues, and a large, mysterious house with marble pillars, tapestries, and grand stairways.
- The moonlit garden resembles a “garden of the blind,” and the house is described like a “water castle” with sea motifs and underwater imagery.
- The atmosphere is eerie yet magical, with references to stars, fireflies, and phantoms.
- Rich sensory descriptions evoke visual, tactile, and auditory experiences.

Other Motifs

See: Horses and Carriages

- Falada represents freedom, imagination, and the link between past and present.
- Moon and Stars are symbols of mystery, guidance, and the unconscious.
- Marble Statues and Tombs are symbols of death, memory, and permanence.
- Water and Sea Motifs represent transition, silence, and the unknown.
- The entire ride is a metaphor for Vera’s inner journey. The horse is described as “almost only an idea,” and the house is likened to a tomb and an underwater castle.
- References to historical furniture styles (Queen Anne, Chippendale), mythological creatures (phoenix, Triton), and fairy tales (the fairy tale of Falada, which Mr. Spitzer calls Arabic) enrich the novel’s layers.
- The setting is a magical, moonlit garden and a grand, mysterious house filled with symbolic statues and motifs.

Research: Resources

- “The fierce, exultant pride that was mine”: In “What Is It with Women and Horses?” (Intelligent Horsemanship, 2019), Dr. Rosie Jones-McVey, drawing on her PhD research among British horsewomen, writes: “In Victorian novels, as well as in the more modern genre of pony-girl books, it is often aboard a horse that girls find their wings, often proving some snot-nosed boy wrong in the process, or enabling them to escape various romantic dramas and find solace in the barn. Just like the pony-girl books, many of my participants’ life stories entwined horseyness with coming-of-age stories. Horses were the means through which many women first acted in a truly independent way, often pursuing equestrian endeavours despite/without their parents, or else, proudly taking up adult-like responsibilities in being the teacher, pilot, and carer of their ponies, rather than the one being looked after and told what to do.” She argues that horses give many women a space for independence and self-assertion that their everyday lives do not. See Freedom and Escape, Women, Gender, and Marriage, and Horses and Carriages.
- “riding my black pony, Falada”: In the Brothers Grimm fairy tale “The Goose Girl” (1815), a princess is sent off to marry with her magical horse Falada, who can talk, and

a waiting maid. The maid forces the princess to change places with her and, once she is the bride, has the prince kill Falada so he cannot tell. The princess has the horse's head nailed under the dark gateway, and each morning it speaks to her as she passes: "Alas, young Queen, how ill you fare! / If this your tender mother knew, / Her heart would surely break in two." In the end the king learns the truth and the false bride is punished. Falada means "spoken" in Portuguese. See Falada and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
    - Mr. Spitzer calls it "an old Arabic fairy tale which had its parallels in many countries, in many ages," and tells of the head that "had spoken oracles and parables to the people passing through the gates."
- "following the movements of an imaginary polo ball": Polo came to England from India with British cavalry officers in the 1860s, and Vera wears her "polo hat cocked back at a jaunty angle." See Horses and Carriages.
- "a path that made a circle like an eye through the garden of the blind": The grandmother's garden of the blind. See Eyes and Blindness and the Chapter 12 resources.
- "It was a steeplechase, and we would jump over all the church steeples": The first steeplechase (1752) was a race across Irish country from one church steeple to the next. See Horses and Carriages.
- "I was a bareback rider, wearing a plume, a pair of pink tights": Philip Astley's London circus (1768) began as trick riding in a ring, and the bareback equestrienne in tights became the star of American circuses. See Horses and Carriages.
- "Falada could dance on his hind feet": The levade and capriole of the Lipizzaners of Vienna's Spanish Riding School, where horses rear and leap on command. See Horses and Carriages.
- "Miss MacIntosh was an old witch who kept me enchained in a dark tower": Rapunzel, locked in a tower by a witch. See Fairy Tales and Folklore, Miss MacIntosh, and the Chapter 3 resources.
- "served as a model for merry-go-round horses because of his grace in keeping all fours off the earth at once": In 1878 Eadweard Muybridge photographed Leland Stanford's horse Sallie Gardner and proved that a galloping horse lifts all four hooves at once, though not stretched out, as on carousel horses. See Horses and Carriages.
- "had been sent to Mr. Spitzer by someone who had admired Mr. Spitzer's brother": Peron, the gambler of the horse circles (Chapter 14). See Peron Spitzer, Joachim Spitzer, and the Chapter 14 resources.
- "the cabriole, the furniture of good Queen Anne's day, whole forests of Chippendale": Queen Anne furniture stands on curved cabriole legs, shaped like an animal's leg. The name comes from the French cabriole, a goat's leap. In dressage, the capriole is the horse's leap with all four feet off the ground. Thomas Chippendale published his Director in 1754. See Horses and Carriages.

- “the legs of a chair were referred to as the limbs”: The story comes from Captain Frederick Marryat’s Diary in America (1839), where an American lady was shocked by the word “leg,” and piano legs were said to wear frilled trousers.
- “a rose by any other name would smell as sweet”: Romeo and Juliet 2.2. Catherine forgot the coachman’s name in Chapter 14, while Mr. Spitzer believes “all things were in their names.” See Shakespeare and the Chapter 14 resources.
- “the sleeping marble lions which had once guarded the palace of a Venetian doge”: The winged lion of St. Mark is the emblem of Venice, ruled by its doges for a thousand years.
- “the mosaic emperors like the faces of old playing cards”: The Byzantine mosaics of Justinian and Theodora at San Vitale in Ravenna (547).
- “the kings with the triple crowns”: The triple crown is the papal tiara. See the Chapter 3 resources.
- “the black funeral gondola”: Venice’s black funeral gondolas. See Weddings and Funerals and the Chapter 14 resources.
- “the great mother-of-pearl mollusk which might have contained the form of Venus”: Botticelli’s The Birth of Venus (c. 1485) shows the goddess rising from the sea on a scallop shell. See Greek Mythology and The Sea and Water.
- “I should be the umbrella medusa rising to the surface”: The jellyfish’s bell is called its umbrella, and its free-swimming stage is the medusa. See The Sea and Water.
- “the phoenix rising from those cold ashes of the dream”: The phoenix, which dies in fire and rises from its own ashes. See Birds and the Chapter 7 resources.
- “the effigy of a sleeping marble boy lying on his tomb”: Medieval tomb effigies often rest their feet on a dog, the sign of fidelity. See Dogs and Death and Mortality.
- “angels who restored sight to the blind and hearing to the deaf”: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped” (Isaiah 35:5). The gardens of the blind and of the deaf were Chapters 12 and 13. See Angels and Archangels, Eyes and Blindness, Silence and Deafness, and The Bible.
- “the stuffed lute birds”: The lyrebird of Australia, named for its lyre-shaped tail. See Birds and the Chapter 3 resources.
- “the shell which was the great turbaned Turk, the phaeton, the winding stairway”: These are real shells. The turban shell is one, and the wentletrap takes its name from the Dutch for “winding staircase.” See The Sea and Water.
- “there would be a ding and a dong and a bell through all the rooms”: The nursery rhyme “Ding, dong, bell, / Pussy’s in the well,” and Ariel’s song in The Tempest. See Fairy Tales and Folklore, Shakespeare, and the Chapter 6 resources.
- “I was the headless rider”: “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” again. See Fairy Tales and Folklore and the Chapter 12 resources.
- “as many husbands as Solomon had wives”: “And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines” (1 Kings 11:3). See The Bible and the

Chapter 9 resources.

- “the shock of this knowledge was but the affirmation of some older shock which had been forgotten”: Freud’s “The Uncanny” (1919) describes the uncanny as something long familiar and forgotten that returns as strange. See Freud and Jung.

Vocabulary

Allée

A walk or path lined with trees or tall hedges. Young writes “allees.”

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Bareback

Riding a horse without a saddle.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Brackish

Of water: slightly salty, as where a river meets the sea.

Cabriole

A curved furniture leg shaped like an animal’s leg, from the French for a goat’s leap.

Canter

A horse’s easy three-beat gait, between a trot and a gallop.

Carousel

A merry-go-round. Earlier, a tournament in which horsemen performed exercises and displays.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Cheval glass

A tall mirror swung in a frame so that it can be tilted.

Chippendale

Furniture in the style of the English cabinetmaker Thomas Chippendale (1718-1779).

Cuirass

Armor for the chest and back.

Dank

Unpleasantly damp and cold.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Doge

The elected ruler of Venice.

Effigy

A sculpture or model of a person, especially one lying on a tomb.

Equine

A horse; of horses.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Exultant

Triumphantly joyful.

Gable

The triangular upper end of a wall under a pitched roof.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Jaunty

Lively and self-confident; set at a rakish angle.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Marquee

A large tent or awning.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Oracle

A message from the gods; a source of prophecy.

Paddock

A small field where horses are kept.

Pallbearer

One who helps carry a coffin at a funeral.

Parable

A short story that teaches a lesson.

Pedigree

The recorded line of descent of an animal or person.

Peruke

A powdered wig of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Phaeton

A light, open, four-wheeled carriage; also a name for some seashells.

Phosphorescent

Glowing faintly in the dark.

Portico

A porch with a roof supported by columns.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Steeplechase

A horse race over fences, ditches, and water jumps, first run cross-country from one church steeple to another.

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Tendon

A tough cord that joins muscle to bone.

Triton

A sea god of Greek myth, half man and half fish, who blows a conch shell.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Whinny

A horse’s gentle neigh.

Wind-broken

Of a horse: short of breath from damaged lungs.

Chapter 17

Content note: *Miss MacIntosh warns Vera of a lurking rapist, and the chapter leads into the events of Chapter 18.*

Summary

In the moonlight Miss MacIntosh stands by the window, and Vera sees that she is bald, “bald as the egg or as the rock where nothing grows,” with “only one breast.” Vera knows her only by her broken nose. Terrified and wildly triumphant at having always pictured her with a mustache and cast her as the bridegroom, Vera screams, “Miss MacIntosh, you are a man!” A struggle follows, told in the language of the boxing ring. Vera is knocked down, her mouth covered by “his hoary hand,” and laid on the bed, and she wonders whether her attacker is a fallen angel, a gladiator, the sandbag dummy come to life, or the angel Jacob wrestled. She calls it the work of someone “who should take advantage of a poor, ignorant girl, only fourteen years old.” She calls for her mother and for Mr. Spitzer, but no one comes. In the morning her braids are exactly braided, and the only scratches on her cheeks could have come from leafless branches.

Characters present

Miss MacIntosh · Vera Cartwheel · Falada · Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Fear and Courage · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Madness and Sanity · Memory and the Past · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Horses and Carriages · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · Weddings and Funerals

Allusions: Ancient Egypt · Dante · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- Miss MacIntosh is portrayed almost as a spectral, otherworldly figure standing by the tall windows with blowing curtains. Her corset stays resemble quills of a porcupine or rays of moonlight, and her head is replaced by a “cold and dented” moonlike dome. This surreal image evokes a sense of alienation and transformation, suggesting that she is no longer fully human or recognizable. The metaphor of her body being “more

angular than curved” and “ready to meet with the opponent at a single move” sets the tone of confrontation and tension.

- The silence, the white curtains blowing like wings, and the “faint tappings of a spectral branch” create an eerie atmosphere, hinting at supernatural or psychological disturbance. This passage is important because it introduces the unsettling and uncanny presence of Miss MacIntosh, foreshadowing the dramatic events to follow.
- A key moment is the revelation that Miss MacIntosh is bald “as the egg or as the rock where nothing grows,” her face “absolutely impersonal and expressionless.” This stark image symbolizes loss of identity, vitality, and femininity. Vera is horrified by this transformation, seeing her as a “monster” or a “phantasmagoric being,” a “bald pretender” who deceives the senses.
- The contrast with the memory of her “red, shining hair, tawny as an August sunset,” her eyeglasses, and umbrella underscores the dramatic change, suggesting that this is either a ghostly apparition or a symbolic representation of death, decay, or betrayal.
- Vera reflects on proverbs and parables, such as “the mountains shall never meet with the mountains,” “you shall praise the bridge that carried you,” and “man is not born to happiness.” These reflections highlight the philosophical and existential underpinnings of the chapter, emphasizing themes of inevitability, loss, and the fragile nature of human happiness.
- Vera struggles with the notion that either Miss MacIntosh has changed or she herself has changed, questioning the nature of reality and perception. This self-doubt and questioning of identity deepen the psychological tension and ambiguity.
- This extended passage details a physical and symbolic struggle between Vera and the bald figure (Miss MacIntosh or a phantom). The fight is described in vivid, almost cinematic terms, with references to boxing moves (“left jab,” “straight right,” “rabbit punch”) and wrestling.
- Vera experiences disorientation, pain, and a sense of duality (“my body seemed divided as if now there were two of us”). The imagery of stars falling “like dried seed pods,” “dark horsemen,” and a black “cloud extending from pole to pole” evokes apocalyptic or mythic grandeur.
- Importantly, Vera questions the identity of the attacker, wondering if it is a “fallen angel,” a “Christian knight,” or merely a “sandbag dummy come to life.” This uncertainty blurs the line between reality, dream, and hallucination.
- Vera describes being overpowered, feeling hair pulled out “by handfuls,” yet experiencing no pain but a speculative wonder about being “snatched bald.” This loss of hair symbolizes a profound loss of beauty, femininity, and power, likened to a “terrible mistake, God’s error.”
- Despite this, Vera notes that “the next morning, of course, my long braids were exactly braided down my back,” suggesting the experience may have been a dream, vision, or hallucination, blurring reality and illusion.

- “She was only this old man who had only one breast and no hair and no future prospect.” Chapter 19 confirms that one breast was amputated. The novel’s clues to Miss MacIntosh’s illness, the lobster’s claws upon her forehead in Chapter 10 and the blue lips in Chapter 12, come to this.
- Vera’s account of the struggle, her mouth covered, laid on “the bed of death or something which might be worse,” the work of someone “who should take advantage of a poor, ignorant girl, only fourteen years old,” is the language of assault. That the morning shows no trace leaves open what happened, not whether Vera was harmed.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “I refused to accept the simple explanation which I myself proposed, refused to believe that she had not changed, that only I had changed.” Which is true?
- “What shall we do when, fleeing from illusion, we are confronted by illusion?” How does Vera answer?
- Her “body seemed divided as if now there were two of us, one who fought, one who lay still and watched it all.” What does that division tell us?

Characters

- Vera laughs and feels “no pity for her but only a kind of wild triumph.” Why?
- Vera calls Miss MacIntosh “the bald pretender” who “had been pulling the wool over my eyes.” Who has been deceived?
- She knows Miss MacIntosh “by her broken nose.” What does it mean to know someone by a wound?

Connections

- Vera has pictured Miss MacIntosh with a red mustache (Chapter 9) and as the bridegroom (Chapter 10). How does that prepare for “you are a man”?
- The sandbag dummy of Chapters 12 and 15 comes “to life.” What has Vera been training for?
- Falada’s head speaks after death in Chapter 16. What does Miss MacIntosh’s bare head say?

Reflection

- Why might a child react with cruelty when someone she trusted is suddenly exposed?
- Can a person be harmed by an event she cannot be sure happened?
- How does illness change how others see a body?

Research: Characters

Miss MacIntosh

- Initially described as a familiar and trusted figure, a nursemaid, a guardian.
- Transforms into a bald, expressionless, ghostly figure, described as “bald as the egg or as the rock where nothing grows,” symbolizing loss, change, or an unsettling void.
- Portrayed with contradictory imagery: both fragile and monstrously strong, spectral yet physically violent.
- Vera struggles to reconcile this apparition with the Miss MacIntosh she knew, suspecting deception and a hidden identity.
- Symbolizes a “bald pretender,” a false self, or a shadowy force challenging Vera.
- She has “only one breast,” and Vera knows her only “by her broken nose” from the Spokane bus (Chapter 9).

Vera Cartwheel

- On the night of her fourteenth birthday, caught between terror and fascination.
- Experiences a physical and psychological battle with the transformed Miss MacIntosh.
- Reflects on memories, identity, and the nature of illusion versus reality.
- Shows moments of wild laughter, despair, and confusion, indicating a complex emotional state.
- Vera’s perception is unreliable or dreamlike, blending corporeal reality with surreal visions.
- She screams, “Miss MacIntosh, you are a man!” and feels “a kind of wild triumph,” though “I should have cried.”

Research: Themes

Identity and Transformation

See: Identity and the Self

- Miss MacIntosh’s sudden baldness and altered demeanor symbolize a profound change, calling into question the stability of identity.
- Vera’s inability to accept this change reflects a struggle with understanding the self and others.
- The motif of hair loss as a loss of femininity or vitality is potent and unsettling.

Illusion versus Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- The chapter blurs the lines between waking life, dream, and hallucination.
- Vera questions what is real, what is illusion, and the nature of perception.
- The fight with the “bald opponent” may also be symbolic, reflecting an internal conflict or a confrontation with an aspect of the self.

Fear and Madness

See: Madness and Sanity · Fear and Courage

- The setting at midnight, the eerie descriptions, and the “zero hour” evoke a sense of dread.
- Vera’s fear escalates into a violent struggle, suggesting a descent into madness and trauma.
- The chapter explores how strange events can “leave us mad” or shatter sanity.

Power and Vulnerability

See: Fear and Courage · Women, Gender, and Marriage

- Miss MacIntosh’s physical power contrasts with her ghostly, fragile appearance.
- Vera, though young and vulnerable, refuses to be defeated quietly.
- The battle becomes a metaphor for the fight between opposing forces within or external threats.

Memory and Perception

See: Memory and the Past

- Vera recalls past moments with Miss MacIntosh, contrasting them with the present terrifying vision.
- There is an awareness that memory and perception can deceive or change over time.
- Vera’s reflections on proverbs and parables hint at larger philosophical questions.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Baldness

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- Represents loss, emptiness, exposure, and transformation.
- Compared to “the egg,” “the rock where nothing grows,” “the rose stripped of all its petals,” and “bare as the winter winds,” emphasizing barrenness and desolation.

Moonlight and Darkness

See: Moon and Stars · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- The moonlight creates a cold, distant atmosphere.
- The interplay of light and shadow symbolizes the tension between knowledge and ignorance, reality and illusion.

Corset and Armor

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Miss MacIntosh's metallic corset is described like a battleship or wrestler's gear, symbolizing restraint, protection, and conflict readiness.

Animal Imagery

See: Horses and Carriages

- Falada, Vera's old pony, a present from Mr. Spitzer, represents loyalty and alertness but is powerless.
- Vera's comparison of Miss MacIntosh to a "codfish swept up upon a barren shore" and "old man" adds to the grotesque transformation.

Physical Combat

See: Fear and Courage

- The fight is depicted with detailed boxing terminology (rabbit punch, jab, left hook), emphasizing the visceral and brutal nature of the struggle.
- The encounter may also symbolize internal psychological conflict or a battle with one's fears or identity.

Style

- The narration flows with intense, fragmented, and poetic sentences reflecting Vera's emotional turmoil.
- The imagery is often dreamlike, blending the real with the fantastical.
- The tone fluctuates between terror, disbelief, wild laughter, and despair.

Use of Parables and Philosophical Reflections

See: Fairy Tales and Folklore

- Vera contemplates proverbs and existential questions, adding depth and universality.

Further notes from the text

- Miss MacIntosh first appears as a silhouette: corset stays sticking out like the quills of an angry porcupine, and in place of a head another moon, an ivory ball "such as perhaps a god should play with."

- The baldness arrives as a litany of similes, bald as the egg, as the rock where nothing grows, as the rose stripped of its petals, and then as a list of missing things: her red hair, her eyeglasses, her black umbrella, her Pilgrim's Progress.
- Vera's first response is laughter and "a kind of wild triumph" at having been right all along in imagining Miss MacIntosh with a red, curled mustache and in casting her as the bridegroom, a direct callback to the dream wedding in Chapter 10.
- The figure Vera fears is the lurking rapist Miss MacIntosh had warned her about, the drunken sailor reeling out of the fog. The protector and the danger she warned against have become one figure in the dark.
- The struggle is told in boxing language: the left jab, the straight right, the rabbit punch, the left hook, the southpaw. It is the sandbag dummy of Chapters 12 and 15 come to life, and also, Vera thinks, the angel with whom Jacob wrestled at Peniel.
- Vera calls for help that cannot come: her mother, and Mr. Spitzer, who "was gone from Boston to Boston." She says she will be asking the questions of this night long years afterward, when she is old and grey.

Research: Resources

- "her corset stays sticking out like the quills of an angry porcupine": The Ghost tells Hamlet his tale would make "each particular hair to stand on end, / Like quills upon the fretful porpentine" (Hamlet 1.5). A few lines later, "My hair crawled," and soon Vera's hair stands "on end." See Shakespeare and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- "a figure of a tomb": She stands "her hands crossed against the flatness of her breasts," the pose of a tomb effigy. See the Chapter 16 resources.
- "that zero hour, the hour of midnight when strangest things do often happen": "Zero hour" was the soldiers' name for the hour of attack in the First World War. "'Tis now the very witching time of night, / When churchyards yawn" (Hamlet 3.2). See Shakespeare.
- "as if I were entombed in fields of everlasting ice": At the bottom of Dante's Hell, the traitors are frozen in the ice of Cocytus (Inferno 32-34). Vera is about to feel betrayed. See Dante.
- "she was bald. She was bald as the egg": Alopecia, the total loss of hair, was popularly blamed on "some sudden shock or amazement or illness." The hair passage of Chapter 12 prepared for this, and in Chapter 19 Vera finds Miss MacIntosh's red wig. See Hair, Wig, and Baldness, Miss MacIntosh, and the Chapter 12 resources.
- "a great mirror where one should see one's self if one looked closely": Her bald head as a mirror. See Mirrors and Reflections.
- "I knew her by her broken nose": The broken nose from the Spokane bus. See Miss MacIntosh and the Chapter 9 resources.
- "many a game of battledore and shuttlecock": Battledore and shuttlecock is the old paddle game, the ancestor of badminton.

- “the mountains shall never meet with the mountains”: “Friends may meet, but mountains never greet,” an old proverb. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “you shall praise the bridge that carried you”: “Praise the bridge that carries you over,” an English proverb. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “man is not born to happiness and is a bubble”: Homo bulla, “man is a bubble,” and “man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward” (Job 5:7). See The Book of Job and the Chapter 15 resources.
- “old pharaohs voyaging to heaven upon clouds of incense”: The Pyramid Texts tell of the king rising to heaven on the smoke of incense. See Ancient Egypt.
- “where was her Pilgrim’s Progress?”: Miss MacIntosh’s Bunyan. See the Chapter 3 resources.
- “Better it had been King Magnus, the fleshless being!”: It is not clear which Magnus Young means. Magnus the Good (1024-1047), an illegitimate son of St. Olaf, became king of Norway and Denmark. St. Magnus of Orkney, an earl and martyr, whose skull, split by an axe, was found hidden in a pillar of Kirkwall Cathedral in 1919, would fit “the fleshless being.”
- “who knows not the grinning skull?”: Yorick’s skull: “Where be your gibes now?… Not one now, to mock your own grinning?” (Hamlet 5.1). See Shakespeare, Death and Mortality, and the Chapter 7 resources.
- “some Irish hooligan or drunken sailor”: “Hooligan” came into use in 1890s London, said to be from a rowdy Irish family named Houlihan. The word carries the era’s contempt for the Irish poor. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “visualizing her with a red, curled mustache, that I had been right in assigning to her the role of the bridegroom”: The red mustache of Chapter 9 and the wedding dream of Chapter 10. See Weddings and Funerals, the Chapter 9 resources, and the Chapter 10 resources.
- “this old man who had only one breast”: Halsted’s radical mastectomy (1894), which removed the breast and the muscles beneath it, was the standard treatment for breast cancer for most of the twentieth century. Chapter 19 confirms the loss. In Chapter 10, Vera imagined “claws upon her forehead like the claws of a lobster,” and cancer takes its name from the crab. See Miss MacIntosh, Women, Gender, and Marriage, and the Chapter 10 resources.
- “It was a horse ballet, a Spanish carousel with many mirrors”: Baroque courts staged horse ballets, and the carrousel was first a tournament of horsemen, like Louis XIV’s Grand Carrousel of 1662. See Horses and Carriages and the Chapter 16 resources.
- “the moon which draws the waves in its wake and has no life of its own”: The moon raises the tides and shines only by reflected sunlight. See Moon and Stars.
- “she was the ring-master”: The circus of Vera’s bareback dream in Chapter 16 returns, Miss MacIntosh with her “steel embroidery hoops.” See the Chapter 16 resources.
- “one rose which canker shall not eat”: “And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud” (Shakespeare, Sonnet 35). See Shakespeare.

- “one door which shall not open to our knocking”: An inversion of “Knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7). See The Bible.
- “the left jab which annoys, hurts, and stings, the straight right”: The fight follows boxing under the Marquess of Queensberry rules (1867). The rabbit punch, a blow to the back of the neck named for the way hunters killed rabbits, is illegal. The Sunday punch is a fighter’s best blow, and a southpaw fights left-handed. The little shadow boxer returns as a character in Chapter 72. See The Little Shadow Boxer.
- “The stars fell like dried seed pods upon a dark and barren plain”: “And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs” (Revelation 6:13). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “Myriads of dark horsemen thundered against a sky”: The four horsemen of Revelation 6. See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “was it some fallen angel, some livid creature of the deep, or was it the angel of light”: “For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). See The Bible.
- “Where was Mr. Spitzer? He was gone from Boston to Boston.”: The preacher’s words in the dream of Chapter 10: “from Boston to Boston.” See Joachim Spitzer and the Chapter 10 resources.
- “some ancient Sumerian or Greek wrestler or Roman gladiator”: In the Epic of Gilgamesh, from ancient Sumer and Babylon, Gilgamesh wrestles the wild man Enkidu, who becomes his friend. See Greek Mythology.
- “someone who wore a jumbo corset whale-boned”: Corsets were stiffened with whalebone, the baleen from the mouths of whales. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “even that holy angel with whom Jacob struggled at Peniel”: Genesis 32:22-32 and Hosea 12:3-5: “And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day” (Genesis 32:24). See Genesis and the Chapter 6 resources.
- “the sandbag dummy come to life”: The sandbag dummy Vera was made to box in Chapters 12 and 15, now “the shadow boxer moving with such rapidity that his blows were impossible to block.” The little shadow boxer returns as a character in Chapter 72. See The Little Shadow Boxer, the Chapter 12 resources, and the Chapter 15 resources.
- “my wailings and gnashings of teeth”: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12). See The Bible and the Chapter 10 resources.
- “the anesthesia provided by nature before she strikes her final blow”: David Livingstone, mauled by a lion, wrote that the shock “caused a sort of dreaminess, in which there was no sense of pain nor feeling of terror” (Missionary Travels, 1857).

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Anesthesia

Loss of feeling or sensation, natural or induced.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Battledore

A small paddle used to hit a shuttlecock; also the game itself.

Beseechment

Earnest pleading.

Biceps

The large muscle at the front of the upper arm.

Breastplate

A piece of armor covering the chest.

Canker

A blight or ulcer that eats away at a plant or the body; anything that corrupts from within.

Carousel

A merry-go-round. Earlier, a tournament in which horsemen performed exercises and displays.

Clinch

In boxing, a hold in which the fighters grip each other.

Codfish

A large food fish of cold northern seas.

Combatant

One who fights.

Corrugated

Shaped into ridges and furrows.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Girded

Encircled or bound tightly, as with a belt or girdle.

Gladiator

A fighter in the arenas of ancient Rome.

Goose pimples

Bumps on the skin raised by cold or fear.

Gossamer

A fine film of cobweb; anything light and delicate.

Hoary

Gray or white with age.

Hooligan

A rough, lawless young man.

Invulnerable

Unable to be wounded or harmed.

Irrevocably

In a way that cannot be undone.

Jab

A quick, short punch.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Myriad

A countless number.

Parable

A short story that teaches a lesson.

Phantasmagoric

Like a phantasmagoria, a shifting series of dreamlike or nightmarish images. A phantasmagoria was an eighteenth-century magic-lantern ghost show.

Pinioned

Held or bound fast, especially by the arms.

Pretender

One who pretends; also, someone who claims a throne or title without a rightful claim.

Preternatural

Beyond what is natural.

Rabbit punch

An illegal blow to the back of the neck.

Ravishing

Enchanting; also, seizing by force.

Shuttlecock

A feathered cork struck back and forth in battledore or badminton.

Southpaw

A left-handed boxer.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Speculative

Thoughtful and wondering; based on guesswork.

Stays

Strips of whalebone or steel that stiffen a corset.

Sunday punch

A boxer’s hardest, best blow.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Vanquish

To defeat thoroughly.

Whalebone

Baleen, the flexible plates from the mouths of certain whales, once used to stiffen corsets.

Zero hour

The hour set for an attack to begin.

Chapter 18

Content note: *This chapter strongly suggests that the young Vera has been sexually assaulted, and it shows an adult frightening a child into silence.*

Summary

Through the rest of the night, Miss MacIntosh holds Vera and talks, in two voices: the familiar one of proverbs and geography lessons, and a raw, grieving one that cries for the left breast “already gone,” for her hair, and for “one kiss,” all she ever asked. A red wig hangs on the chair post. She insists nothing happened, that it was all a dream. She covers Vera’s head with a pillow, leaves “the heavy, claw-shaped mark of her hand” upon her forehead “to teach you… charity,” and swears she will kill Vera if she ever tells. By dawn she is quizzing her on Michigan’s industries and the Battle of Shiloh, and promising that all will be as it was. As Vera falls asleep, Miss MacIntosh whispers that she lost her hair in Vera’s service, that she once had a pale gold mane, and that she is not as old as Vera thinks. Vera carries the secret as her sin, and ever after tries to be charitable.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Miss MacIntosh · The Old Blind Sheep Dog · Catherine Cartwheel · Falada · Joachim Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Duality and Doubles · Fear and Courage · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · The Search for Meaning · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Dogs · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Horses and Carriages · Mirrors and Reflections · Roses and Flowers · The House · The Sea and Water · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Buddhism · Freud and Jung · Hinduism · Taoism and Zhuangzi · Wittgenstein

Allusions: American Writers · Angels and Archangels · Astronomy · Edgar Allan Poe · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Napoleon and Wellington · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job · The Civil War

Key passages

From the research

- Vera confronts “the phantom of change,” a figure that embodies both the fixed and true, yet also the unsettling reality beneath illusion. This passage explores the idea that what we take as reality is often a self-deception, with the “curtain of illusion” stripped away, revealing the naked truth that each person wears a mask, pushing them into “the imperial darkness.” This emphasizes human vulnerability and the elusive nature of identity and reality.
- Miss MacIntosh, initially a “red-headed, plain nursemaid,” becomes a complex, almost demonic figure: bald, naked, and both terrifying and intimate. The lover who emerges is described as neither man nor woman but an “angelic demon,” symbolizing the secret, hidden aspects within each person, the “other self” that is always present yet unreachable. This passage reveals the interplay of identity, gender, and inner conflict.
- Miss MacIntosh’s bald, furrowed head “looming above me in the foggy darkness,” with her “false teeth clicking, clicking like old bones or dice in the wind,” represents a haunting presence of mortality and decay. Her voice moans about ephemerality and the transient nature of life, blending imagery of death, loss, and cosmic insignificance. This creates a powerful atmosphere of dread and existential despair.
- Miss MacIntosh delivers a harsh reflection on mortality, sin, and human frailty: “One leak sinks a ship, and one sin sinks a sinner,” and “God pity us all,” underscoring the inevitability of death and the universal vulnerability of humanity. Her admonitions and proverbs touch on themes of fate, loss, and the futility of resistance, adding a somber philosophical layer to the narrative.
- Despite the terrifying nocturnal revelations, Miss MacIntosh insists that everything will “be all right” in the morning, that the night’s horrors are but a dream, and life will resume its “fixed schedule.” This tension between nightmare and waking life reflects Vera’s struggle to reconcile the profound encounter with the mundane reality of everyday existence.
- Baldness here symbolizes a stripping away of pretense and beauty, a harsh exposure to the raw truth beneath appearances. Vera’s painful awareness of Miss MacIntosh’s “essential baldness” represents a loss of innocence and the confrontation with the unvarnished realities of life and human nature.
- In the closing passage, Miss MacIntosh, holding Vera, reflects on her lost hair as a metaphor for the passage of time and aging. She poses a poignant question about the nature of age itself, “Alas, when shall I grow old?” suggesting the elusive and paradoxical quality of time and existence.
- “I have lost my hair in your service.” The nursemaid who threatened to kill Vera if she told turns, in the last lines, into a woman confessing what her service cost her: “When I came here, I had all my own hair, a thick mane of it, pale gold hanging down my back.”

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “Memory sometimes provides the one flower more than ever blossomed. Memory sometimes omits the only flower there really was.” Which does Vera’s memory of this night do?
- “Perhaps, however, the lack of deception is always another deception.” What deception is left when the wig is off?
- Miss MacIntosh insists, “Nothing that you think is happening is happening!” Why does she need Vera to believe it?

Characters

- She marks Vera’s forehead “to teach you… charity.” What lesson does Vera take?
- “If ever I told what I had seen, she would kill me.” How does the threat change what Vera remembers?
- “I have lost my hair in your service.” What else has Miss MacIntosh given up?

Connections

- The “claw-shaped mark” echoes the “claws upon her forehead” Vera imagined in Chapter 10. What has passed from one woman to the other?
- The quiz questions of Chapter 13 (“Where is North Dakota?”) return here at dawn. What are they for?
- Vera’s dream made Miss MacIntosh the bridegroom (Chapter 10). How does that dream come back here?

Reflection

- What does a child lose when she learns an adult’s secret and cannot unlearn it?
- Is a secret kept under threat still one’s own?
- Can tenderness and harm come from the same person on the same night?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- Questioning reality, memory, and self-identity.
- Experiences a profound revelation and confrontation with hidden truths.
- Shows vulnerability, fear, and eventual resolve to accept and understand.

- She carries “the heavy, claw-shaped mark” of Miss MacIntosh’s hand and resolves to be charitable, “as a retribution for my cruelty.”

Miss MacIntosh

- Initially perceived as a plain, red-headed nursemaid.
- Transforms into a bald, frightening figure symbolizing raw truth and loss.
- Acts as a guide or interlocutor, mixing sternness with intimacy.
- Represents both nurturing and harsh realities of life, death, and change.
- Embodies themes of charity, mortality, and the limits of human understanding.
- Her red wig hangs on the chair post, and she mourns the left breast “already gone.”
- She threatens to kill Vera if she tells, then says she lost her hair in Vera’s service.

The Phantom Lover and the Secret Man

- A spectral figure representing the hidden aspects of self.
- Neither fully man nor woman; embodies the duality of human nature.
- Symbolizes the unrecognizable parts of identity and love.

The Old Blind Sheep Dog

- The old blind sheep dog appears only briefly and indirectly. It may function as a potent symbol of failing protection, limited perception, and the human struggle to confront elusive and overwhelming existential truths. Its presence underscores the chapter’s meditation on vulnerability, loss, and the elusive nature of reality and memory.
- Vera hears him barking “perhaps at a spar, perhaps at the last falling star… or some danger greater than any I could have imagined.”

Research: Themes

The Phantom of Change and Illusion versus Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- Vera encounters a “phantom of change” (something fixed, undeniable yet elusive in understanding).
- Illusion is portrayed paradoxically as “the only reality,” with self-deception being the “only rose” (symbol of beauty and pain).
- The external world is likened to “a mad man’s dream,” emphasizing the fragility and elusiveness of perceived reality.

Memory and its Limitations

See: Memory and the Past

- Memory is depicted as incomplete, evolving, and surrounded by the unknown.
- Vera questions the accuracy of remembered events, hinting that memory may omit or alter essential details.
- The idea that “the dream is never complete” and that new realities arise from what is missing in memory.

Duality of Human Nature: The Secret Man and Woman

See: Duality and Doubles

- The concept that within every woman is a secret man, and within every man, a secret woman.
- This duality is visualized through the phantom lover who is neither fully man nor woman but an “angelic demon” representing the hidden self.

Fear, Vulnerability, and the Mask of Identity

See: Identity and the Self · Fear and Courage

- Vera experiences fear and confusion confronting Miss MacIntosh’s bald, naked, and terrifying form, symbolizing raw truth stripped of pretense.
- The “mask” everyone wears shields them from their true selves, leading to isolation and existential loneliness.

Mortality and the Inevitability of Death

See: Death and Mortality

- Dialogue and imagery emphasize transience and mortality: “Oh, how ephemeral are we!” and “The brief candle goes out.”
- The inevitability of death and the futility of resistance are central, with Vera urged to “be silent as the corpse” and accept loss.

Charity and Understanding

See: The Search for Meaning

- Despite cruelty and misunderstanding, Vera resolves to be charitable toward others, especially toward Miss MacIntosh, recognizing her essential vulnerability and “baldness.”

Return to Normalcy and the Persistence of Routine

See: Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- Miss MacIntosh insists that the strange night is a dream and that normal life will resume with the morning.
- The repeated references to daily routines, domestic tasks, and practical lessons reflect the human need to cling to order amid chaos.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Baldness of Miss MacIntosh

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- Represents the stripping away of illusion, revealing raw and uncomfortable truth.
- Symbolizes mortality, vulnerability, and the loss of pretense.

Curtains Blowing, Shutters Banging, Weathercocks Creaking

See: The House

- Create an atmosphere of instability and eerie music; symbolize the chaotic forces of change and the unknown.

The Sea, Waves, and Tides

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · The Sea and Water

- Evoke transience, the unconscious, and the relentless movement of life and death.

False Teeth Clicking

See: Death and Mortality

- Symbolize decay, mortality, and the eerie persistence of mortality's reminder.

Feather Pillow

See: Birds

- Used by Miss MacIntosh to cover Vera's head, symbolizing an attempt to induce forgetfulness, sleep, or escape from harsh realities.

The Brief Candle

See: Shakespeare

- Classic metaphor for the fragility and brevity of life.

The Rider and the Horse

See: Falada · Horses and Carriages

- Metaphor for the unity of self and illusion, indicating the inseparability of dream and dreamer.
- Vera wonders if she has “become Falada,” with Miss MacIntosh now the rider.

Research: Resources

- “some angelic demon”: Young may be referring to the Nephilim. In Genesis 6:4, they are born when “the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men.” Later legend made them the children of fallen angels and mortal women, at once angelic and demonic. See Genesis and Angels and Archangels.
- “That night, the curtain of illusion had been stripped away”: Vera is describing what others in literature have said. Sarah Dessen writes, “You can’t unlearn something, even if you want to. You know what you know” (Along for the Ride, 2009). Arundhati Roy writes, “The trouble is that once you see it, you can’t unsee it” (Power Politics, 2001).
- “Would that my lover had been a man!”: Vera’s realizations this night seem to be described again as a sexual act, something very intimate and physical. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “such a man as is hidden in the woman”: Jung named the woman within the man the anima, and the man within the woman the animus. See Freud and Jung and Duality and Doubles.
    - Young may also be drawing from the Chinese philosophy of Yin and Yang which is a concept of dualism, describing how obviously opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world, and how they may give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another. (Wikipedia)
- “one who combs her long gold hair upon the rock”: Heine’s Lorelei (1824), the Rhine siren who combs her golden hair on the rock and draws boatmen to their deaths. Clemens Brentano first told of her in a ballad of 1801. The body “scaled with silver scales” that follows is the mermaid’s. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “Who was that old rapist if not Miss MacIntosh”: Imagery in this chapter hints that either physically, emotionally, or psychologically a rape took place. Vera because of her age and experience does not have the words to fully explain what has happened to her. See Miss MacIntosh.
- “Oh, how ephemeral are we!”: Ephemeral means something is short-lived or temporary, and it can be used to describe the nature of life and relationships.
- “Watchman, what of the night? Who goes there?”: “Watchman, what of the night?” (Isaiah 21:11), and the opening of Hamlet, “Who’s there?” See The Bible, Shakespeare, and the Chapter 43 resources.
- “Dead men tell no tales”: An old proverb, in print by 1664. See Death and Mortality.

- “wrapped in this house of clay”: “How much less in them that dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust” (Job 4:19). See The Book of Job.
- “Thus did sparrows fall”: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (Matthew 10:29). It is a poetic way to express the transience of life and the shared fate of all creatures within the vast cycle of existence portrayed in the novel. See The Bible.
- “The left breast is already gone”: Miss MacIntosh talks about losing her left breast. William Halsted performed his first radical mastectomy in New York in 1882 and described the operation in 1894. There is no clear record of how earlier women survived the operation, or for how long. See Miss MacIntosh, Women, Gender, and Marriage, and the Chapter 17 resources.
- “Oh, bear the sinner up! Oh, wash our sins away and leave us white as snow!”: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18). Compare 1 Peter 2:24, Psalm 38:4, Galatians 6:2, and Lamentations 5:7. It is a plea for cleansing and forgiveness. Just before, “Oh, plunge me in the purple flood” echoes William Cowper’s hymn: “And sinners, plunged beneath that flood, / Lose all their guilty stains” (1772). See The Bible and the Chapter 3 resources.
- “Oh, where’s What Cheer, Iowa”: Miss MacIntosh’s hometown. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest and the Chapter 9 resources.
- “that hers was that knob where the breast was missing”: In the AMC series Dietland (2018), based on Sarai Walker’s novel, the character Julia (Tamara Tunie) reveals to Plum that she has had a double mastectomy, after a life of wearing “a mask,” as Tunie put it: “the hair, the makeup, the clothes.” See Miss MacIntosh.
- “This earth is but the poor testing ground”: “The testing ground” of Chapter 15. See the Chapter 15 resources.
- “and all oxen are our brothers”: “Thou shalt not see thy brother’s ox or his sheep go astray” (Deuteronomy 22:1). The phrase underscores the theme of humility before life’s challenges and the interconnectedness of all beings in their vulnerability and strength. See The Bible.
- “Only the worm is clothed, and the worm is our little brother”: “I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister” (Job 17:14). See The Book of Job.
- “Where is Issachar”: Jacob’s sons, the tribes of Israel Vera learned to recite in Chapter 9. See The Bible and the Chapter 9 resources.
    - Issachar was a son of Jacob and Leah.
    - Reuben was Jacob’s firstborn son, by Leah. (The Flemish painter is Rubens.)
    - Nabal is in 1 Samuel 25, a story where he insults David and “the Lord smote Nabal, that he died.” His name means “fool” (1 Samuel 25:25), set beside “No fool like an old fool.”
- “No fool like an old fool”: John Heywood’s proverb (1546). See the Chapter 10 resources.

- “Out, out, brief candle!”: “Out, out, brief candle! / Life’s but a walking shadow” (Macbeth 5.5). See Shakespeare.
- “Man was but a shadow and a breath”: “Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away” (Psalm 144:4). It echoes the novel’s sense that a human life is as insubstantial as a shadow and as brief as a breath. See The Bible and the Chapter 15 resources.
- “greaves of brass upon her legs, a target of brass between her shoulders, her spear like a weaver’s beam”: Goliath “had greaves of brass upon his legs, and a target of brass between his shoulders. And the staff of his spear was like a weaver’s beam” (1 Samuel 17:6-7). See The Bible.
- “One leak sinks a ship, and one sin sinks a sinner”: Franklin’s Poor Richard (1745) has “A small leak will sink a great ship,” a warning against neglecting small expenses. Miss MacIntosh turns it from money to sin, where one small fault can sink a soul.
    - John Bunyan is credited with the saying “One leak will sink a ship: and one sin will destroy a sinner.”
- “when the roll was called up yonder”: “When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder” is a popular Christian hymn that speaks of being ready for the day when God’s chosen ones gather in heaven. The song was written by James Milton Black in 1893 and has been translated into multiple languages and sung by various artists. (Wikipedia) The song’s lyrics are often interpreted as a reflection on the concept of the Book of Life and the promise of eternal life in heaven. It encourages believers to live a life of faith and service so that they will be among those who are called up yonder. Here the hymn becomes part of Miss MacIntosh’s shipwreck lament, where “God Himself should not know us, and our own parents should not know us.” The phrase underscores the idea that life and death, beginnings and ends, are intertwined and that ultimately, all must face a final accounting beyond earthly existence.
- “we are sinned against more than we are sinning”: “I am a man / More sinned against than sinning” (King Lear 3.2). See Shakespeare.
- “Clubs are trumps”: The cards of Chapter 14. See Gambling and Playing Cards and the Chapter 14 resources.
- “Luck is for the few, but death is for the many”: The line echoes an Arabic proverb, “Misfortune is for everyone, but good fortune is for a few” (al-bala yaʿumm wa al-rahma takhuss; Al-Ahram, “Proverb of the day”). The phrase is a somber reminder of human mortality and the limits of worldly success, fitting into the novel’s larger themes of illusion, inevitability, and the search for meaning in the face of death.
- “Never married, never buried. An old man’s love is a young maid’s sorrow”: Both lines are old proverbs, often found in folk traditions and songs, particularly in the context of warnings against marrying old men, as in the ballad “Maids When You’re Young Never Wed an Old Man” (Ballad Index). John Heywood’s Proverbs (1546) has the other side: “Better to be an old man’s darling than a young man’s warling.”

- “The bald head is soonest shaved”: Miss MacIntosh turns old jokes about baldness on herself, here and in “No grass grows on a busy street.” See Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “a fool’s paradise”: The phrase is Middle English, and the earliest known use is in the Paston Letters of 1462. In Romeo and Juliet, the Nurse warns Romeo not to “lead her into a fool’s paradise” (2.4). Miss MacIntosh tells Vera she was “living in a fool’s paradise, and now you know there is no answer.” See Shakespeare.
- “Heaven’s nets are woven very wide”: The Tao Te Ching, chapter 73, in one common translation: “Heaven’s net is vast; though its meshes are wide, nothing slips through.” Miss MacIntosh finishes the thought, “but none shall escape them.” Indra’s Net appears in the Atharva Veda, and Huayan Buddhism made it the image of a world where each jewel in an endless net reflects every other. It means that the net of divine grace or judgment is extensive and all-encompassing, offering no easy escape from one’s spiritual destiny. It underscores themes of universality, inevitability, and the encompassing nature of divine authority in the novel. See Taoism and Zhuangzi, Hinduism, and Buddhism.
- “this life was all a dream”: The idea runs through many works:
  - Pedro Calderón de la Barca’s Life Is a Dream (first performed 1635, published 1636) is a famous play that uses the metaphor of life as a dream to explore themes of free will, fate, and the nature of reality. The play’s central character, Segismundo, is imprisoned in a tower and then released, experiencing both pleasure and suffering before being told it was all a dream. (Wikipedia) See the Chapter 2 resources.
  - Prospero’s “We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep” (The Tempest 4.1) compares life to a dream.
  - Edgar Allan Poe’s “A Dream Within a Dream” explores the cyclical nature of dreams and the illusion of reality, further reinforcing the idea of life as a dream. See Edgar Allan Poe.
  - Ludwig Wittgenstein wrote in a diary entry of the early 1930s: “We are asleep. Our life is like a dream. But in our better hours we wake up just enough to realize that we are dreaming.” See Wittgenstein.
  - In Indian philosophy, Maya, literally “illusion” or “magic,” has many meanings; in later Vedic texts it connotes a “magic show, an illusion where things appear to be present but are not what they seem.” (Wikipedia) See Hinduism.
- “her fishnet bag with her Pilgrim’s Progress”: Miss MacIntosh’s Bunyan again. See the Chapter 3 resources.
- “the last rose of the last summer on earth”: “The Last Rose of Summer” is a poem by the Irish poet Thomas Moore, published in 1813 and written while staying at Jenkinstown Castle in County Kilkenny, Ireland, where he was said to have been inspired by the China rose ‘Old Blush.’ (Wikipedia) It poignantly represents the final vestiges of youth, vitality, and love, standing on the brink of disappearance, much like

the characters grappling with mortality and the fading of dreams. See Roses and Flowers and the Chapter 6 resources.

- “There is no God”: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psalm 14:1). Diagoras of Melos, a fifth-century BC poet, was called “the Atheist” in antiquity. He was said to have mocked the Eleusinian Mysteries and was condemned at Athens. This phrase marks a moment of profound questioning or a crisis point in the narrative where the comforting presence of God is deeply questioned or felt to be absent, confronting the characters with the mystery of existence and the silence in the face of suffering. See The Bible.
- “the true love is that which does not alter when it alteration finds”: Shakespeare wrote, “Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds… O no! it is an ever-fixed mark / That looks on tempests and is never shaken” (Sonnet 116). Young follows with “The true love wears an old shirt and is familiar.” See Shakespeare and the Chapter 6 resources.
- “as if I myself had become Falada”: Vera’s pony of Chapter 16, named for the horse in the Grimm tale. See Falada, Horses and Carriages, and the Chapter 16 resources.
- “the heavy, claw-shaped mark of her hand upon my forehead”: In Chapter 10, Vera imagined “claws upon her forehead like the claws of a lobster.” Now the claw marks Vera. See Miss MacIntosh and the Chapter 10 resources.
- “I have tried to be charitable”: “And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity” (1 Corinthians 13:13). See The Bible.
- “hold with the hounds while she ran with the hares”: John Heywood’s proverb (1546). See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “a house divided”: “If a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand” (Mark 3:25), and Lincoln’s speech of 1858. See The Bible and The Civil War.
- “to stand with one foot in the sea and one foot on the shore”: “Men were deceivers ever, / One foot in sea and one on shore, / To one thing constant never” (Much Ado About Nothing 2.3). See Shakespeare.
- “all flesh, she said, is as the burned grass”: “For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away” (1 Peter 1:24). This metaphor, spoken by Miss MacIntosh during a moment of intense revelation and struggle with Vera (the narrator), equates human flesh with grass that has been burned. Something once living and vibrant but now scorched, fragile, and destined to wither away. It conveys the stark reality that human life, no matter how vibrant or full, is ultimately fleeting and fragile, much like grass that is scorched by fire and will not regrow. It invites reflection on mortality and the importance of facing life’s truths with courage and acceptance. See The Bible.
- “every heart is married to death who is the bridegroom and the bride”: Death as the bridegroom, as in Chapter 15. It means that human life is fundamentally intertwined with death. Death is not an external threat but a constant, intimate presence in life. It emphasizes the tragic and inevitable nature of mortality that defines and shapes

human existence, love, and relationships. This theme is woven throughout the novel, in the narrator's reflections on life, death, and illusion. See Weddings and Funerals, Death and Mortality, and the Chapter 15 resources.

- "the king of rags and patches": Hamlet calls his uncle "A king of shreds and patches" (Hamlet 3.4). See Shakespeare.
- "Better be stung by a nettle than pricked by a rose": An old proverb. The nettle's sting is sharp but plain, while the rose, beautiful and seemingly gentle, wounds in hiding.
- "He who covers us with his wings will bite us with his bill": The first half echoes Psalm 91:4, "He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust." It is a vivid metaphor expressing the ambivalence and potential cruelty in relationships, especially those involving protection or intimacy. This line suggests that the one who seems to protect or shelter us (covering us with wings, like a bird shielding its young) can also cause harm or betrayal (biting us with his bill). It captures the paradox that those closest to us, who may offer care and safety, can also inflict pain and disappointment. The imagery implies vulnerability and the complicated nature of love and trust with those who protect have the power to hurt as well. The phrase conveys the idea that protection and harm are often intertwined in human relationships, emphasizing the complexity and sometimes painful duality of intimacy. See The Bible.
- "Better go to hell with rags than to heaven with embroidery": The old proverb runs the other way: "Better go to heaven in rags than to hell in embroidery." Miss MacIntosh turns it around.
- "the crooked way of the crab": Aesop's crab, who cannot walk straight. See Fairy Tales and Folklore and the Chapter 15 resources.
- "Why bark if one keeps a dog?": "Why keep a dog and bark yourself?" (1583). See Dogs.
- "the chief industry of northern Michigan": Iron and copper mining and lumber on Michigan's Upper Peninsula.
- "Where was Egg Harbor?": Egg Harbor is a village in Door County, Wisconsin. There is also an Egg Harbor in New Jersey.
- "Where was Aldebaran?": Aldebaran is a giant star in the zodiac constellation Taurus. See Astronomy.
- "Where was the lost star?": Traditionally the lost star is the Lost Pleiad, Merope, said to have dimmed for shame at marrying a mortal. See the Chapter 11 resources.
- "Where was Tobias Smollett?": Tobias Smollett (1721-1771) was a Scottish author known for his picaresque novels. Miss MacIntosh names him in her dawn quiz, among places, battles, and stars.
- "it was all a dream through which I had lived": Miss MacIntosh and Vera's mother Catherine seem to agree that whether a person decides to fill their head with factual knowledge or live in an imaginary world, it is all a dream of living and dying. Human beings ultimately go through life not knowing why they are here or not wanting to know.

- “where was Skagerrak”: The Skagerrak is a strait between Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, “an arm of the North Sea,” as Miss MacIntosh says, “which should be south of Norway.”
- “the Battle of Shiloh”: The Battle of Shiloh (April 1862) was fought in the Western Theater of the American Civil War. See The Civil War.
- “the Society Islands”: The Society Islands, which include Tahiti, are an archipelago in the South Pacific Ocean.
- “the Easter Islands”: Easter Island is a remote volcanic island in Polynesia. See the Chapter 3 resources.
- “who spoke only with a whistling language”: Whistled languages exist in Spain, Turkey, France, Mexico, South America, India, Nepal, New Guinea, and West Africa. The best known is the Silbo Gomero of La Gomera, in the Canary Islands.
- “where was Shakespeare?”: William Shakespeare was an English playwright, poet and actor. See Shakespeare.
- “the Palace of the Doges”: The Palace of the Doges was built in the Venetian Gothic style in Venice. See the Chapter 16 resources.
- “Where was Ratisbon?”: Ratisbon is the old name of Regensburg, in Bavaria, which Napoleon stormed in 1809. Browning’s “Incident of the French Camp” (1842) begins, “You know, we French stormed Ratisbon.” See Napoleon and Wellington.
- “Where was Paul Revere?”: Paul Revere was an American silversmith, engraver, early industrialist, and Patriot of the American Revolution. (Wikipedia) Longfellow’s “Paul Revere’s Ride” (1861) begins, “Listen, my children, and you shall hear / Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere.” See American Writers.
- “Where were the Pyrenees?”: The Pyrenees are a mountain range that separates the Iberian Peninsula from the rest of Europe.
- “old proverbs plucked from the World Almanac or farmers’ journals”: The World Almanac has been published since 1868. The Farmer’s Almanac appears in Chapter 15. See the Chapter 15 resources.
- “the joker is that card which has no face but is the highest card when it is used in euchre”: The joker was added to the deck for euchre in 1860s America as the “best bower,” the highest card, just as Miss MacIntosh says. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “most men are conceived in the night and die with the ebbing of the tide”: In Dickens’s David Copperfield (1850), Mr. Peggotty says of the dying Barkis, “People can’t die, along the coast, except when the tide’s pretty nigh out.” Falstaff died “ev’n at the turning o’ th’ tide” (Henry V 2.3). See Shakespeare.
- “Where were her red jersey bloomers?”: Amelia Bloomer’s reform dress. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and the Chapter 9 resources.
- “an un-Christian institution for the sports of kings and fools”: The Roman circus was the arena for chariot racing, the greatest being the Circus Maximus, which held well over

150,000 spectators. Early Christian writers such as Tertullian, in *On the Spectacles* (around 200 AD), condemned the games as pagan idolatry, and tradition linked the arenas with the martyrdom of Christians.

- “or were they angels in the furnace fire?”: The fourth figure in the fiery furnace, “like the Son of God” (Daniel 3:25), and Daniel in the lions’ den (Daniel 6). See The Bible.
- “winter is summer’s heir”: The proverb of Chapter 15. See the Chapter 15 resources.
- “The tallow is burning low. We have no oil.”: The foolish virgins of the parable say, “Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out” (Matthew 25:8), and miss the bridegroom. See The Bible and Weddings and Funerals.
- “the rose at the North Pole is the rose immortal”: In a spiritual sense it signifies the coexistence of death and eternal life, the presence of enduring beauty and essence in a world otherwise marked by loss, coldness, and transience. It evokes a mystical, almost sacred dimension beneath the surface of harsh reality or an eternal “rose” blooming in the frozen heart of the North Pole. See Exploration and the Poles.
    - A compass rose, sometimes called a rose of the winds, is the diagram of directions on maps and nautical charts, and medieval mariners were expected to name all 32 of its points. It is also the emblem of the worldwide Anglican Communion. (Wikipedia) There are two North Poles, magnetic and true.
- “What if the whole world should turn to salt?”: Lot’s wife “became a pillar of salt” (Genesis 19:26). See Genesis.
- “A good husband makes a good wife”: Miss MacIntosh in this case is taking on the role of the groom in molding Vera to be the bride. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “robbing Peter to pay Paul”: or other versions that have developed over the centuries such as “to borrow from Peter to pay Paul” and “to unclothe Peter to clothe Paul” are phrases meaning to take from one person or thing to give to another, especially when it results in the elimination of one debt by incurring another. (Wikipedia) Within the context of the chapter, it emphasizes the frustration with life’s compromises and the lack of genuine progress or resolution in their difficult circumstances. It conveys the sense of being caught in a cycle of compromises and sacrifices that do not truly improve the situation but merely shift burdens around, reflecting the broader themes of futility, suffering, and the search for meaning in the novel.
- “we must prepare to go into the winter solstice”: Chapter 15 sets this night in “the hot August night,” so Miss MacIntosh is looking ahead to winter. “Solstice” comes from the Latin sol and sistere, “the sun stands still,” which Young spells out: “when the sun should apparently stand still.”
- “triple-crowned kings”: The triple crown is the papal tiara. See the Chapter 16 resources.
- “the Anatolian coast”: Anatolia is the peninsula of Western Asia that makes up most of Turkey.
- “the Bay of Biscay”: The Bay of Biscay is a gulf south of the Celtic Sea.
- “the Shetland Islands”: The Shetland Islands are an archipelago in Scotland.

- “and Archangel”: Archangel, or Arkhangelsk, is a Russian port on the White Sea.
- “Archimedes”: Archimedes was a Greek mathematician, physicist, engineer, inventor, and astronomer. (Wikipedia) In the chapter he is a representation of reason, science, and the human quest for comprehension amidst the mystical and often inscrutable realities that Vera confronts in her dreamlike journey. His figure anchors the narrative’s oscillation between the mystical and the rational, the historical and the personal. See the Chapter 15 resources.
- “fuss and feathers”: “Old Fuss and Feathers” was the nickname of General Winfield Scott, known for his love of uniform and ceremony.
- “O, temporal O, mores!”: Cicero’s “O tempora, o mores!” (“Oh, the times! Oh, the customs!”), from his speech Against Catiline (63 BC), garbled by Miss MacIntosh.
- “for he is unworthy to live who lives only for himself and not somewhat in others”: The wording has not been traced to Luther. His On the Freedom of a Christian (1520) closes on a like thought, that a Christian “lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor.” The line expresses a moral and philosophical viewpoint about the nature of a meaningful life. It suggests that a person who lives solely for their own self-interest, without regard or connection to other people, lacks true worth or dignity. This idea aligns with Miss MacIntosh’s practical and no-nonsense worldview, emphasizing selflessness, community, and service to others as fundamental values. She believes that life’s purpose is found in caring for and contributing to the well-being of others (the poor orphans of this world) and that the “fool’s paradise” of self-indulgence and isolation is not the way to live a good or worthy life. The phrase means that a life confined within selfishness and isolation is considered lacking, and true worth comes from empathy, love, and living in connection with other souls. It underscores one of the novel’s recurrent themes about the importance of shared humanity and moral responsibility toward others.
- “if ever I told what I had seen, she would kill me”: A person who rapes another often threatens their life or the life of someone they care about in order to ensure they will never tell anyone what happened.
- “She had never seen it herself except in a mirror”: Until this night, only a mirror had seen her baldness. See Mirrors and Reflections.
- “a man’s bedroom was a man’s castle”: “A man’s house is his castle” (Sir Edward Coke, 1628). See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “She had tried to woo me away from my mother, believing I was more nearly her child than my mother’s”: Young told Studs Terkel that the novel began with “a famous court case” in which “a rich girl… declared publicly that she loved her nursemaid more than her mother”: “that is actually where the idea of the book came from” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). Young did not name the case. Coral Russell, searching for the case Young may have meant, identified the most likely match as the 1934 Vanderbilt custody trial, in which ten-year-old Gloria Vanderbilt clung to her nurse, Emma Sullivan Keislich, “Dodo,” and the newspapers called her the “poor little rich girl.” See Vera Cartwheel and Miss MacIntosh.

- “Common sense was the rarest jewel, more precious than rubies”: Wisdom “is more precious than rubies” (Proverbs 3:15), and “the price of wisdom is above rubies” (Job 28:18). See The Bible and The Book of Job.
- “I needed a father to guide me”: Miss MacIntosh believes Vera should have had a father and this might refer to a husband since in earlier marriages a daughter is passed from her father to her husband as her guardian. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “tempus fugit”: Tempus fugit is Latin for “time flies.” It comes from Virgil’s Georgics (3.284), “fugit inreparabile tempus,” time flies, never to be regained.
- “Age is the most difficult thing to achieve”: Life expectancy in the United States in 1900 was 47 years and in 1950 rose to 68 years. Neil deGrasse Tyson has said, “The fact that you and I are alive is against stupendous odds. One day we will die, and that’s sad, but there are people who will never die because they were never born. We’re the lucky ones, we get to die” (in conversation with Vikas Shah, Thought Economics, January 13, 2023). Miss MacIntosh whispers the line as Vera falls asleep, just after “Alas, I was several years younger then than I am now, for tempus fugit.” To achieve age is to endure loss, hardship, and change, not simply to count the years.
    - Society shapes human health because social factors like income, education, stress levels, access to healthcare, neighborhood environment, social support networks, and cultural norms significantly influence people’s health behaviors, prevailing marketing around lifestyle choices, and overall health outcomes, essentially determining the level of health an individual can achieve within a given community. The World Health Organization calls these the social determinants of health, “the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age.”

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Antagonist

An opponent; one who struggles against another.

Anvil

The heavy iron block on which a blacksmith hammers hot metal into shape.

Awry

Askew; turned or twisted to one side.

Balderdash

Nonsense.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Bisect

To cut or divide into two parts.

Bloomers

Loose trousers gathered at the knee, worn by women.

Castanets

Pairs of small wooden shells clicked together in the hand, as in Spanish dance.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Constitutional

A walk taken regularly for the sake of one’s health.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Deflowered

Robbed of virginity.

Distraught

Deeply upset.

Doge

The elected ruler of Venice.

Dupe

A person who is easily fooled.

Eaves

The edges of a roof that overhang the walls.

Ephemeral

Lasting a very short time.

Errant

Wandering; straying from the proper course.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Euchre

A card game for four players, for which the joker was first added to the deck.

Facetious

Joking at an inappropriate time.

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Gannet

A large white seabird that dives for fish.

Genealogy

A record of a family’s descent.

Greaves

Armor for the shins.

Harrowed

Distressed; tormented.

Interstices

Small gaps or spaces between things.

Invulnerable

Unable to be wounded or harmed.

Jersey

A soft knitted cloth.

Lazar

A diseased beggar, especially one with leprosy.

Leeward

On the side sheltered from the wind.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Loping

Moving with long, easy strides.

Makeshift

Serving as a rough, temporary substitute.

Marcel

A hairstyle of deep, regular waves made with a heated iron.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Monitor

One who watches over and warns.

Nautilus

A sea creature with a spiral shell. The paper nautilus is a small octopus whose female makes a thin, papery shell.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Paltry

Small and worthless.

Paraphernalia

Personal belongings or equipment.

Phantasmal

Ghostly; like a phantom or an illusion.

Pinioned

Held or bound fast, especially by the arms.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Pretender

One who pretends; also, someone who claims a throne or title without a rightful claim.

Proximity

Nearness.

Recessive

Tending to recede; hidden or held back.

Resonance

Deep, full, echoing sound.

Retribution

Punishment given in return for a wrong.

Retrospection

A looking back on the past.

Seamy

Sordid; the rough, unpleasant side of life.

Seine

To fish with a large hanging net.

Shipshape

Neat and in good order.

Solstice

Either of the two days of the year when the sun is farthest north or south, the longest and shortest days.

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard. Spar is also the name for certain shiny, easily split crystalline minerals, such as Iceland spar.

Sprightly

Lively and energetic.

Sumac

A shrub with red autumn leaves and clusters of red berries.

Swooned

Fainted.

Tallow

Animal fat used for candles and soap. Tallow-colored is a dull, yellowish white.

Tempus fugit

Latin for “time flies.”

Tenpins

Bowling played with ten pins.

Timbre

The quality or tone of a voice or sound.

Transient

Passing quickly; not lasting. As a noun, a hotel guest who stays only a short time.

Tumult

A loud, confused uproar.

Undertow

A current beneath the surface that pulls back out to sea.

Vagrant

Wandering, with no settled home.

Vapid

Dull and empty of life or interest.

Vestments

Robes or garments, especially ceremonial ones.

Wayfarer

A traveler, especially on foot.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Whaler

A whaling ship or a man who hunts whales.

Chapter 19

Summary

“That was the false dawn, surely.” Vera wakes in Miss MacIntosh’s bed, sure that the night was a dream for which no one was responsible. Before she opens her eyes, she goes over things she never thought to question: the missing eyebrows, the face that changes color, the baseball cap in the mornings, the green ribbon in the evenings, the veils over the whaler’s hat, the black umbrella carried even indoors. Her mother calls herself “the horizontal person.” Miss MacIntosh is “perpendicular.” Then Vera looks. The bald head lies on the pillow next to hers, “cold as marble,” and the red wig is perched on the hat rack “like a rare tropical bird.” The room is bare and broken: a bust of Martin Luther, cherubim with no wings, a Bible chained to a table, false teeth in a glass, the deuce of clubs turned up, seaweed hanging on the barred door, the umbrella open on the floor. Then Vera observes “what I must surely have always known.” One breast has been amputated, and “what was left was no bigger than a baby’s.”

Characters present

Miss MacIntosh · Vera Cartwheel · Catherine Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Decay and Ruin · Dreams and Imagination · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Cards, Games, and Chance · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Eyes and Blindness · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Roses and Flowers · The House · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology

Allusions: Angels and Archangels · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Music and Composers · Shakespeare · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a meticulous depiction of Miss MacIntosh’s largely bare and austere bedroom. The room contains very few ornaments: a bust of Martin Luther, a large seashell used as a doorstop, and crumbling cherubim heads around a blackened fireplace, covered by cheese-cloth drapery. The room is described as “plain,” “barely furnished,” and showing signs of decay which metaphorically reflects Miss MacIntosh’s own physical and perhaps spiritual condition. This setting evokes a sense of austerity,

fragility, and impermanence, mirroring the character's struggle with her own vulnerabilities.

- Vera observes Miss MacIntosh's physical traits with a mix of curiosity and tenderness. Notable is the absence of her eyebrows, the rapid changes in the color of her skin, her habitual wearing of old caps or a baseball cap, and the ever-present whistle around her neck. The description of her headgear and her old black umbrella carried like a shield even indoors suggests a defensive posture against the world or perhaps her own frailty. These details hint at a woman who is both physically fragile and psychologically guarded, living with an awareness of her own vulnerability.
- A striking image is that of Miss MacIntosh's bald head lying next to Vera's pillow, "cold as marble" and "seldom touched by sunlight." This evokes a sense of mortality and the harsh reality of illness or aging. Her red wig, compared to a "rare tropical bird," is carefully placed within reach, symbolizing a constructed identity or a protective mask she wears in public. The presence of her worn clothing, her corset stained and draped over a chair, and other personal belongings scattered around the room reinforce the theme of physical deterioration and survival. Vera's detailed observation of these items underscores a deep intimacy and respect for Miss MacIntosh's resilience despite her hardships.
- Among the personal items is a set of translucent playing cards with Dutch windmills, with the upturned card being the deuce of clubs, described as "the test of tears" and "the omen of death." This is particularly poignant given Miss MacIntosh's critical view of gambling as "the crafty Devil's handiwork." The card's presence symbolizes fate, mortality, and perhaps the inevitability of death. It also highlights the duality in Miss MacIntosh's beliefs between her Christian faith, her honesty, and her rejection of "double motions" or duplicity in the heart. This passage deepens the psychological complexity of her character and sets a somber, reflective tone.
- The description of the room's decay continues, with cracked walls, stained ceilings, barred doors with seaweed and barnacles, mud tracks, grains of sand, and salt gleamings. These vivid natural and physical details evoke a sense of isolation, imprisonment, and the passage of time, suggesting that Miss MacIntosh's life is enclosed, weathered by external elements and internal struggles. The imagery of the umbrella, still opened on the floor as if for protection during the night, reinforces the motif of defense and vulnerability. Vera's discovery that one of Miss MacIntosh's breasts has been amputated is a stark and intimate revelation, symbolizing loss and suffering, yet also the survival and endurance of the woman.
- "I observed what I must surely have always known, the fact that one breast had been amputated. What was left was no bigger than a baby's." The revelation is something Vera half knew all along.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “That was the false dawn, surely.” What is false about this morning?
- Miss MacIntosh’s bedroom has “no dust-catchers,” yet Vera finds it crowded with saved things. Which details give the woman away?
- The upturned card is “the deuce of clubs, that card which signifies the test of tears.” Why does Young place it within reach of her hand?

Characters

- Catherine is “the horizontal person,” and Miss MacIntosh is “perpendicular.” What does each posture protect?
- Vera wants to ask her questions “with studied detachment as if one were considering a land one had not visited and would never visit.” Why that distance?
- “She was no turncoat,” and “she knew not… of these dualities in one heart.” What does the room say about that claim?

Connections

- The red wig on the chair post in Chapter 18 is “perched like a rare tropical bird” here. How has Vera’s view of it changed overnight?
- Chapter 18 heard her talk of the breast “already gone.” What changes when Vera sees it?
- The seaweed on the door and the open umbrella look ahead to the sea. Where has the novel already told how Miss MacIntosh will die?

Reflection

- “What I must surely have always known.” Can a person know something and not know it?
- What do the things a person saves “for a rainy day” say about her?
- Is there tenderness in looking closely at someone who is asleep, or is it a trespass?

Research: Characters

Miss MacIntosh

- Bald head cold as marble, veined limbs, a missing breast (amputated), thin, ascetic mouth with “not one soft fuzz of hair upon the upper lip,” red wig resembling a tropical bird, gnarled hands.

- Wears a baseball cap or old caps in the morning and a green ribbon in the evenings.
- Always carries a whistle around her neck.
- Wears a veil-tied hat outdoors, sometimes layered with heavy veiling.
- Carries an old black umbrella indoors and outdoors, like a shield.
- Sleeps lightly, alert to the slightest noise.
- Yet this morning she sleeps on with “a kind of abandon,” “singularly unaware of my scrutiny.”
- Has a strong Christian faith, critical of gambling, “the crafty Devil’s handiwork.”
- Exhibits physical and emotional contradictions: shifting skin color, blushing for no apparent reason, and trying to resist external forces (“bucking against the broncho wind”).
- The playing cards, especially the “deuce of clubs,” symbolize fate, death, or a trial by tears, despite her rejection of gambling.
- Her patched clothing and worn items reflect hardship and resilience.

Vera Cartwheel

- She describes her mind as “lucid as day” but simultaneously reveals a hesitation or reluctance to fully open her eyes and confront reality directly. This tension between clarity and avoidance suggests an internal conflict or a fragile psychological state. She seems caught between the realms of dream and waking, reality and imagination, as shown by her uncertainty about whether she is truly awake despite the vividness of the dawn light and surroundings.
- She meticulously catalogues the objects and conditions in Miss MacIntosh’s bedroom, from the “crumbling heads of cherubim” to the “red wig, almost purple,” and the “jeweled water glass” holding false teeth. This detailed observation indicates a careful, almost forensic attention to detail, suggesting a mind that seeks to understand and piece together the significance of the environment and the person within it.
- There is a tone of gentle curiosity in Vera’s internal questioning about Miss MacIntosh’s peculiarities: her missing eyebrows, the changing colors of her skin, her habitual wearing of hats and a whistle, and the careful way she avoids showing vulnerability (the umbrella carried “like a shield uplifted where there was no gale”). These questions are posed with “studied detachment,” as if Vera is trying to maintain emotional distance while simultaneously probing deeply into the character of Miss MacIntosh.
- Despite this detachment, Vera’s sensitivity is apparent in her awareness of the “quiver of wind upon the high cheek bones,” the “thin, ascetic mouth,” and the “wet and stained” pillow. She notices intimate, tender details such as the fact that “one breast had been amputated,” describing what remains as “no bigger than a baby’s,” which evokes a sense of vulnerability and loss. This reveals an underlying empathy and a recognition of Miss MacIntosh’s suffering and resilience.

- Vera recalls Miss MacIntosh's sayings that "the Devil's cards are marked" and that she "knew not… of these dualities in one heart, these double motions."
- Vera's detailed description of Miss MacIntosh's room (with its broken, bare, and patched furnishings, barred door, and scattered personal effects) reflects a broader sense of isolation, hardship, and complexity. She seems attuned to this atmosphere of loneliness and endurance, which may mirror her own inner state or the broader themes of the narrative.

Research: Themes

Reality versus Dream

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination

- Vera questions the boundaries between waking and sleeping, dream and reality, underscored by the "false dawn" and the dreamlike quality of the observations.

Decay and Brokenness

See: Decay and Ruin

- The imagery of broken cherubim, cracked walls, a fallen alabaster rose, and worn clothing reflects themes of impermanence, loss, and the passage of time.

Isolation and Protection

See: Isolation and Connection

- Miss MacIntosh's habits (umbrella indoors, veils, barred door) suggest a need for defense against external threats and a guarded, solitary existence.

Faith and Morality

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- Her Christian beliefs, criticism of gambling, and chained Bible contrast with the ominous presence of the cards and other symbols of fate, indicating internal conflicts or tensions between belief and fate.

Physical and Emotional Vulnerability

See: Women, Gender, and Marriage

- The amputated breast and the varying skin colors symbolize physical trauma and emotional sensitivity.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Red Wig

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- A mask or false identity, “perched like a rare tropical bird on the hat rack… within easy reach of her gnarled hand,” ready but separate from her true self.

Playing Cards (Deuce of Clubs)

See: Cards, Games, and Chance

- Represents the “test of tears” and omen of death; a paradox considering her moral stance against gambling.

Umbrella

See: The Umbrella

- A shield or protective barrier, even when unnecessary.
- “The heavy-ribbed black umbrella, opened, was on the floor where it had rolled as if, during the night, she might have upheld it for her protection.”

Barred Door with Seaweed

See: Keys, Doors, and Locks

- Symbolizes isolation and self-imposed confinement.
- “A clump of blackened seaweed… much like some other wig, barnacles clinging to it.” The sea is already hanging on her door.
- The door was “barred from the inside.” Whatever happened, she shut them in together.

Broken Cherubim and Fallen Alabaster Rose

See: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Roses and Flowers

- Fragments of lost innocence or beauty.

Chained Bible

See: The Bible

- Firm but restrained faith; tethering spirituality to reality.

Miss MacIntosh’s Bedroom

See: The House

- A large, sparsely furnished chamber, described as “barely furnished” with no dust-catchers, no hanging tapestries, no floating angels, reflecting a deliberate plainness.

Decor

See: The House

- Broken cherubim heads around a blackened fireplace, a bust of Martin Luther on a pedestal, a large sea shell used as a door stopper, cracked walls, and stained ceiling with broken cornices.

Atmosphere

See: Dreams and Imagination

- The dawn light is described as “moon-washed,” filled with “pristine light,” “tremblings,” and “washings” that create a liminal space between night and day, dream and reality.

Details

See: The House

- Objects are scattered about her room: her red wig on a hat rack, a whale-boned corset, a silver-dollar watch pinned to a curtain, false teeth in a jeweled water glass, stockings, patches, knitting, a porcelain chamber pot, an empty picture frame, a broken ship’s compass, a chained Bible, and a Pullman towel.

Research: Resources

- “That was the false dawn, surely”: FitzGerald’s note to the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám (1859): “The False Dawn; Subhi Kázib, a transient light on the Horizon about an hour before the Subhi sádik, or True Dawn.” In Chapter 18, “the first light of the first dawn… seemed a falsehood.” See the Chapter 18 resources.
- “the bust of Martin Luther”: Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a German professor of theology, priest, Augustinian monk, and hymn writer, and the central figure of the Reformation. (Wikipedia) His “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (c. 1529) is still sung in Protestant churches. Luther himself opposed the image-breakers of 1522, but the Reformation he began stripped many churches bare, as Miss MacIntosh strips her room. Miss MacIntosh quoted a line attributed to him at dawn in Chapter 18. See Augustine and Christian Theology, Music and Composers, and the Chapter 18 resources.
- “the crumbling heads of cherubim”: In the Bible, cherubim are fierce guardians, set “at the east of the garden of Eden… to keep the way of the tree of life” (Genesis 3:24). The winged child heads of decoration are the putti of Renaissance art. These have “already lost their wings.” See Angels and Archangels and Angels, Devils, and Myth.

- “the acanthus leaves in the molding”: Acanthus is one of the most common plant forms for foliage ornaments and decoration. (Wikipedia) The Roman architect Vitruvius tells that the sculptor Callimachus saw acanthus growing around a basket left on a young girl’s grave and carved it into the first Corinthian capital (On Architecture 4.1).
- “my sleeping mother who called herself the horizontal person”: Catherine, who lives lying down, “never walked except in her imagination.” Miss MacIntosh is “perpendicular.” See Catherine Cartwheel.
- “the cap of a sleeping car porter”: After the Civil War, the Pullman Company hired Black men, many of them formerly enslaved, as sleeping car porters. They worked long hours for low pay and tips, and passengers called every one of them “George,” after George Pullman. A. Philip Randolph organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters in 1925, and in 1937 it won “the first major labor agreement between a Black union and a corporation” (Smithsonian Magazine, February 18, 2025). See Society, Class, and Race.
    - “There was a Pullman towel”: Pullman towels were stamped with the company name, and travelers carried them home.
- “jigsaw puzzles which always turned out to be the faces of presidents or the maps of foreign countries”: The first jigsaw puzzles were “dissected maps,” cut by the London mapmaker John Spilsbury in the 1760s to teach geography.
- “playing tiddlywinks”: The game was patented in England by Joseph Fincher in 1888 as “Tiddledy-Winks” and became a craze in the 1890s.
- “my strange bedfellow”: “Misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows” (The Tempest 2.2). See Shakespeare.
- “Her red wig, almost purple”: The wig Vera saw “upon the carven chair post” in Chapter 18. See Hair, Wig, and Baldness and the Chapter 18 resources.
- “Her whale-boned, salmon-colored corset”: The “salmon-colored monstrosity” of Chapter 18, stiffened with whalebone. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts and the Chapter 17 resources.
- “my grandmother’s rocking chair”: The blind grandmother of the garden of the blind. See Eyes and Blindness and the Chapter 12 resources.
- “Her silver-dollar watch”: This may be a dollar watch, like the Ingersoll pocket watch of 1896, which sold for one dollar and was the first watch most Americans could afford.
- “a grey fedora”: The fedora takes its name from Victorien Sardou’s play Fédora (1882), in which Sarah Bernhardt wore a soft, creased, brimmed hat. It was a woman’s hat first, and then a man’s. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “the convict’s garb”: Striped prison uniforms began at New York’s Auburn Prison in the 1820s, so a prisoner could be seen anywhere. Most prisons gave them up in the early twentieth century.
- “a pair of white fur ear muffs”: Chester Greenwood of Farmington, Maine, invented earmuffs at fifteen, in 1873, and patented them in 1877.

- “her dim mackintosh”: The Scottish chemist Charles Macintosh patented his rubberized waterproof cloth in 1823, and the raincoat took his name. It is her name, too. See Miss MacIntosh.
- “a world’s almanac”: The World Almanac of Chapter 18. See the Chapter 18 resources.
- “a broken ship’s compass”: The compass rose of Chapter 18, now broken. See the Chapter 18 resources.
- “a Moody’s hotel Bible. I noted that she had chained it to a table”: The Gideons placed their first hotel Bible in 1908, in Iron Mountain, Montana. In 1538, Thomas Cromwell ordered every church in England to set up “one book of the whole Bible of the largest volume in English” where parishioners could read it. It came to be called the Chained Bible, because it was fastened so it could not be taken away. Miss MacIntosh chains hers. See The Bible.
- “an Atlantic City paperweight”: Atlantic City, New Jersey, built its Boardwalk in 1870 and became the great seaside souvenir town of the East.
- “the lashless eyelids”: Alopecia universalis is the loss of all hair on the body, including the brows and lashes. See Hair, Wig, and Baldness and the Chapter 17 resources.
- “the deuce of clubs, that card which signifies the test of tears”: Cartomancy reads fortunes in ordinary playing cards. Young gives the deuce of clubs its meaning herself. Clubs were trumps the night before. See Gambling and Playing Cards and the Chapter 18 resources.
- “the Devil’s cards are marked”: The Puritans called playing cards “the Devil’s books.” The American historian of cards Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer titled her book The Devil’s Picture-Books (1890). See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “beauty is as beauty does, and beauty is more than skin deep”: Miss MacIntosh bends two proverbs. “Handsome is that handsome does” is Mrs. Primrose’s in Goldsmith’s The Vicar of Wakefield (1766). “Beauty is but skin deep” goes back to Sir Thomas Overbury’s poem “A Wife” (1613): “All the carnall beautie of my wife, / Is but skinne-deepe.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “it’s an ill wind that blows nobody good”: John Heywood’s proverb (1546). Falstaff’s man Pistol says, “Not the ill wind which blows no man to good” (Henry IV, Part 2 5.3). See Shakespeare.
- “a clump of blackened seaweed hanging on a nail on the door”: “much like some other wig.” Miss MacIntosh will be lost to the sea. See The Sea and Water and the Chapter 6 resources.
- “her red jersey bloomers”: The bloomers Miss MacIntosh asked for at dawn in Chapter 18. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and the Chapter 18 resources.
- “one breast had been amputated”: The Halsted operation of Chapters 17 and 18. See Miss MacIntosh, Women, Gender, and Marriage, and the Chapter 17 resources.

Vocabulary

Acanthus

A Mediterranean plant whose deeply cut leaves are carved as ornament, especially on Corinthian columns.

Alabaster

A fine, smooth, white stone used for carving.

Ascetic

Severe and self-denying; giving up comfort and pleasure.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Bloomers

Loose trousers gathered at the knee, worn by women.

Broncho

An old spelling of bronco, a wild or half-tamed horse of the American West.

Burnished

Polished until shining.

Chamber pot

A bowl kept under the bed for use as a toilet at night.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Cornice

A decorative molding that runs along the top of a wall or building.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Coverlid

An old form of coverlet, a bedspread.

Deuce

A playing card or die with two spots.

Dominoes

A game played with small oblong tiles marked with spots.

Fedora

A soft felt hat with a brim and a crease along the crown.

Gnarled

Knobbly and twisted, as old trees or hands.

Jersey

A soft knitted cloth.

Lucid

Clear; clear-headed.

Mackintosh

A raincoat of rubberized cloth, named for its inventor, Charles Macintosh.

Nocturnal

Of or happening in the night.

Oilskin

Cloth made waterproof with oil; a raincoat of it.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Pedestal

The base on which a statue or bust stands.

Perpendicular

Upright; at a right angle to the horizon.

Plumage

A bird’s feathers.

Pristine

Fresh and pure, as if new.

Salt-and-pepper

Of cloth or hair: flecked with black and white.

Scrutiny

Close, searching examination.

Sealing wax

A wax that is melted to seal letters.

Serge

A sturdy twilled woolen cloth.

Shirtwaist

A woman’s blouse tailored like a man’s shirt.

Sloth

Laziness; one of the seven deadly sins.

Soapstone

A soft, smooth stone that feels like soap, carved into dishes and ornaments.

Storm lamp

A lantern shielded against the wind.

Supporters

Garters attached to a corset to hold up stockings.

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Tarpaulin

A heavy waterproof cloth for covering things.

Threadbare

Worn so thin the threads show.

Ticking

A strong striped cotton cloth used to cover pillows and mattresses.

Tiddlywinks

A game of flicking small discs into a cup by pressing their edges with a larger disc.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Tremulous

Trembling; quivering.

Turncoat

One who switches sides.

Tweed

A rough woolen cloth, often of mixed colors, first woven in Scotland.

Weathercock

A weathervane shaped like a rooster; also, a person who changes with every wind.

Whalebone

Baleen, the flexible plates from the mouths of certain whales, once used to stiffen corsets.

Whaler

A whaling ship or a man who hunts whales.

Chapter 20

Summary

In the full light of dawn, Vera studies the sleeping woman. It is “the light which had already killed the heart of Miss MacIntosh,” stripping her “bare as roses of their petals”: no “crowning glory of woman’s hair,” no single hair “to suggest a possibility of future growth,” and the “narrow and intolerable vacancy” where the other breast should be. Vera wonders who robbed her of her hair, and when, whether hair by hair or all at once, whether a broken heart caused it, whether she was “deserted at the altar by her bridegroom or her bride.” Then she makes her resolve. She will go on “as if I had never seen her,” iron the shirts with new alacrity, learn the Hebrew measures, coins, months, and the stations of the Exodus, and “protect her from the knowledge of herself.” The old routine is already “the elegiac past,” and she will “hold to every moment as if I lived with a dying man.” Near the end Vera asks, “Was God bald, too,” in a litany of the Bible’s images for God, and she closes knowing she has come “close to something which none should see and live to relate.”

Characters present

Miss MacIntosh · Vera Cartwheel · Catherine Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Decay and Ruin · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Light and Darkness · The Search for Meaning · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Kant and Hegel

Allusions: Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Dante · Ecclesiastes · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Judaism · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a vivid depiction of dawn which paradoxically serves as both illumination and a force that has “already killed the heart of Miss MacIntosh” before her actual death. The light reveals wounds and deprivations that “would not heal with time,” suggesting an exposure of deep, irrevocable suffering and loss.

- A striking passage focuses on the physical absence of hair on Miss MacIntosh's head which symbolically represents a loss of feminine identity, vitality, and perhaps a history of mourning or trauma. Vera reflects on the significance of hair as beauty or terror and wonders about the circumstances of her hair loss, whether gradual or sudden, linking it to emotional or existential devastation.
- Vera experiences a powerful tension between the recognition of Miss MacIntosh's vulnerable, altered state and a desire to revert to ignorance for the sake of "common sense" and routine. There is a determined resolve to "go on as if I had never seen her," to protect her from the knowledge of herself, and to maintain the illusion of normalcy despite the stark reality of her condition.
- The passage detailing Vera's imagined daily routines contrasts sharply with the internal, almost mystical knowledge of Miss MacIntosh's profound deprivation. Vera contemplates learning ancient measures, weights, and biblical geography, suggesting a search for meaning or order amid chaos and personal loss.
- Toward the end, Vera muses deeply about mortality, identity, and divinity. The baldness and missing breast become metaphors for the exposed realities of life and death, while Vera questions the nature of God with rich biblical imagery, reflecting on God's multifaceted definitions as friend, refuge, crown, and shadow. This passage underscores the theme of confronting harsh truths and the limits of human understanding.
- The final lines evoke a solemn recognition of the "image of life failing before his eyes," highlighting Vera's acute awareness of mortality and the profound emotional weight of witnessing the decline of a once vibrant individual.
- "I should hold to every moment as if I lived with a dying man, and I should protect her from the knowledge of herself." Vera's resolve turns the daily routine into an elegy.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "It was surely the light which had already killed her." What does the dawn take from Miss MacIntosh?
- "I should have been less surprised to have found her with a red beard than with no hair at all." Why would a beard surprise Vera less?
- Vera promises to learn the digit, the cubit, the gerah, and Nisan and Elul. Why does she turn to measuring now?

Characters

- Miss MacIntosh was "not endowed… with intuitive imagination." How does Vera use that to keep the secret?
- "It would be easy to deceive her." What has Vera learned about deception overnight?

- “Was she her only lover?” What does Vera suspect about her past?

Connections

- Chapter 10’s dream made Miss MacIntosh the bridegroom. Here Vera asks if she was “deserted at the altar by her bridegroom or her bride.” How do the two scenes speak to each other?
- The Israelites wander from Egypt to Canaan, and “some die… on their way.” How does that journey match Vera’s?
- In Chapter 15, Miss MacIntosh said “none should ever see it and live.” How does Vera come “close to something which none should see and live to relate”?

Reflection

- Can keeping someone’s secret be a way of loving them?
- “Grey hair does not signify a necessary wisdom.” What does?
- Is pretending that we are simple ever simple?

Research: Characters

Miss MacIntosh

- A figure of strength and common sense, yet marked by profound physical and existential deprivation.
- Described as “hale and hearty, a red-headed nursemaid” in the past, yet now revealed in a state of vulnerability and loss.
- Her condition is a mystery to Vera, who struggles to reconcile her external robustness with the internal and physical ravages revealed by the light.
- She embodies the tension between resilience and suffering, denial and revelation.
- Vera resolves to “protect her from the knowledge of herself.”
- She had never wished to travel or see the world, “for she had seen enough of it,” and she was “cryptic as to any forlorn romance of the past.”

Vera Cartwheel

- Exhibits complex emotions: pity, love, denial, and a protective instinct toward Miss MacIntosh.
- Is philosophical and reflective, wrestling with large existential questions prompted by Miss MacIntosh’s condition.
- Exhibits a desire to maintain normalcy and routine to shield both herself and Miss MacIntosh from harsh truths.

- She plans to deceive Miss MacIntosh, as she “had often done before,” and to pretend “that it was someone else I dreamed of.”

Research: Themes

Light as a Revealing and Destructive Force

See: Light and Darkness

- Dawn and light symbolize both revelation and destruction. Vera suggests that light has “already killed the heart of Miss MacIntosh” before her physical death, exposing wounds that cannot heal and deprivations that are eternal.
- The light strips away illusions, revealing the “fearful forehead” and the “bald and naked, cloudless summit” of Miss MacIntosh’s head, symbolizing a harsh unveiling of truth and vulnerability.
- There’s also a paradoxical beauty in the light, described as “diamond dawn” and “celestial aureole,” which offers hope for redemption and healing, yet simultaneously exposes harsh realities.

Loss and Absence

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Miss MacIntosh’s baldness is a potent symbol of loss: loss of hair as a “crowning glory,” loss of feminine nature, and the missing breast as a “door knob,” a stark reminder of what is absent.
- Vera questions the cause and timing of this loss: was it gradual or sudden? Was it caused by heartbreak, mourning, or some unknowable trauma?
- This absence is not just physical but metaphysical, representing the stripping away of identity and vitality.

Mortality and the Inevitability of Decay

See: Death and Mortality · Decay and Ruin

- Vera reflects on mortality, decay, and the “wounds in our sides” that light will bind up to prevent death like “Saul or Solomon or Sennacherib.”
- There is a tension between the desire to protect Miss MacIntosh from the knowledge of her own condition and the inevitability of facing harsh truths.
- The novel grapples with the idea that despite external appearances or the passage of time, some wounds and losses are timeless and unhealable.

Identity and Self-Perception

See: Identity and the Self

- Miss MacIntosh’s lack of “intuitive imagination” and her common sense shield her from the deeper, visionary truths Vera perceives; she is “content with things just as they were” and would deny or not suspect the “empty vision” beyond the commonplace.
- Vera’s internal conflict involves a desire to pretend normalcy to protect both Miss MacIntosh and herself from confronting the full reality of her condition.
- There is also a complex emotional dynamic, where Vera simultaneously sees her as an “obstacle” to her happiness and as someone deeply significant, a secret lover or cause of her “vain pursuits.”

Spiritual and Existential Questions

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural · The Search for Meaning

- The narrative moves toward existential and spiritual reflection, pondering God’s nature, the problem of creation, and the place of suffering and imperfection in the divine order.
- Vera likens the “baldness” and loss to a profound experience, possibly greater than mere mortal wisdom or aging, invoking biblical and mythological imagery.
- The chapter closes with a meditation on life failing before one’s eyes and the idea of seeing something no one “should see and live to relate.”

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Hair and Baldness

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- Hair symbolizes beauty, identity, and vitality; baldness represents loss, vulnerability, and exposure.
- Absence of hair is described as a “barren, impoverished landscape without flower or bush or hedge.”

Light and Dawn

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Dawn is both “diamond” and “many-prismed,” a metaphor for clarity, revelation, but also a harsh revealer of truth.
- The “Aurora Borealis” in her sparsely furnished bedroom suggests a surreal, otherworldly illumination, the “first experience of light” upon uncreated things.

Missing Breast

See: Women, Gender, and Marriage

- The missing breast is a stark physical symbol of loss and incompleteness, described as “like a door knob,” emphasizing its unnatural absence.

Biblical and Mythological References

See: The Bible · Angels, Devils, and Myth

- References to biblical figures (Saul, Solomon, Sennacherib) and ancient measurements, calendars, and places (Nisan, Jyar, Wady Feiran, Egypt to Canaan) ground the narrative in a spiritual and temporal history.
- Quotes and allusions to Ovid and Greek perspectives on beauty and hair enhance the classical depth of the novel.

Research: Resources

- “shall bind up the wounds in our sides”: “He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds” (Psalm 147:3). The wounds “in our sides” recall the wound in Christ’s side (John 19:34), which Thomas was told to touch (John 20:27). See The Bible.
- “that we shall not die like Saul or Solomon or Sennacherib in the midst of our corruption”: Saul fell on his own sword (1 Samuel 31:4). Solomon “slept with his fathers” (1 Kings 11:43) after his wives “turned away his heart after other gods” (1 Kings 11:4). Sennacherib was killed by his sons while he worshipped in the house of his god Nisroch (2 Kings 19:37). See The Bible and Suicide in History and Literature.
- “celestial aureole”: An aureole is a radiant light around the head or body of a representation of a sacred personage.
- “when we shall put on our shining armor”: “Let us put on the armour of light” (Romans 13:12), and “Put on the whole armour of God” (Ephesians 6:11). See The Bible.
- “those who dwell in hidden caves beneath the overhanging, moss-grown rocks”: The kings and great men “hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us” (Revelation 6:15-16). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “dark as the ace of spades”: The ace of spades has long been called the death card. The deuce of clubs was “the omen of death” in Chapter 19. See Gambling and Playing Cards and the Chapter 19 resources.
- “haunted rays of Aurora Borealis”: The northern lights. The Latin name, “northern dawn,” joins Aurora, the Roman goddess of the dawn, and Boreas, the north wind, and is usually credited to Galileo (1619). See Astronomy and Exploration and the Poles.
- “the experimental light of the first day of crazed creation”: “And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light” (Genesis 1:2-3). See Genesis.
- “celebrating his triumphs over the Devil and the flesh”: The Litany in the Book of Common Prayer (1549): “From all the deceits of the world, the flesh, and the devil, Good Lord, deliver us.”
- “less surprised to have found her with a red beard”: The red mustache Vera gave her in Chapter 9. See the Chapter 9 resources and the Chapter 17 resources.

- “There was no crowning glory of woman’s hair”: “If a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering” (1 Corinthians 11:15). See The Bible, Hair, Wig, and Baldness, and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “Ugly is a field without grass, a plant without leaves, a head without hair, according to Ovid”: Ovid, The Art of Love (3.249-250): “Turpe pecus mutilum, turpe est sine gramine campus, / et sine fronde frutex, et sine crine caput” (“Ugly is a hornless bull, ugly a field without grass, a bush without leaves, and a head without hair”). The lines come in his advice to women on hiding the loss of hair, which includes buying false hair. See Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “Hair adds beauty to a good face and terror to an ugly one, according to the Greek”: Plutarch’s Life of Lycurgus (22) explains that the Spartans wore their hair long, remembering a saying of their lawgiver Lycurgus “that a fine head of hair made the handsome more comely still, and the ugly more terrible.” See Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “the wheels within wheels”: Ezekiel’s vision: “their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel” (Ezekiel 1:16). See The Bible.
- “Calvinistic rigors and denials and aggressions”: John Calvin (1509-1564) taught predestination, that God has chosen from eternity who will be saved. Calvinism shaped the Puritans and the Presbyterian and Reformed churches. Young sets its rigor against a woman’s “vague evasions and whimsicalities.” See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “Had some old crow plucked each hair away?”: In Aesop’s fable, a middle-aged man had two sweethearts. The young one plucked out his grey hairs, the old one his dark ones, until he was bald. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “Was she deserted at the altar by her bridegroom or her bride?”: Compare Miss Havisham in Dickens’s Great Expectations (1861), jilted on her wedding day, who stopped every clock and wore her wedding dress ever after. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “this which was like sackcloth and ashes”: Mordecai “put on sackcloth with ashes” (Esther 4:1), and Christ says the cities “would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes” (Matthew 11:21). See The Bible.
- “the existence which is the phenomenal beyond which we do not inquire”: Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason (1781) separates the phenomenal world, things as they appear to us, from the noumenal, things as they are in themselves, which we cannot know. See Kant and Hegel.
- “recite the genealogies and names of those who fled into a desert”: The genealogies of Chapter 9. See the Chapter 9 resources.
- “the digit or fingerbreadth, the tophach or handbreadth, the cubit, the fathom, the reed, the foot”: Miss MacIntosh’s lessons follow the tables of measures, weights, months, and Exodus stations printed in the back of many old Bibles. See Judaism.
    - The digit, or fingerbreadth, was about three-quarters of an inch.

    - The tophach, or handbreadth, was four fingers, about three inches. The table of the tabernacle has “a border of an hand breadth” (Exodus 25:25).
    - The cubit ran from the elbow to the fingertip, about eighteen inches. The long, or royal, cubit was about twenty inches.
    - The fathom is six feet, the span of outstretched arms. Paul’s sailors “sounded, and found it twenty fathoms” (Acts 27:28).
    - The measuring reed of Ezekiel’s temple vision was “six cubits long” (Ezekiel 40:5), about nine to ten feet. John is given “a reed like unto a rod” to measure the temple (Revelation 11:1).
    - A foot is a unit of measurement for length that is equal to 12 inches.
- “the value of the Attic drachma, the gerah, the beka, the maneh, the talent”: The coins and weights of the Greeks and Hebrews, part of humanity’s effort to impose order and meaning on life. See Judaism.
    - The Attic Drachma was a silver coin and monetary unit of ancient Athens. It was one of the world’s earliest coins and was used from the 6th century BC until the Roman period. It had the head of Athena on one side and an owl on the other. (Wikipedia)
    - A gerah was an ancient Hebrew unit of weight and currency, the smallest the Hebrews used: “a shekel is twenty gerahs” (Exodus 30:13). The gerah also appears in Leviticus 27:25, Numbers 3:47 and 18:16, and Ezekiel 45:12.
    - The beka was a unit of weight equal to half a shekel: “A bekah for every man, that is, half a shekel” (Exodus 38:26). It was used as a counterweight for the silver half shekel brought to the temple each year. Abraham’s servant gave Rebekah “a golden earring of half a shekel weight” (Genesis 24:22).
    - In the Bible, maneh is a unit of weight that is sometimes translated as “pound.” It appears in Ezekiel 45:12, 1 Kings 10:17, Ezra 2:69, and Nehemiah 7:71-72. A maneh is estimated to weigh around 2.5 or 3 pounds.
    - In the Bible, a talent was a unit of weight and money and it also appears in the parable of the talents. A talent weighed about 75 pounds (34 kilograms), or 3,000 shekels (“Bekahs, Shekels, and Talents,” Ensign, August 1987). The Israelites used 29 talents of gold to build the tabernacle (Exodus 38:24). A talent was worth 20 years of labor. The parable of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30) is about a master who entrusts his wealth to three servants while he goes away on a journey. The parable is often interpreted as a lesson on the responsible use of one’s abilities, resources, and gifts.
- “I would learn the Jewish calendar”: The Jewish calendar is a lunisolar calendar, which means it’s based on both the moon and the sun. It has 12 months, with each month containing either 29 or 30 days. To keep it in step with the solar year, a leap month is added seven times in every 19 years, the Metonic cycle. The months are Nisan, Iyar, Sivan, Tammuz, Av, Elul, Tishrei, Heshvan, Kislev, Tevet, Shevat, and Adar. In leap years, Adar becomes Adar II and another month, Adar I, is added before it. (Wikipedia) The civil year begins on Rosh Hashanah, but Nisan is the first month of the religious

year: “This month shall be unto you the beginning of months” (Exodus 12:2). “Jyar” is an old spelling of Iyar. The calendar’s structure ensures that Jewish holidays take place in the correct season. It is significant as a motif of disciplined learning, historical consciousness, and the search for order in a world otherwise marked by instability and dreamlike disorientation. See Judaism.

- “the names of the antediluvian patriarchs”: The antediluvian patriarchs are the individuals listed in Genesis 5 who lived before the Noachian flood: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah. (Wikipedia) They represent the lineage of humanity before the Great Flood. Methuselah lived “nine hundred sixty and nine years” (Genesis 5:27). See Genesis.
- “the itinerary of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan”: The Israelites’ journey from Egypt to Canaan involved a circuitous route through the wilderness, lasting approximately 40 years. The Israelites’ long journey is often attributed to their disobedience, doubt, and lack of faith in God’s leadership. God led them by a longer route to protect them from enemies and allow them time to develop their faith and trust: “God led them not through the way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, Lest peradventure the people repent when they see war” (Exodus 13:17), and “your children shall wander in the wilderness forty years” (Numbers 14:33). See Ancient Egypt and The Bible.
    - In the Bible, Rameses refers to a city in Egypt and a pharaoh’s name. The city was a treasury city built by the Hebrews in Egypt. It was the Israelites’ departure point from Egypt (Exodus 12:37; Numbers 33:3).
    - Succoth was the Israelites’ first camp after leaving Rameses (Exodus 12:37; Numbers 33:5). Another Succoth, in Canaan, is where Jacob built booths (Genesis 33:17), and the feast of Sukkot celebrates the Israelites’ time in the desert.
    - In the Bible, Etham was a place where the Israelites camped after leaving Egypt and before turning back to Pi-hahiroth. It was a significant stop on their journey to the Promised Land (Exodus 13:20; Numbers 33:6-8).
    - Pi-hahiroth is the fourth station of the Exodus mentioned in Exodus 14:2. The biblical books Exodus and Numbers refer to Pi-hahiroth as the place where the Israelites encamped between Migdol and the sea, opposite Baal Zephon, while awaiting an attack by the Pharaoh, prior to crossing the Red Sea. (Wikipedia) Marah and Elim come after the crossing, in the wilderness of Shur.
    - Marah is a place where the Israelites found bitter water after crossing the Red Sea. The word “Marah” is Hebrew for “bitterness” (Exodus 15:22-27).
    - In the Bible, Elim was a place where the Israelites camped after leaving Egypt. It was the second stop after crossing the Red Sea, where there were “twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees” (Exodus 15:27; Numbers 33:9; Exodus 16:1).
- “Where was the mouth of Wady Feiran?”: Wadi Feiran or Wadi Faran is Sinai’s largest and widest wadi (an Arabic term referring to a river valley or wet riverbed). It is an intermittent stream and rises from the mountains around Saint Catherine’s Monastery,

at 2500 m above sea level. It is one of the alleged sites of Rephidim, a station of the Exodus where Moses struck a rock causing it to spring water, allowing his people the Hebrews to drink. (Wikipedia) “Wady” is the old spelling of wadi.

- “Where was the desert of El-Tih?”: El-Tih, Arabic for “the wandering,” is the high limestone desert of central Sinai, named for the Israelites’ forty years of wandering.
  - The poem El Tih (1859) was written by Frederick Stewart, 4th Marquess of Londonderry, who signed his dedication only “L.” Its two cantos, written during a journey by Lake Como and through the Alps, “are called El Tih, or ‘The Wandering’” (El Tih and Other Poems, London, 1859), borrowing the Arabic name of the Sinai desert for the poet’s own wandering.
- “Should some die… on their way from Egypt to Canaan”: “Your carcases shall fall in this wilderness” (Numbers 14:29). A whole generation died on the way, and Moses saw the land from Mount Nebo but did not enter it (Deuteronomy 34:4-5). See The Bible.
- “a face which should break all mirrors”: The old saying is of a face that would crack a mirror. See Mirrors and Reflections.
- “sent shivering like ghosts at dawn”: The ghost in Hamlet “faded on the crowing of the cock” (Hamlet 1.1). See Shakespeare.
- “a busy Etruscan seaport. A place where the dead came and went”: The Etruscans of ancient Italy built great cities of the dead, the necropoleis of Cerveteri and Tarquinia, and Populonia was one of their seaports. See Catherine Cartwheel.
- “Not that she would ever really die, of course!”: Her disappearance into the sea is told in Chapter 6. See Miss MacIntosh and the Chapter 6 resources.
- “What was old age?”: Chapter 18 ends with her line “Age is the most difficult thing to achieve.” See the Chapter 18 resources.
- “Better were two heads than one”: “Two heads are better than one,” in John Heywood’s proverbs (1546), and “Two are better than one” (Ecclesiastes 4:9). See Ecclesiastes.
- “grey hair does not signify a necessary wisdom”: “The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness” (Proverbs 16:31), but “great men are not always wise: neither do the aged understand judgment” (Job 32:9). See The Book of Job.
- “a babe cast into purgatory”: Catholic tradition placed unbaptized infants not in purgatory but in limbo, at the edge of Hell, where Dante puts the virtuous unbaptized (Inferno 4). See Dante.
- “the dead tree of life”: “The tree of life also in the midst of the garden” (Genesis 2:9). See Genesis.
- “the missing breast like a door knob”: The “knob where the breast was missing” of Chapter 18. See Miss MacIntosh and the Chapter 18 resources.
- “Was God bald, too”: Children mocked Elisha, “Go up, thou bald head” (2 Kings 2:23), and the Ancient of Days has “the hair of his head like the pure wool” (Daniel 7:9). See The Bible and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.

- “What was God, defined in so many terms”: Young’s litany gathers images of God and of Christ from across the Bible. The descriptions emphasize the profound mystery of divinity, the coexistence of opposites within the divine, and the limited capacity of human beings to grasp the full nature of God. See The Bible.
  - “as a fuller’s soap, as a refining fire”: “He is like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ soap” (Malachi 3:2). A fuller cleaned and whitened cloth.
  - “as the light of the morning when the sun arises, even as a dawn without clouds”: “As the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds” (2 Samuel 23:4).
  - “as rivers of water in a dry place, as a hiding place from the wind”: “A man shall be as an hiding place from the wind… as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isaiah 32:2).
  - “as a stone of grace”: Proverbs 17:8 reads “a precious stone” in the King James Version and “A stone of grace” in Young’s Literal Translation (1862).
  - “a friend that sticketh closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24).
  - “a brother born for adversity” and “a friend that loveth at all times” (Proverbs 17:17).
  - “a root out of a dry ground” (Isaiah 53:2).
  - “a nail fastened to a sure place”: “I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place” (Isaiah 22:23).
  - “as the tender grass by clear shining after the rain” (2 Samuel 23:4).
  - “as a casket”: In older English a casket is a small box for jewels, not a coffin. Compare “in that day when I make up my jewels” (Malachi 3:17).
  - “as an ark”: In the Bible, the Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of God’s presence and a holy place where God dwelt with his people. Noah’s ark carried life through the Flood (Genesis 6-8).
  - “as a crown of glory, as a diadem of beauty”: “In that day shall the Lord of hosts be for a crown of glory, and for a diadem of beauty” (Isaiah 28:5).
  - “as a belt of stars”: Orion’s Belt: “Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?” (Job 38:31). See Astronomy and The Book of Job.
  - “as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isaiah 32:2).
  - “Was there the plant not planted by God?”: “Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up” (Matthew 15:13).
  - “Were there the strayed sheep?”: the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:12; Luke 15:4).
  - “Was there the relapsing demoniac?”: the unclean spirit that returns with “seven other spirits more wicked than himself” (Matthew 12:43-45).
- “something which none should see and live to relate”: “There shall no man see me, and live” (Exodus 33:20), as in Chapter 15. See The Bible and the Chapter 15 resources.

Vocabulary

Alacrity

Cheerful eagerness.

Antediluvian

Before the Flood; very old.

Aureole

A ring or field of radiant light around a sacred figure.

Bemused

Puzzled and lost in thought.

Burnished

Polished until shining.

Capacious

Roomy; able to hold much.

Carapace

The hard upper shell of a turtle.

Casket

A small, often ornate box for jewels or valuables. In American usage, also a coffin, so Young's "casket containing no jewel" carries both meanings.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Contraband

Forbidden; smuggled.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Cryptic

Mysterious; hard to make out.

Cubit

An ancient measure of length, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, about eighteen inches.

Culmination

The highest point; the final result.

Demoniac

Wild and frenzied, as if possessed by a demon.

Deprivation

The lack or loss of something needed.

Diadem

A jeweled crown or headband worn as a sign of royalty.

Drachma

A silver coin of ancient Greece.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Extraneous

Coming from outside; not essential.

Fathom

A measure of six feet, used for the depth of water.

Forebodings

Feelings that something bad is about to happen.

Fuller

One who cleans and thickens cloth.

Genealogy

A record of a family’s descent.

Hale

Healthy and strong, especially said of someone older.

Immemorial

Older than memory.

Imploring

Begging earnestly.

Impoverished

Made poor.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Invulnerable

Unable to be wounded or harmed.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Necessitous

Needy; forced by necessity.

Negation

Denial; saying no.

Parti-colored

Made of patches of different colors.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Proclivities

Natural leanings or tendencies.

Refulgent

Shining brightly; radiant.

Regnant

Reigning; ruling.

Renunciation

The act of giving something up.

Sackcloth

A coarse cloth worn in mourning or penance.

Surmise

A guess, without proof.

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Transient

Passing quickly; not lasting. As a noun, a hotel guest who stays only a short time.

Tremulous

Trembling; quivering.

Wady

An old spelling of wadi, a desert valley that fills with water only after rain.

Whimsicalities

Odd, playful fancies.

Chapter 21

Summary

Vera promises herself that tomorrow she will look only at the red hair “like shining armor” and go on as before: “Daylight should cover us.” Her “good intention” is to deceive Miss MacIntosh into believing herself “but a usual being in the light.” Yet she remembers Miss MacIntosh’s own warnings, that the road to Hell “is paved with bones and good intentions,” that the Devil “does not always wear horns” and can quote Scripture. Pity wakes in her: “It was only the beginning of pity. It was not the end.” Vera takes a last long look at the sleeping body, the scar, the stalk of the cut-away breast, the wad of cloth in the brassiere, the green ribbon looped over the bust of Martin Luther. Then she falls asleep. When she wakes, Miss MacIntosh stands at the foot of the bed, fully dressed, her red hair shining, in remarkably good humor. She says Vera has been very sick, scolds her for dancing at “your first birthday party, even though no guest came,” and holds up the party dress Mr. Spitzer gave her. Vera can see no tear in it. Miss MacIntosh declares it cannot be mended: “Into the ash bin it goes.”

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Miss MacIntosh · The Old Blind Sheep Dog · Joachim Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Illusion and Reality · Love · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Dogs · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Pearls and Jewels · The Sea and Water · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Aristotle · Augustine and Christian Theology

Allusions: Angels and Archangels · Greek Mythology · Homer’s Epics · Milton · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- This opening passage is crucial because it establishes Vera’s conscious perception of Miss MacIntosh in her usual, seemingly strong and formidable state. The language (“shining armor,” “scaled vizor,” “rugged individualist,” “triumphant”) creates an image of someone powerful, decisive, and perhaps intimidating, contrasting sharply with the vulnerability revealed later. It sets up the central theme of appearance versus reality and the layers of disguise or perception that Vera navigates. The detail about the

evening walk and the old dog grounds this potentially abstract description in a concrete, if slightly surreal, daily ritual.

- The revelation of Miss MacIntosh's baldness is a pivotal moment. Vera contrasts this "palpable disguise of the average man" with a sense of hidden "dead and vanished glory." The image of the "great baldness as of the moon sunken" is striking and suggests something vast, desolate, and perhaps beyond reach. Crucially, Vera interprets this physical revelation not as a simple lack, but as something that reveals a deeper truth about reality: that strength is intertwined with fragility, illusion, and disorder. This passage shifts the narrative from external observation to deep internal reflection on the nature of identity, love, and perception.
- Vera's complex motivation is articulated after witnessing Miss MacIntosh's vulnerability. The "good intention" is to maintain a facade of normalcy for her sake, even if it requires Vera to "deceive her" about her own profound realization. Vera seems to want to protect her from the implications of the "glory" or "chaos" she perceived, wishing instead for her to see herself as ordinary, stable, and authentic. This reveals Vera's protective instinct but also highlights the inherent tension in their relationship and the burden of Vera's newfound knowledge. It introduces the theme of deliberate self-deception or mutual deception as a way to cope with difficult truths.
- Miss MacIntosh's sayings about the Devil, while seemingly a digression, reinforce the chapter's themes of appearance versus reality, disguise, and the difficulty of discerning truth. They emphasize that evil can be deceptive, appearing in attractive forms ("charming," "handsome," "fine dancer," "God's ape"). This mirrors Vera's experience of seeing Miss MacIntosh's seemingly strong exterior peeled away to reveal a hidden reality, suggesting that what appears "normal" or even "good" might conceal something else entirely. It adds a layer of theological or philosophical depth to the personal revelation, implying that the struggle to understand her is part of a larger human struggle to understand complex, hidden realities. It also gives voice to Miss MacIntosh's own worldview.
- This extended description is incredibly powerful and visceral. It moves beyond the initial shock of baldness to reveal a body marked by age, illness, and labor (the missing breast, scar, gnarled hands and feet). The imagery is both starkly realistic ("mouth open and toothless") and metaphoric ("Alpine frozen slopes," "wintry field," "polished marble," "barnacles"). The repetition of "pity" underscores Vera's overwhelming emotional response. The description emphasizes vulnerability, loss, and a stripping away ("denudement") of layers both physical and perhaps metaphysical. The comparison of this reality to something "less substantial than the wildest, saddest dream" suggests a profound disorientation for Vera, blurring the lines between waking life and nightmare, and making the revealed reality seem almost unbelievable despite its physical presence.
- After the intense, detailed description of the vulnerable, sleeping figure, Miss MacIntosh is abruptly presented as the familiar, formidable "Miss MacIntosh," fully dressed and appearing exactly as she did the previous evening, complete with her shining red hair. Vera notes her lack of astonishment, highlighting how quickly the mind

can revert to familiar perceptions, even after a profound revelation. She finds herself in Miss MacIntosh's brass bed and not her own, "something which had never happened before," and does not ask how. This passage reinstates the "disguise" or preferred appearance and raises questions about which reality is dominant or "true": the vulnerable sleeping figure or the robust, familiar Miss MacIntosh.

- This dialogue shifts the focus away from Miss MacIntosh's physical state to Vera's apparent illness of the night before. Miss MacIntosh's tone is parental ("sick and unusually stubborn," "mild reproach"), emphasizing their caregiver-dependent relationship. The mention of the "first birthday party" and the torn dress introduces a specific past event, possibly symbolic of a loss of innocence or a failed attempt at celebration. Most significantly, the passage presents a clear discrepancy: Vera sees no tear in the dress, but Miss MacIntosh insists it is irreparably damaged and must be discarded. This highlights a potential unreliability in the narrative, either on the part of Miss MacIntosh (perhaps deliberately misrepresenting the dress's condition) or Vera (perhaps unable to see the damage, literal or symbolic). The torn dress becomes a symbol of something broken or lost that cannot be fixed, but the disagreement about its state complicates its meaning and adds to the chapter's layers of uncertain reality. Miss MacIntosh's repetition of the "road to Hell" saying connects this conversation back to the earlier philosophical digression, grounding it in her practical, somewhat fatalistic worldview.
- "It was only the beginning of pity. It was not the end." Vera's pity starts here and keeps deepening through the novel.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "Daylight should cover us." What does Vera expect daylight to do?
- "The pity, pity, pity of nothing, of something, for nothing is always something." What is the "something"?
- Vera "could not see a hole in it," yet Miss MacIntosh says the dress "cannot be mended." What is torn?

Characters

- Miss MacIntosh tells Vera, "You have been very sick." Whose story of the night is this?
- She is in "a remarkably good humor." Why now?
- Vera's "good intention" is to deceive her. What does Vera know about good intentions, from Miss MacIntosh herself?

Connections

- In Chapter 9, Miss MacIntosh disliked the dress's low neck and bare arms, and Mr. Spitzer promised "Fair as a bride I should be." Why does she throw it away now?
- "That love is love which… does not alter" echoes Sonnet 116, as in Chapter 18. What is Vera promising?
- The Devil "might appear as the angel transfixed by light." Where has Vera already met an angel of light (Chapter 17)?

Reflection

- Is it kinder to pretend not to know?
- "Evil has many forms, and the good has only one." Is that true?
- What does a person throw away when she throws away a dress?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- She is introspective, empathetic, and deeply affected by Miss MacIntosh's state.
- She wrestles with her feelings of pity and the desire to shield Miss MacIntosh from harsh truths.
- She reflects on love, the nature of identity, and the meaning of suffering, indicating a philosophical and emotional depth.
- Her "good intention" is "that I should deceive her into accepting herself as but a usual being in the light."

Miss MacIntosh

- Portrayed as a strong yet vulnerable figure, marked physically by baldness, scars, and loss, which symbolize deeper suffering.
- Despite her condition, she maintains a robust and kind demeanor, showing resilience. She is depicted with vivid details like her red hair, green ribbon, and practical attire.
- She embodies the tension between appearance and inner reality, strength and vulnerability.
- Her sayings on the Devil: he "does not always wear horns," can "quote his Scriptures," and is "God's ape."

Research: Themes

Love as Eternal and Unchanging

See: Love · Shakespeare

- “That love is love which… does not alter with the changing circumstance” echoes Sonnet 116, as in Chapter 18.
- Vera emphasizes that true love remains constant despite changing circumstances. Love “does not ebb, does not wane,” symbolizing an ideal of permanence in an impermanent world.
- This eternal love contrasts with the physical and emotional struggles depicted, underscoring a spiritual or emotional steadfastness.

Appearance versus Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- There is a tension between outward appearances and inner realities. Vera observes Miss MacIntosh’s bald head, a stark and raw image that strips away pretense and illusion.
- The “palpable disguise of the average man” and the “inarticulate mediocrity” hint at the masks people wear to hide deeper truths.
- Vera’s intention to let Miss MacIntosh believe she is “a usual being” shows a desire to protect her from harsh truths.

Suffering and Pity

See: Death and Mortality

- The chapter conveys deep pity for Miss MacIntosh’s condition, symbolized by her baldness and the physical aftermath of illness or trauma (e.g., the missing breast, scar, and hairlessness).
- The imagery of “valley of dry bones” and “the road to Hell… paved with bones and good intentions” suggests the harshness of life and the prevalence of suffering masked by well-meaning actions.

The Devil and Deception

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The narrative includes reflections on evil’s many forms, warning against being deceived by charming appearances (“The Devil does not always wear horns”).
- The Devil is described metaphorically as “God’s ape,” emphasizing the complexity of good and evil and the danger of superficial judgments.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Bald Head

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- Symbolizes raw truth, vulnerability, and the stripping away of superficial identity.

Sea and Light

See: The Sea and Water · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- The sea light covering the scene suggests mystery, change, and the vastness of life's experience.

Valley of Dry Bones

See: The Bible

- Represents death, decay, and the desolation of existence, yet also possibly hints at resurrection or hope in a biblical sense.

The Devil as "God's Ape"

See: Angels, Devils, and Myth

- Illustrates the deceptive nature of evil and the difficulty in distinguishing it from good.
- This metaphor warns against being deceived by appearances, a central theme in the chapter.

The Party Dress

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Represents innocence and celebration. Miss MacIntosh declares it beyond mending, though Vera "could not see a hole in it" or "a seed pearl which was not in its place."
- The destruction of the dress symbolizes the loss of innocence and the inevitability of change.

Love and Identity

See: Love

- Highlights Vera's struggle to reconcile ideal love with the imperfect reality of human beings.

Pity and Reality

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- The repetition of “pity” emphasizes the deep sorrow felt for Miss MacIntosh’s condition, portraying her as an incomplete and tragic figure.

Miss MacIntosh’s Morning Appearance

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- Miss MacIntosh’s appearance contrasts sharply with the earlier portrayal of vulnerability, showing her resilience and normalcy despite suffering.

Research: Resources

- “the scaled vizor of my rugged individualist”: Herbert Hoover praised “the American system of rugged individualism” in his campaign speech of October 22, 1928.
- “the old, blind sheep dog running ahead of us on three legs”: The dog still “guarding the pasture which was no more against the thief who would not come.” See The Old Blind Sheep Dog and Dogs.
- “that love is love which is love forevermore and unchanging, which does not alter with the changing circumstance”: “Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds” (Sonnet 116), as in Chapter 18. See Shakespeare and the Chapter 18 resources.
- “this great head which was the secret pearl”: The merchant “who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Matthew 13:46). See The Bible and Pearls and Jewels.
- “one who had not built her house upon shifting sands”: “A foolish man, which built his house upon the sand” (Matthew 7:26). See The Bible.
- “evil has many forms, and the good has only one”: Aristotle writes that “it is possible to fail in many ways… while to succeed is possible only in one way,” and quotes the line “men are good in but one way, but bad in many” (Nicomachean Ethics 2.6). See Aristotle.
- “the road to Hell, as she had often grimly said, is very broad and very wide and is paved with bones and good intentions”: “Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction” (Matthew 7:13). Samuel Johnson said “Hell is paved with good intentions” (Boswell’s Life of Johnson, 1775). Miss MacIntosh repeats it at the end of the chapter: “the highway to Hell is paved with more good intentions than shining cobblestones.” See The Bible.
- “life is this valley of dry bones”: “The hand of the Lord… set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones… Can these bones live?” (Ezekiel 37:1-3). See The Bible.
- “The Devil does not always wear horns”: In Goethe’s Faust (1808), Mephistopheles tells the witch that the devil has given up his horns, tail, and claws to keep up with the times. See Angels, Devils, and Myth.
- “fine feathers which make fine birds”: An old proverb, in print by the sixteenth century.

- “the Devil wore a red coat and a pair of green breeches”: Folklore often makes the Devil a gentleman and a dancer. In Burns’s “Tam o’ Shanter” (1791), “auld Nick” plays the pipes for the witches’ dance. See Angels, Devils, and Myth.
- “The Devil could quote his Scriptures, too, chapter and verse for his purpose”: “The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose” (The Merchant of Venice 1.3). In the temptation, Satan quotes Psalm 91 to Christ (Matthew 4:6). See Shakespeare and The Bible.
- “once he sat at the right hand of the throne of God and was a favorite son of Heaven”: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” (Isaiah 14:12). Milton’s Satan was “of the first, / If not the first Archangel, great in power” (Paradise Lost 5.659-660). See Milton and Angels and Archangels.
- “some there are who still confuse the brothers, he who fell”: Both are called the morning star: Lucifer, “son of the morning” (Isaiah 14:12), and Christ, “the bright and morning star” (Revelation 22:16). See The Bible.
- “The Devil, she had said when opening her black umbrella in the sunlight, is God’s ape”: The devil as God’s ape, simia Dei, who mocks God by imitating Him, is an old Christian saying, often traced to the Church Fathers and used by Luther. Medieval bestiaries made the ape the devil’s creature: “As the devil poorly imitates the Lord, so do apes poorly imitate us” (Samiksha Chopra, “Book of Beasts,” Getty Iris). See Augustine and Christian Theology and Angels, Devils, and Myth.
- “God’s crown which is a crown of stars”: Compare the woman clothed with the sun, “upon her head a crown of twelve stars” (Revelation 12:1). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “better the Devil you know than the Devil you will never know”: The proverb is “Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t.” Miss MacIntosh makes the unknown devil one you will “never know.”
- “He might appear as the angel transfixed by light or as the angel of darkness”: “For Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14), as in Chapter 17. See The Bible and the Chapter 17 resources.
- “The greatest sorrows were those not described”: Seneca’s Phaedra has “Curae leves loquuntur, ingentes stupent” (“Light griefs speak, great ones are struck dumb”). Malcolm tells Macduff, “Give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak / Whispers the o’er-fraught heart and bids it break” (Macbeth 4.3). See Shakespeare.
- “The King James version of the Bible was not to be trusted because made for the vanity of earthly kings”: The King James Version of the Bible was not the first English language version of the Bible, but the culmination of extensive translation activity (some illegal!) in the 1500s. This began with the work of William Tyndale and the printing of the first English New Testament in 1526. Following a tumultuous 75 years, James VI of Scotland became James I of England in 1603, joining the two crowns. Three main English Bibles were in use: the Bishops’ Bible (Church of England), the Geneva Bible (Protestants), and the Rheims New Testament (1582, Roman Catholic Church), causing much confusion and dissension. To settle disagreements over

reforms in the Church of England and respond to pressure from the Puritans, King James in 1604 approved a new translation of the Bible, primarily because he knew that it would reinforce his image as a political and spiritual leader. He approved six companies of translators, 54 men in all, of whom 47 are known to have worked on it, to prepare the new translation, using previous English Bible translation work, and using the best Hebrew, Greek, and Latin texts and manuscripts. The completed King James Version was first published in 1611. These first editions were large pulpit Bibles (folios) to be read in churches, but were followed within a year by the printing of smaller versions (quartos) for personal use. Though slow to be adopted in the English-speaking world and to replace the more popular Geneva Bible, from the mid-1600s to the late 20th century, the King James Version was the Bible of the English-speaking church (Encyclopaedia Britannica). The translators' dedication addresses "the most high and mighty Prince James," the kind of flattery Miss MacIntosh distrusts. See The Bible.

- "A man who is a pig is still a man": Circe turns Odysseus's men into swine, but "their minds were as before" (Odyssey 10). See Homer's Epics and Greek Mythology.
- "the darkness and the whirlwind": "Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind" (Job 38:1). See The Book of Job.
- "the tissues like a baby's fist": Here the text has "a baby's fist." Chapter 19 has "no bigger than a baby's." See the Chapter 19 resources.
- "a brassiere with a wad of cloth which had been Concealed": The "breast pad" Vera imagined in Chapter 20. After a mastectomy, women padded the brassiere with cloth. Young's capital "Concealed" is in the text. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and the Chapter 20 resources.
- "her Irish green hair ribbon looped over the bust of Martin Luther": The bust of Chapter 19. See the Chapter 19 resources.
- "Dancing is never to be encouraged by this old lady": Miss MacIntosh vividly expresses sexism through her character by highlighting her pragmatic, no-nonsense attitude toward the limitations imposed on women, her rejection of illusions, and her critical view of the societal roles prescribed to women. Miss MacIntosh's insistence on practicality and self-reliance reflects a critique of traditional sexism by underscoring how women are often expected to conform to narrow roles, suppressing their individuality and desires. Miss MacIntosh's harshness can be read as internalized sexism, reflecting how women may police themselves and others to survive within a patriarchal system that offers them limited agency. This portrayal critiques the constraints sexism imposes on women's lives, identities, and dreams by grounding Miss MacIntosh as a figure of practical wisdom and resilience who nonetheless embodies the burdens of gendered limitations. It sums up how Miss MacIntosh has internalized sexism where she takes sexist behaviors and attitudes about women and projects them onto herself and Vera in the form of fear, envy, jealousy, suspicion, resentment, rage, anxiety, lack of self-esteem and confidence. Miss MacIntosh's greatest fear is that Vera will become and get to do everything society expects a

‘normal’ woman to be and do, something Miss MacIntosh will never achieve. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- “as when Mr. Spitzer had taken it out of its long white box”: The dress of Chapter 9. Mr. Spitzer promised, “Fair as a bride I should be,” and Miss MacIntosh complained of its low neck and lack of sleeves. See Joachim Spitzer, Weddings and Funerals, and the Chapter 9 resources.

Vocabulary

Baleful

Threatening harm; menacing.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Breeches

Short trousers fastened at or below the knee.

Carapace

The hard upper shell of a turtle.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Clammy

Damp, cold, and sticky.

Cobalt

A deep blue.

Constitutional

A walk taken regularly for the sake of one’s health.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Denudement

A stripping bare.

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Gnarled

Knobbly and twisted, as old trees or hands.

Hypocrisies

Pretenses of virtue or feeling one does not have.

Immoderate

Excessive; beyond reasonable limits.

Impartial

Fair; favoring no side.

Impersonations

Acts of pretending to be someone else.

Inarticulate

Unable to express oneself clearly.

Jester

A clown kept at a royal court.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Mauve

A pale purple.

Mediocrity

The state of being ordinary or second-rate.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Palpable

Able to be touched or felt; plain to see.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Ribald

Coarsely humorous.

Robust

Strong and healthy.

Rosette

A rose-shaped decoration of ribbon or lace.

Seed pearl

A very small pearl.

Shirtwaist

A woman’s blouse tailored like a man’s shirt.

Simulacrum

An image or likeness; a mere imitation.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Transfixed

Pierced through; held motionless.

Turtleneck

A high, close, turned-over collar on a sweater.

Vapid

Dull and empty of life or interest.

Vizor

An old spelling of visor, the movable front of a helmet.

Wan

Pale and sickly.

Chapter 22

Summary

At a breakfast table laid, for no reason anyone names, with Haviland china, silver, and a bowl of white roses, Vera sits scratched, bruised, and aching, “seethingly irritated” that Miss MacIntosh never asks how she passed the night. Miss MacIntosh reads the water-stained newspaper aloud, a Brazilian rebellion, a needle-workers’ strike, gold to be drained from the sea, a famine in China, a new star, and steers the household like a ship (“All hands to the ropes!”). She scolds Vera about dust and unmatched socks and fires the old questions at her: the days of creation, which she counts from Sunday because Constantine “got us all off on the wrong day of the week,” and the world’s islands, mountains, boxers, and stars. Twice Vera asks whether the party dress was thrown away as a punishment, and twice she is answered with more questions. Miss MacIntosh scoffs at phantoms (“Who ever saw the ghost of his father?”), says she has not looked into a mirror in years, and mutters, almost asleep, “Baldness is no cure for sorrow, my dear.” Vera thinks of the two Mr. Spitzers, of the wreckage the sea casts up, and of her mother, who mistakes everything she sees for something else. “Was she all others? I wondered.”

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Miss MacIntosh · Richard MacIntosh · Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · The Old Clam Digger · Solomon the Turtle · Mr. Chandelier · Mr. Res Tacamah · The Old Blind Sheep Dog

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Decay and Ruin · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Love · Memory and the Past · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · Society, Class, and Race · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Dogs · Eyes and Blindness · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Horses and Carriages · Mirrors and Reflections · Roses and Flowers · The House · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) · Freud and Jung · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Nietzsche

Allusions: American Religious Movements · Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer’s Epics · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Judaism · Milton · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with Vera’s seething irritation and physical discomfort, describing scratches, aches, and a nameless fatigue that suggests both physical and spiritual malaise. This sets the tone of discontent and existential questioning that permeates the chapter. The sea is described as a mysterious, almost otherworldly presence, “an astral light as of some other planet.”
- Vera’s feeling of disconnection from the usual routine and Miss MacIntosh’s cheerful insistence on continuing the day’s affairs despite Vera’s obvious distress highlight a fundamental tension between resignation and rebellion.
- Miss MacIntosh reads aloud the morning newspaper, which is water-stained and blurred, symbolizing the blurred and unstable condition of the world and their lives. The newspaper covers a wide range of topics from international politics and economic troubles to mundane notices like shipments of coconuts and sports scores, reflecting the chaotic and fragmentary nature of modern life.
- Her manner is repetitive and insistent on routine knowledge and memorization of things such as: biblical creation days, current events, and housekeeping duties. This shows her belief in order and discipline as a defense against chaos and despair.
- The sea is a recurring symbol representing memory, oblivion, and the unknown. Miss MacIntosh doubts that the sea has memory, questioning “What does the sea remember when it swallows the ship?” This reflects Vera’s own questioning of existence and loss.
- The house is depicted as a decaying, almost haunted place filled with relics, broken items, and ghosts of the past. The chapter describes the house’s vast but unused wealth (silver services, fine china) and its gradual ruination, symbolizing the decay of old values and failed dreams.
- Miss MacIntosh is portrayed as brusque, pragmatic, and somewhat harsh, focused on housekeeping, moral discipline, and maintaining order. She criticizes Vera’s laziness and failure to perform her duties, insisting on sewing, cleaning, and learning practical skills for any future husband.
- Her voice is described as grating and rasping, likened to rusted hinges and drowning sounds, emphasizing her toughness and weariness but also her refusal to indulge in illusions or sentimentalities.
- The chapter is punctuated by Miss MacIntosh’s rapid-fire questions about the creation days, geography, history, sports, and the meaning of life and death. These questions serve as a kind of catechism, an attempt to impose order and knowledge on a world that feels chaotic and uncertain to Vera.
- Vera reflects on the futility of these lessons and the disconnection between the external facts of the world and her internal sorrow and longing.

- While Miss MacIntosh insists on routine and practical concerns, Vera is lost in a dreamlike state, haunted by memories, illusions, and phantasms. There is a growing sense of alienation and sorrow, Vera's desire for "perfect happiness" contrasting with Miss MacIntosh's grounded, if harsh, realism.
- Miss MacIntosh's dismissal of ghosts and phantoms as nonsense, and her readiness to confront any imaginary specter with her black umbrella, shows the rejection of fantasy she professes, though Young saw the umbrella as "a kind of canopy between her and reality" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965).
- "'Baldness is no cure for sorrow, my dear,' she muttered sleepily, her voice like the continuation of a dream I had almost forgotten." This is the only time Miss MacIntosh comes near the night.
- "For many years now, she had never looked into a looking glass. She could not remember the last time she had seen herself."

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- The table is laid "as if for some special occasion, the nature of which I could hardly imagine." What is the occasion?
- "There is no news today that was not yesterday." Why does Miss MacIntosh read the news at all?
- "Baldness is no cure for sorrow." Whose sorrow?

Characters

- Vera asks twice about the party dress and is twice answered with questions. What is Miss MacIntosh evading?
- Miss MacIntosh "had never been to sea" but talks "as if we were far out at sea." Why?
- "Was she all others?" What has Vera begun to see?

Connections

- Chapter 18's dawn quiz returns: Skagerrak and Shiloh then, James Bay and Fingal's Cave now. What has changed between the two quizzes?
- In Chapter 18 she "had never seen it herself except in a mirror." Here she "had never looked into a looking glass" for years. Which is true?
- Catherine mistakes a fan for a door and Mr. Spitzer for an umbrella stand. How is Miss MacIntosh's blindness different?

Reflection

- What do we ask questions to avoid answering?
- “It takes more than clothes to make the man.” What does it take?
- Is a routine a comfort or a hiding place?

Research: Characters

Vera Cartwheel

- Tired, disillusioned, and inwardly restless, she struggles with a profound sense of sorrow and alienation.
- She questions the value of the tasks imposed on her and longs for a life beyond repetitive lessons and duties.
- She asks twice, “Did you throw away my party dress for a punishment?” and declares, “I shall dance again, even with my own shadow.”

Miss MacIntosh

- A forthright, practical woman with a strong sense of duty, she is Vera’s caretaker and disciplinarian.
- She is resistant to illusions and ghosts, skeptical of sentimentality, and focused on maintaining order.
- Despite her harshness, she harbors her own doubts and vulnerabilities, reflected in her philosophical musings and physical frailty.
- She counts the days of creation from Sunday, works every day of the week, and blames the Emperor Constantine for the Christian Sunday.
- Her “old dollar watch… was given to her by her dead love.”

Richard, Miss MacIntosh’s brother (Mentioned)

- A missionary who disappeared among the islands of Oceania, where he went to live among the head-hunters and was either eaten by them or converted by them (told in a later chapter). Here she asks only, “Where is my brother Richard? Some said I looked like him. His hair was red.”

Research: Themes

Routine versus Inner Turmoil

See: Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- Vera experiences deep emotional fatigue and existential questioning, feeling trapped in repetitive, meaningless tasks imposed by Miss MacIntosh's rigid routine. The contrast highlights the human struggle between external order and internal chaos.

Memory and Forgetfulness

See: Memory and the Past · The Sea and Water

- The sea, a recurring motif, is described as both full of "wrinkles" and yet possibly without memory. This paradox symbolizes the blurred lines between remembering and forgetting, life and oblivion.

Illusion versus Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- Miss MacIntosh dismisses phantoms and ghosts as nonsense, emphasizing the importance of facing reality and practicality, whereas Vera's experience is haunted by memories, dreams, and elusive presences.

Mortality and Loss

See: Death and Mortality

- References to death, the "angel of death," and shipwrecks evoke the fragility of life and the inevitability of decay. Miss MacIntosh speaks of the absence of new life ("we shall have no baby of our own") and the presence of old, broken things, symbolizing lost hopes.

Knowledge and Education

See: Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- The insistence on memorizing Biblical genealogies, current events, geography, and sports reflects a traditional, perhaps oppressive, approach to learning as a way to impose order and meaning in a chaotic world.

Isolation and Connection

See: Isolation and Connection

- Vera feels isolated, disconnected from the external world and even from Miss MacIntosh, who seems unable to perceive Vera's sorrow. There is a tension between their companionship and emotional distance.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Sea

See: The Sea and Water

- Represents memory, oblivion, and the passage of time. It is both a life source and a graveyard, swallowing ships and memories alike.

The Breakfast Table

See: The House

- The ornately set table contrasts with the characters' modest lives, symbolizing lost grandeur or unrealized potential.

Phantoms and Ghosts

See: Illusion and Reality

- Symbolizes Vera's inner fears and the past's haunting presence. Miss MacIntosh's dismissal of them reflects a pragmatic worldview.

Broken and Sunken Objects

See: Decay and Ruin

- Shipwrecks, broken crockery, and old estate remnants symbolize decay, loss, and the impermanence of human endeavors.

Black Umbrella

See: The Umbrella

- Miss MacIntosh's protective and practical tool, symbolizing her grounded nature and defense against both literal and figurative storms.

Technique

See: Marguerite Young on Her Craft

- Symbolism: The chapter abounds with symbolic references to ships, storms, and phantoms, enhancing themes of memory and loss.
- Stream of Consciousness: Vera's thoughts flow freely between observation, memory, and philosophical reflection, emphasizing her inner turmoil. Young said both things about the method. She told Studs Terkel, "This is not a stream of consciousness novel. It's a very controlled, rather realistic treatment of that kind of attitude" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965), and in 1983, asked whether the stream of consciousness was the method of the novel, she answered, "Yes, the

stream of consciousness” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983).

- Allusion: Biblical references to creation days, historical figures (Emperor Constantine, King Canute), and biblical figures (Jeremiah) deepen thematic complexity.
- Contrast: Between Vera’s emotional state and Miss MacIntosh’s external cheerfulness and routine.

Research: Resources

- “her morning newspaper”: In the lists of events and things there appear to be two time periods being dealt with: one paragraph is the 1800s and the other the early 1900s.
- “a Brazilian rebellion”: Brazil’s revolts within Miss MacIntosh’s memory include the Naval Revolt (1893-94), the war at Canudos (1896-97), the Revolt of the Lash (1910), when Black sailors mutinied against flogging, and the Revolution of 1930.
- “a needle-workers’ strike or a new garment union”: In the “Uprising of the 20,000” (1909), shirtwaist makers in New York, most of them young immigrant women, struck for months. The International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union was founded in 1900. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and Society, Class, and Race.
- “the instability of islands”: The Pacific islands came under colonial rule, foreign intervention, and control. Eventually the unstable conditions in the Pacific began to draw in European governments, all of which acknowledged some responsibility for the protection of their nationals and their property.
- “the recent visit of a British prime minister”: This may be Ramsay MacDonald, who in 1929 became the first sitting British prime minister to visit the United States.
- “the tonnage of water falling each day over Niagara Falls where was a honeymooners’ paradise”: Niagara Falls has a rich history as a honeymoon destination, beginning, by local tradition, with Theodosia Burr and Joseph Alston’s bridal tour in 1801. It was initially considered a destination for the wealthy, but became more accessible to a wider range of couples with the opening of the Erie Canal and the growth of railroads. The iconic Maid of the Mist boat tour, which takes visitors close to the base of the falls, has run since 1846 (Niagara Falls USA, “How Niagara Falls Became the Honeymoon Capital of the World”).
- “a great drouth in the sheep-raising lands of Western Alberta”: The 1920s and 1930s drought in Western Canada, particularly in areas of Alberta, was not solely a “Dust Bowl” event in the same way as the US Great Plains. While conditions were harsh, with severe droughts and dust storms, the period also saw a significant economic downturn related to agricultural challenges. The drought of 1929 to 1937 devastated a quarter of Canada’s arable land and left 13,900 farms abandoned (The Canadian Encyclopedia, “Drought in Palliser’s Triangle”).
- “a fall in sea island cotton”: Sea Island cotton, a long-staple variety cultivated on coastal islands of South Carolina and Georgia, was intimately linked to the institution of

slavery. Its high quality and demand made it a lucrative crop, but its production relied entirely on the forced labor of enslaved Africans. The Sea Island cotton industry thrived from the late 1700s to the late 19th century, fueled by the brutal exploitation of enslaved people. The cultivation, harvesting, and processing of Sea Island cotton were entirely dependent on the labor of enslaved Africans. The Civil War ended slavery, but not the crop. Sea Island cotton was grown by freedpeople and others until it was “no longer economically viable by the 1910s,” and the boll weevil, arriving in the 1910s and 1920s, dealt the “final blow” (South Carolina Encyclopedia, “Cotton”). See Society, Class, and Race.

- “a project for draining gold out of the sea”: Humans have known that gold exists in the ocean since at least 1872, when British chemist Edward Sonstadt discovered it. People have been captivated by the idea of extracting gold from the ocean for over 100 years. In the 1890s, New England pastor Prescott Ford Jernegan claimed to have invented a device that could extract gold from seawater using mercury and electricity. His Electrolytic Marine Salts Company at Lubec, Maine (1897-98) was a swindle, and he fled with investors’ money. The ocean contains around 20 million tons of dissolved gold (Atlas Obscura, “There Is Gold in Seawater, But We Can’t Get at It”), but there is only about one gram of gold for every 100 million metric tons of ocean water (NOAA Ocean Service, “Is there gold in the ocean?”). There is also undissolved gold in and on the seafloor, encased in rock “a mile or two underwater” (NOAA). Getting gold from seawater is very difficult, so it is not expected to happen anytime soon. Scientists have also tracked the amount of gold in the ocean over the last 3.5 billion years (Ross R. Large and others, “Gold in the oceans through time,” Earth and Planetary Science Letters, 2015).
- “the lost regatta”: Throughout the 1800s, hundreds of professional and amateur boat clubs were established in the United States. A select few remain intact today, a few merged with other clubs, and others had brief but interesting lives. It gives a snapshot into what life was like in America as society’s elite established these clubs not just for athletics, but to build and maintain their social status, wealth, and political clout. Things weren’t so glamorous outside these boathouses in the US at that time (Rachel Freedman, “1800s: While White Men of Privilege Were Establishing Boat Clubs,” Rowsource).
    - The Henley Royal Regatta barred “mechanics, artisans, or labourers” until 1937. In 1920 it refused the American sculler John B. Kelly, a bricklayer.
- “a shipment of cocoanuts”: DNA analysis of more than 1,300 coconuts from around the world reveals that the coconut was brought under cultivation in two separate locations, one in the Pacific basin and the other in the Indian Ocean basin (Gunn, Baudouin, and Olsen, PLoS ONE, 2011).
- “the deposition of another Balkan king”: Serbia’s King Alexander Obrenović was murdered by his own officers in 1903. Greece deposed Constantine I in 1917 and declared a republic in 1924. Alexander I of Yugoslavia was assassinated in 1934, and Albania’s King Zog fled in 1939.

- “the sea is full of wrinkles, though it has neither age nor grey hairs”: “Time writes no wrinkle on thine azure brow: / Such as creation’s dawn beheld, thou rollest now” (Byron, Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage IV, 1818). See Romantic Poets and The Sea and Water.
- “the jeremiads”: A jeremiad, from Jeremiah’s name, is “a prolonged lamentation or complaint” and also “a cautionary or angry harangue” (Merriam-Webster). He was called the “weeping prophet” and was one of the major prophets of the Hebrew Bible.
- “Commonwealth Edison was doing very well”: Samuel Insull’s utility empire, with Commonwealth Edison of Chicago at its head, collapsed in 1932. This news dates from before the crash, and it bears on the “two time periods” of the newspaper.
- “Hong Kong funds were frozen, and the British were rank imperialists”: Britain took Hong Kong in the First Opium War, fought to force the opium trade on China (Treaty of Nanking, 1842). See The History of Opium.
- “there was a great famine in China”: The North China famine of 1876-79 killed some nine to thirteen million people, and famines came again in 1920-21, 1928-30, and 1942-43.
- “A younger brother had been assassinated in Java”: The sultans of Yogyakarta:
  - Hamengkubuwono IV died suddenly, perhaps by poison.
  - Hamengkubuwono V was killed by one of his wives.
- “A new star had been discovered in the Northern Hemisphere”: T Coronae Borealis may refer to the New Star that is seen every 80 years. “It was first discovered in an outburst in 1866 by John Birmingham, though it had been observed earlier as a 10th magnitude star. It may have been observed in 1217 and in 1787 as well. In February 1946 a 15-year-old schoolboy from Wales named Michael Woodman observed a flare up, subsequently writing to the Astronomer Royal and leading to the theory that the star flares each 80 years” (Wikipedia).
- “Mr. Spitzer’s close-mouthed old houseman with his clam buckets and his seine”: The old clam digger. See The Old Clam Digger.
- “We loved no graven image”: “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image” (Exodus 20:4). See The Bible.
- “we were using the Haviland china”: Haviland & Co. was founded at Limoges, France, by the American importer David Haviland in 1842.
- “cabbage roses such as grew, if not in What Cheer, Iowa”: Miss MacIntosh’s hometown. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest and Roses and Flowers.
- “The first was to have begun what He could not finish”: Because creation is incomplete, the characters, particularly Miss MacIntosh, emphasize the importance of practical, honest living in the present world rather than dreaming of distant, perfect worlds or afterlives. The unfinished world demands human effort and self-discipline, and moral clarity, rather than escapism or fantasy.

    - The 8th day of creation is often used symbolically to represent a new beginning, a time of renewal or a significant event beyond the initial creation narrative, often associated with the covenant with Abraham and the practice of circumcision on the 8th day after birth, signifying a new life within the covenant with God. Some Christians interpret the 8th day as a reference to Jesus' resurrection. "He that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you" (Genesis 17:12), and the Epistle of Barnabas (15) speaks of "a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world… we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead."
- "no monsters guarding the waves at the edge of the world": Old maps put sea monsters at the edges of the known world. The Hunt-Lenox Globe (c. 1510) is marked "HC SVNT DRACONES," "here are dragons."
- "pheasants' tongues served by imaginary servants": Suetonius says the emperor Vitellius was served "the livers of pike, the brains of pheasants and peacocks, the tongues of flamingos" (Vitellius 13).
- "triple-crowned griffins with gold eggs between their gilded paws": Herodotus tells of griffins guarding gold in the far north (Histories 3.116). See Greek Mythology.
- "My mother always insisted that the hotel entertained many dead men": Catherine's dead guests. See Catherine Cartwheel.
- "what God had created on Wednesday": "And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also" (Genesis 1:16). See Genesis.
- "the Emperor Constantine's having changed the calendar": On March 7, 321, Constantine ordered that "on the venerable day of the Sun" magistrates and city people should rest. The Seventh-day Adventists and Seventh Day Baptists teach that Rome changed the Sabbath to Sunday, and Miss MacIntosh's quarrel with Constantine is theirs. See American Religious Movements and Augustine and Christian Theology.
    - Miss MacIntosh's quarrel is with the seven-day week and its day of rest. She counts from Sunday, works every day, and says God should have "created the world in seven days and rested on the eighth." Young may be telling us that we are out of balance with nature, the seasons, and the natural order. The early Roman calendar followed the seasons more closely. It reinforces Miss MacIntosh's advocacy for common sense and living within the realities of the present moment, acknowledging the limitations imposed by time and mortality.
    - The Roman calendar was used by the Roman Kingdom and Roman Republic. The earliest Roman calendars were lunar calendars that tracked the moon's 29.5 day cycle. It also had an eight-day week, with a market day every eight days.
    - The Julian calendar was a reform of the Roman calendar that was based on the Egyptian solar calendar. It had 365.25 days in a year, with leap days added every four years. It was replaced by the Gregorian calendar in 1582.

    - The Romans were generally pagans for more than a thousand years. Paganism is a term used to describe people who worship multiple gods and nature, rather than one god as in monotheistic religions. The Roman Empire eventually became a Christian majority state, and pagans were persecuted. In February 391 Emperor Theodosius “prohibited sacrifices and the visiting of temples,” and in November 392 he forbade the worship of the pagan gods altogether (Encyclopaedia Britannica).
- “Men did not live so long as in the past time”: The patriarchs of Chapter 20. See the Chapter 20 resources.
- “were created on Thursday last. I think it must have been around four o’clock in the afternoon”: “And God created great whales” (Genesis 1:21). Vera’s mock precision recalls Archbishop James Ussher, who dated the creation to the evening before October 23, 4004 BC (Annales Veteris Testamenti, 1650). See Genesis.
- “How does the other half live?”: Jacob Riis, How the Other Half Lives (1890). The conservative opinion in the Wikipedia article, that immigrants chose to live in slums as a stepping stone to living in America, is ludicrous. It is very convenient that slum lords would argue we need slums. Any conservative minority has been paid to have that conservative opinion in the US, from history up to the present. Riis’s autobiography, The Making of an American (1901), shows the nuance: he may have had prejudices against certain ethnicities, as racism has always been a thing, but that doesn’t explain that slums are necessary for the working class. See Society, Class, and Race.
    - Jacob Riis: “A particularly important effort by Riis was his exposure of the condition of New York’s water supply. His five-column story “Some Things We Drink,” in the August 21, 1891, edition of the “New York Evening Sun,” included six photographs (later lost). Riis wrote: “I took my camera and went up in the watershed photographing my evidence wherever I found it. Populous towns sewered directly into our drinking water. I went to the doctors and asked how many days a vigorous cholera bacillus may live and multiply in running water. About seven, they said. My case was made.” The story resulted in the purchase by New York City of areas around the New Croton Reservoir, and may well have saved New Yorkers from an epidemic of cholera. Riis tried hard to have the slums around Five Points demolished and replaced with a park. His writings resulted in the Drexel Committee investigation of unsafe tenements; this resulted in the Small Park Act of 1887. Riis was not invited to the eventual opening of the park on June 15, 1897, but went all the same, together with Lincoln Steffens. In the last speech, the street cleaning commissioner credited Riis for the park and led the public in giving him three cheers of “Hooray, Jacob Riis!” Other parks also were created, and Riis was popularly credited with them as well” (Wikipedia).
- “every woman’s privilege and duty”: Women’s unpaid labor is the work that women do without financial compensation, such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. It’s often undervalued and underappreciated. Globally, women spend 2.5 times as many hours on unpaid care work as men (UN Women, “Care work keeps the world running”). Unpaid labor limits women’s time for paid work and can lead to longer hours. Unpaid

labor can have negative emotional, mental, and physical health impacts on women. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- “Solomon’s tub should be changed”: Solomon, the turtle Catherine gave Vera on her twelfth birthday (Chapter 9). See Solomon the Turtle and the Chapter 9 resources.
- “The mill workers were striking”: In the Lawrence textile strike of 1912, the “Bread and Roses” strike, women and children of more than twenty nationalities walked out of the mills. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “by the sweat of my brow”: “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Genesis 3:19). See Genesis.
- “a baseball autographed by a dead St. Louis Cardinal”: Young mentioned the St. Louis Cardinals and the Cardinals/Dodgers rivalry and this mention seems to be through the lens of racism. During this period, after the 1942 season, Branch Rickey, who had built up the Cardinals farm system as their general manager, moved to become the Dodgers’ general manager. In 1947, after Rickey broke the color line by signing Jackie Robinson to the Dodgers, there were rumors that southerners playing for the Cardinals were planning to boycott games against the Dodgers, although the players later denied it. In general, the Cardinals were latecomers to integration. Front-office executive Bing Devine said the owner from 1947 to 1953, Fred Saigh, refused to sign black players. There was a widespread belief that St. Louis was, in many ways, a Southern city. In the mid-1950s many of its stores and restaurants refused to serve black customers. The Cardinals, with baseball’s largest radio network blanketing the Midwest and South, had cultivated white Southern fans. Their ballpark was also the last in the majors to abolish segregated seating. Because of their lack of black players, the Cardinals’ play suffered on the field tremendously in the 1950s. Meanwhile, with the success of Robinson, the Dodgers doubled down on the opportunity to sign players of color from the Negro leagues. In the subsequent years after their pennant-winning season in 1947, they would sign Don Newcombe, Roy Campanella, and Jim Gilliam from the Negro leagues, adding to an already tremendous team. The Dodgers made the World Series in 1949, 1952, 1953, 1955, 1956, and 1959 (winning championships in 1955 and 1959) and were a historic pennant race away from making it in 1951, in part because they were the first to accept African American players. The 1951 season included a 14-game winning streak for the Dodgers against the Cardinals, the longest such streak in the rivalry. (Wikipedia) See Society, Class, and Race.
- “the best baseball player in little old What Cheer”: Women have been playing baseball as long as men have. Their long connection with the game began in the 1860s and has continued through the efforts of individual pioneers like Amanda Clement, Jackie Mitchell, Toni Stone, Maria Pepe, and Ila Borders (American Girls Baseball, “The History of Women in Baseball”). The All-American Girls Professional Baseball League played from 1943 to 1954. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
    - “Georgia had run faster than any of them”: her first name, Georgia, the G on her shirts in Chapter 9. See the Chapter 9 resources.

- “the Islands of the Blessed or the Islands of the Dead”: Arnold Böcklin’s painting Isle of the Dead (1880) inspired Rachmaninoff’s tone poem (1909). See Greek Mythology and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
    - Islands of the Blessed may refer to the Islands in Greek mythology which were a semi-legendary place in the western ocean where the souls of heroes and worthy people went after death. They were also known as the Fortunate Isles or Elysian Fields.
    - Islands of the Dead may refer to a concept from pre-Christian Europe of an island to the west where souls went after death. It is reported as being part of Celtic belief by several Roman historians, and evidence for this belief is also found in Welsh folklore. It also existed in ancient Germanic traditions where the British Isles were sometimes depicted as the isles to the west that the dead inhabited. (Wikipedia)
- “Take time by the forelock!”: The saying means to act quickly and decisively, especially to take advantage of an opportunity. It comes from the Greek Kairos, Opportunity, carved by Lysippus with a forelock in front and bald behind, so that he can be seized only as he comes. The Roman fabulist Phaedrus tells it of Occasio (Fables 5.8). See Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “the firmament in the midst of the waters to divide the waters from the waters”: “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters” (Genesis 1:6-7). See Genesis.
- “It’s a heavy sea running”: A nautical phrase meaning there are large, powerful waves crashing against a ship, indicating rough and dangerous sea conditions. Its origin lies in the literal description of a turbulent ocean with large waves, commonly used by sailors to convey the severity of a storm at sea. Webster’s defines a “heavy sea” as “a sea in which the waves run high” (Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary, 1913).
- “The longer the orbit, the longer the planetary year”: Kepler’s third law (Harmonices Mundi, 1619) is that the square of a planet’s orbital period is directly proportional to the cube of the semi-major axis of its orbit, meaning a larger orbit leads to a longer orbital period. See Astronomy.
- “Time was circled in a single week”: Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence (The Gay Science 341, 1882): “This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more.” See Nietzsche and Time.
    - The block universe is usually traced to Hermann Minkowski’s lecture “Space and Time” (1908): “Henceforth space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows, and only a kind of union of the two will preserve an independent reality.” It describes the universe as a four-dimensional block that contains every event that has ever happened, past, present, and future all equally real. The growing block version of the theory states that the past and present are real, but the future is unreal. As future events become present, they are added to the growing block of reality.
- “Siberian wheat”: Mennonites from the Russian steppes brought “Turkey Red” winter wheat to Kansas in 1874, and the USDA’s Mark Carleton brought more Russian hard

wheats around 1900.

- “The American divorces were increasing”: American divorce rates peaked around 1980 (National Center for Family and Marriage Research, Bowling Green State University). In American history, divorce was initially very difficult to obtain, primarily restricted to cases of adultery and was heavily regulated by religious and legal authorities during the colonial era. By the mid-19th century, divorce rates began to rise significantly as states enacted more lenient laws allowing for broader grounds like cruelty, desertion, and habitual drunkenness, leading to a major surge in divorce rates during the 20th century (“no-fault” divorce laws).
- “it was a wise child who knew his own father”: “It is a wise father that knows his own child” (The Merchant of Venice 2.2). Telemachus says, “My mother says I am his son; but I know not, for no man knows his own father” (Odyssey 1). See Shakespeare and Homer’s Epics.
- “God created man on Friday, the sixth day”: “And the evening and the morning were the sixth day” (Genesis 1:31). See Genesis.
- “Man is man’s wolf”: Homo homini lupus, “man is a wolf to man.” Young’s “Homo hominy lupus” puns on hominy, the corn grits of the Midwest. The source is Plautus, “Lupus est homo homini” (Asinaria 495), and Hobbes repeats it in the dedication of De Cive (1642). It implies that without social order or moral restraint, humans naturally act in their own self-interest, often to the detriment of others.
- “I know no Greek, less Latin, less Hebrew”: Ben Jonson said Shakespeare had “small Latine, and lesse Greeke” (First Folio, 1623). See Shakespeare.
- “The sheep cannot guard the sheep against the thief”: “He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber” (John 10:1). See The Bible.
- “An old dog barks at nothing”: This turns around the proverb of Chapter 15, “An old dog barks not in vain.” See The Old Blind Sheep Dog, Dogs, Fairy Tales and Folklore, and the Chapter 15 resources.
- “a confusion of tongues, the very Tower of Babel”: “Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth” (Genesis 11:9). See Genesis.
- “We must catch the old Devil by the tail”: The French “tirer le diable par la queue,” to pull the devil by the tail, means to be struggling or barely scraping by with limited financial resources.
- “He sat next to God, and he thought that he was smarter than God”: Lucifer of Chapter 21. See the Chapter 21 resources.
- “The first thrashing had its origin, I have no doubt, in heaven, and one fell”: “And there was war in heaven… and the great dragon was cast out” (Revelation 12:7-9). The dragon’s “tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven” (Revelation 12:4), as he goes “dragging the stars with him.” See Revelation and the Apocalypse.

- “He was fallen from morning until seven o’clock, from evening until morning”: Milton’s fallen angel Mulciber: “from Morn / To Noon he fell, from Noon to dewy Eve, / A Summer’s day” (Paradise Lost 1.742-744). Luke has Satan fall “as lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). See Milton.
- “Which state of the Union is named for its green mountains?”: Vermont, from the French vert mont, “green mountain,” and Nevada, Spanish for “snow-covered.”
- “has won the famous steeplechase at Aintree where is the dreaded water-jump”: Master Robert, who had once pulled a plow, won the Grand National at Aintree in 1924. See Horses and Carriages.
- “Here’s a horse of a different color”: “My purpose is, indeed, a horse of that colour” (Twelfth Night 2.3). See Shakespeare.
- “Here were the names of some very interesting horses”: Miss MacIntosh’s racing news.
    - Flamingo was a British Thoroughbred racehorse and sire. In 1927 he was one of the best two-year-old colts in England when he won three of his five races including the National Breeders’ Produce Stakes.
    - Pericles’ Pride may refer to Pericles, a Greek statesman and general during the Golden Age of Athens. As the Wikipedia article on Pericles puts it, “Pericles marked a whole era and inspired conflicting judgments about his significant decisions. The fact that he was at the same time a vigorous statesman, general and orator only tends to make an objective assessment of his actions more difficult.” Pericles’ most visible legacy can be found in the literary and artistic works of the Golden Age, much of which survive to this day. In politics, Victor L. Ehrenberg (From Solon to Socrates, 1968) argues that a basic element of Pericles’ legacy is Athenian imperialism, which denies true democracy and freedom to the people of all but the ruling state. The promotion of such an arrogant imperialism is said to have ruined Athens. Pericles and his “expansionary” policies have been at the center of arguments promoting democracy in oppressed countries. Other analysts maintain an Athenian humanism illustrated in the Golden Age. The freedom of expression is regarded as the lasting legacy deriving from this period. Pericles is lauded as “the ideal type of the perfect statesman in ancient Greece” and his Funeral Oration is nowadays synonymous with the struggle for participatory democracy and civic pride. His Funeral Oration, especially this part (Thucydides, History of the Peloponnesian War 2.37, translation adapted from Benjamin Jowett, 1881): “Our form of government does not enter into rivalry with the institutions of others. Our government does not copy our neighbors’, but is an example to them. It is true that we are called a democracy, for the administration is in the hands of the many and not of the few. But while there exists equal justice to all and alike in their private disputes, the claim of excellence is also recognized; and when a citizen is in any way distinguished, he is preferred to the public service, not as a matter of privilege, but as the reward of merit. Neither is poverty an obstacle, but a man may benefit his country whatever the obscurity of his condition.”

    - No racehorse by the name Thine and Mine has been found, but when you flip the words there are two famous poems with the title that this may refer to: Mine and Thine by William Morris (1889) and Florence Van Leer Earle Coates (1904).
    - Trinitarian means relating to the Trinity, the Christian doctrine that God is one being with three aspects. Trinitarians believe that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are co-equal and co-eternal.
- “Here was a race-track at Pimlico”: Pimlico Race Course is in Baltimore, Maryland and hosts the Preakness Stakes.
- “the kind of thing which should interest the late departed Mr. Spitzer”: Peron, the gambler of the race-tracks, “sometimes… seen double, standing in two places at once.” See Peron Spitzer and the Chapter 14 resources.
- “Dog races in Heaven as on earth”: “Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10). See The Bible.
- “What is the correct Chicago time?”: The railroads’ standard time began on November 18, 1883. Until then Chicago, like every city, kept its own local time.
- “If a ship sinks and no one sees it sinking”: This seems to be a rephrasing of “If a tree falls in the woods…” This is a philosophical question that explores the idea of whether a sound exists if no one is there to perceive it, essentially questioning the nature of perception and reality itself. (Wikipedia) See Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume).
    - Berkeley’s “to be is to be perceived” (1710) lies behind the riddle. George Berkeley was an Anglo-Irish philosopher, writer, and clergyman who is regarded as the founder of “immaterialism,” a philosophical theory he developed which was later referred to as “subjective idealism” by others. He was an influence on Kant and Hume. Berkeley, California and the University of California, Berkeley are named after him. (Wikipedia)
- “What is a man?”: “What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” (Psalm 8:4), pondering the value and nature of human beings. This question is a reflection on human fragility and insignificance compared to God’s power, yet also highlights the special attention God gives to humanity.
- “shirts going in job lots, slightly damaged by fire and flood”: May refer to the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in 1911 in New York City which killed 146 workers because a door to one stairway was locked, and the fire escape collapsed. Firefighters’ ladders couldn’t reach the upper floors. Workers, mostly all women, jumped to their deaths. The tragedy led to New York’s Factory Investigating Commission and its safety laws (1911-15). See Women, Gender, and Marriage and Society, Class, and Race.
- “The evening primrose will soon be out”: This is another clue as to the time period of this chapter which is early summer to early fall.
- “The neap tide is the least in the lunar month”: A neap tide occurs during the first and third quarter phases of the moon.
- “the best which Bond Street could offer”: Bond Street is in London, England famous for its luxury shopping and is considered one of the most expensive streets in the world.

- “Old-fashioned celluloid collars were going two for a nickel”: The separable (paper) collar was introduced in the early 1800s as a way of allowing men of more modest means to look sufficiently presentable when the occasion warranted it. Wealthier folks could have their entire shirts laundered after every wearing, but such services were largely out of reach to those with less money, such as laborers, farmers, clerks, or ordinary storekeepers. Laundering in the era before washing machines and modern fabrics was far more labor-intensive than today. The new style collar made it possible for much larger numbers of people to present themselves in church, courts, offices, and stores without bringing embarrassment or revealing their more modest status. (Wikipedia) Celluloid collars came in the 1870s.
- “a recipe for gooseberry tart made of sea gooseberries”: The sea gooseberry is a comb jelly, a small transparent sea creature. A tart of comb jellies can only be a joke.
- “those who fall in love are always blind”: “But love is blind, and lovers cannot see” (The Merchant of Venice 2.6). See Shakespeare and Love.
- “Did you throw away my party dress for a punishment?”: The dress of Chapter 21. See the Chapter 21 resources.
- “two stars in the Great Bear, the lines which joined them pointing nearly toward the North star”: The Pointers, Dubhe and Merak, at the bowl’s edge of the Big Dipper. See Astronomy.
- “these poor tenements of clay”: The “houses of clay” of Job 4:19, as in Chapter 18. See The Book of Job and the Chapter 18 resources.
- “I shall dance again, even with my own shadow”: The dancing of Chapter 21. See the Chapter 21 resources.
- “Where are those towers of gold which God created before creation officially began? Where is that sea of jasper and of light?”: “A sea of glass like unto crystal” (Revelation 4:6), and “the building of the wall of it was of jasper” (Revelation 21:18). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “Describe that heaven which is filled with mares’-tails”: Luke Howard named the clouds cirrus, cumulus, and stratus in his Essay on the Modifications of Clouds (1803). The sailors’ rhyme runs, “Mackerel sky and mares’ tails / Make lofty ships carry low sails.”
    - A mackerel sky is a cloud formation that resembles fish scales. It’s made up of rows of altocumulus or cirrocumulus clouds that ripple across the sky.
- “Where is James Bay?”: James Bay is located on the southern end of the Hudson Bay in Canada.
- “Where is the Sea of Azov?”: The Sea of Azov is a small body of water between Russia and Ukraine.
- “Where is the Coral Sea?”: The Coral Sea is off the northeast coast of Australia.
- “Where is the Sargasso Sea”: The Sargasso Sea is a region of the Atlantic Ocean bounded by four currents forming an ocean gyre. Columbus crossed it in 1492.

- “Where are the Gilbert Islands”: The Gilbert Islands are a chain of sixteen atolls and coral islands in the Pacific Ocean.
    - The Falkland Islands are an archipelago in the South Atlantic Ocean.
    - The Shetland Islands are a subarctic archipelago in the Northern Isles of Scotland.
    - Coronation Island is in Alaska off the northwest coast of Prince of Wales Island. Beside Henrietta Island and Bay Marguerite, this is more likely Coronation Island in the South Orkneys, named in 1821 for George IV’s coronation.
    - Henrietta Island is a small glacier-capped island in the East Siberian Sea. It was discovered in 1881 by De Long’s ill-fated Jeannette expedition.
    - Bay Marguerite is on the west side of the Antarctic Peninsula. Jean-Baptiste Charcot named it in 1909 for his wife, Marguerite. Young shares the name.
    - Port Royal is in southeastern Jamaica. Much of the town sank into the sea in the earthquake of 1692.
    - The Suez Canal is an artificial sea-level waterway in Egypt.
- “Where is Fingal’s Cave?”: Fingal’s Cave is a sea cave on the uninhabited island of Staffa of Scotland. It inspired Mendelssohn’s Hebrides Overture (1830).
- “Where is Victoria Station?”: Victoria Station is a railway station in Westminster, London, UK.
- “Where is Charing Cross?”: Charing Cross is one of the medieval Eleanor crosses in Charing, Westminster, London, UK.
- “Where is Trajan’s Column?”: Trajan’s Column is a Roman triumphal column in Rome, Italy.
- “Where is Cleopatra’s Needle?”: Cleopatra’s Needle is the popular name for each of a pair of ancient Egyptian obelisks re-erected in London and New York City during the nineteenth century. See Ancient Egypt.
- “Where is Mt. Pisgah, my dear?”: The mountain from which Moses saw the promised land: “And Moses went up… to the top of Pisgah” (Deuteronomy 34:1). See The Bible and the Chapter 20 resources.
- “Where is Mt. Ararat”: “The ark rested… upon the mountains of Ararat” (Genesis 8:4). See Genesis.
- “Where is Pike’s Peak?”: Pikes Peak (14,115 feet), in Colorado’s Front Range, was named for Zebulon Pike (1806). It lent its name to the “Pikes Peak or Bust” gold rush of 1859 and inspired “America the Beautiful” (1893). The highest summit of the Rockies is Mount Elbert.
- “Where’s old Jessup Land, far to the North?”: The Arctic Jesup Land, named for Morris K. Jesup, president of the Peary Arctic Club, like Cape Morris Jesup in Greenland. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “Sometimes in the glacier there’s a tidal crack”: Tidal cracks are formed in glaciers because of the movement of the tide underneath. Something that looks solid, like a

sheet of ice or glacier, can be split open by the tide.

- “Where’s Herbert Island?”: Herbert Island lies off northwest Greenland, near Thule, a walrus-hunting ground. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “Where’s Cape Albert Edward?”: Cape Albert Edward is in Canada.
- “Where is Queen Maud Mountains”: Roald Amundsen named them in 1911, on his way to the South Pole, for Queen Maud of Norway. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “Where grows the winter cherry”: Winter cherry, the Chinese lantern plant, is a plant in Southern Europe and Asia.
- “the Kirtland’s warbler”: The Kirtland’s warbler nests in young jack pine in the northern Lower Peninsula of Michigan, not the Upper Peninsula, as Miss MacIntosh says. It was long one of the rarest birds in North America.
- “What dead king lies on the balcony at Elsinore?”: Hamlet’s father, whose ghost walks the platform at Elsinore (Hamlet 1.1). At the end Fortinbras orders the bodies “high on a stage be placed to the view” (5.2). See Shakespeare.
- “In what tower are the ravens the guardians of the dead?”: Ravens are kept at the Tower of London, and legend says that if they leave, the kingdom will fall.
- “What Greek city prided itself that it had no wall?”: Sparta. Lycurgus said, “That city is well fortified which has a wall of men instead of brick” (Plutarch, Life of Lycurgus 19). See the Chapter 20 resources.
- “Who gave a sop to Cerebus?”: Cerberus is the hound of Hades. A sop to Cerberus is an idiom meaning giving something to appease. Young spells it “Cerebus.” The Sibyl throws Cerberus a honeyed, drugged cake so that Aeneas can pass (Aeneid 6). See Greek Mythology.
- “Who was King Canute?”: King Canute was the king of England, Denmark, and Norway. He died in 1035, about forty years old. Henry of Huntingdon tells how he set his throne at the shore and commanded the tide to stop, to show his courtiers that the waves obey no king.
- “Where is New South Wales?”: New South Wales is a state on the east coast of Australia.
- “Where is my brother Richard?”: Miss MacIntosh’s red-haired brother. See Richard MacIntosh.
- “Where are the Easter Islands, the Barents Sea, the Sandwich group, Shackleton Shelf, Enderby Land, Keeling Islands?”: Easter Island is in the Pacific Ocean and belongs to Chile. See the Chapter 18 resources.
    - The Barents Sea is where temperate and cold waters meet off the coast of Norway and Russia. It is named for Willem Barentsz (1596).
    - Sandwich group may refer to a British Territory in the southern Atlantic Ocean. These are probably the South Sandwich Islands, named by Cook in 1775. Cook also named the Hawaiian islands the Sandwich Islands (1778).

    - The Shackleton Shelf is in East Antarctica. It was charted by Mawson's expedition (1912) and named for Shackleton.
    - Enderby Land is in Antarctica, discovered by John Biscoe in 1831.
    - The Keeling Islands are an Australian territory in the Indian Ocean. Darwin visited in 1836 and worked out his theory of coral atolls there.
- "Where is the angel of death?": May refer to Azrael, the angel of death in Islamic and later Jewish tradition. The hooded figure with a scythe comes from medieval European art. Jean Delville published the poem "Azraël" in his collection Les Horizons hantés (1892). It is about the Angel of Death appearing to King Solomon. In the poem, Azrael conjures the afterlife for Solomon. Delville's drawing L'Allégorie de l'Enfer, also called Azrael (c. 1890), goes with the poem (Wikimedia Commons). The passage evokes the tension between acceptance and fear, the known and the unknown, life and death, which permeates the narrative. The angel of death is not simply a figure to be found or confronted but a symbol of the profound mystery and inevitability that shapes human existence. Longfellow's "Azrael" (Tales of a Wayside Inn, 1873) also tells of King Solomon and the angel of death.
- "Where are the Antilles": The Antilles are an archipelago by the Caribbean Sea.
    - The Antipodes Islands are in the subantarctic waters near New Zealand.
- "Where is the Giants' Causeway?": The Giants' Causeway is an area of basalt columns in Northern Ireland. In legend, Finn McCool (Fingal) built it, and it is said to run under the sea to Fingal's Cave. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- "Where is the Golden Gate?": The Golden Gate is a strait that connects San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean.
- "Where is Brooklyn Bridge?": The Brooklyn Bridge is a hybrid cable-stayed/suspension bridge in New York City.
- "Where is the Grand Central Station?": Grand Central Terminal (1913), popularly Grand Central Station, is a commuter rail terminal in New York City.
- "Whose dog did not bark in the night?": May refer to a Sherlock Holmes story Silver Blaze, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, where the fact that a dog did not bark during the night when a race horse was removed from a stable was an important clue to solve the mystery of who removed the horse from the stable. Young said in an interview how much she loved murder mysteries, and she minored in criminology at Butler University (EBSCO Research Starters, "Marguerite Young"). It encapsulates a meditation on missed warnings, silent tragedies, and the profound isolation felt by characters like Vera and Miss MacIntosh as they navigate a world filled with unseen dangers and unspoken sorrows. See The Old Blind Sheep Dog.
- "when there are only two ninepins left, one at each outermost edge": A split. In tenpins, the 7-10 split, one pin at each back corner, is the hardest spare in bowling.
- "Had you been in the crowds at Parker's Arena on Parker's Island": Labor Day, the first Monday of September, became a federal holiday in 1894. No Parker's Arena of 1900 has been found.

- “the Sunday punch”: This is a powerful, devastating punch. See the Chapter 17 resources.
- “Who is the umpire whom all men despise?”: May refer to the umpire Bill Klem.
- “Who fought with John L. Sullivan, the victor until his last fight?”: John L. Sullivan was an American boxer who was the first heavyweight champion of gloved boxing. He was also the last heavyweight champion of bare-knuckle boxing and the first boxing superstar. (Wikipedia) James J. Corbett beat him in New Orleans in 1892.
- “Who was Hercules?”: Hercules is famous in Roman and Greek mythology for his strength and his numerous far-ranging adventures. See Greek Mythology.
- “the laws governing glove sports in the British Isles and in America”: The Queensberry rules (1867) were written by John Graham Chambers and published under the sponsorship of the Marquess of Queensberry. See the Chapter 17 resources.
- “What sport was named after the Earl of Derby?”: The Earls of Derby have given their name to a number of sporting events. The Epsom Derby, first run in 1780, was named for the 12th Earl.
- “Who ever saw one if he was in his senses?”: The meaning of the phrase is a pointed expression of rational disbelief in the supernatural or illusory visions that other characters might accept or experience.
- “Who ever saw the ghost of his father?”: Hamlet’s father’s ghost (Hamlet 1.1-1.5). See Shakespeare.
- “We are always the thing we see”: May refer to “We don’t see things as they are, we see things as we are,” which is commonly attributed to Anaïs Nin. The line appears in Nin’s Seduction of the Minotaur (1961), credited to the Talmud.
- “It takes more than clothes to make the man”: It means that a person’s character, personality, and true worth cannot be judged solely by their appearance or what they wear. A person’s inner qualities and actions are what truly define them, not just their outward appearance. This saying directly contradicts the proverb “clothes make the man.” Polonius: “the apparel oft proclaims the man” (Hamlet 1.3). See Shakespeare.
- “disturbing the even tenor of our days”: Gray: “They kept the noiseless tenor of their way” (Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard, 1751). It is a contemplative poem that meditates on the universality of death, particularly focusing on the lives and deaths of ordinary people buried in a rural churchyard.
- “Moody’s Bibles”: The hotel Bible of Chapter 19. See the Chapter 19 resources.
- “the old clam-digger had mistaken at first for a man”: The store window dummy Mr. Spitzer introduced to Catherine. See The Old Clam Digger and Joachim Spitzer.
- “an old Jew’s pawn shop under the sign of the three golden balls”: The three golden balls were the sign of a pawnbroker. They come from the arms of the Medici and the legend of St. Nicholas’s three bags of gold. Young’s “old Jew’s pawn shop” draws on an old antisemitic stereotype. Medieval Christian law barred Jews from most trades and left them moneylending, and then despised them for it. See Society, Class, and Race.

- “For many years now, she had never looked into a looking glass”: In Chapter 18 she “had never seen it herself except in a mirror.” See Mirrors and Reflections and the Chapter 18 resources.
- “Emperor Hadrian, indeed! Who stole the mosaics off his tomb?”: Hadrian’s tomb is the Castel Sant’Angelo in Rome, stripped of its marble over the centuries. His deathbed poem begins “Animula vagula blandula,” “little soul, wandering, charming.”
- “Mr. Chandelier, Mr. Res Tacamah”: Catherine’s companions, Mr. Res Tacamah “who was the drug bottle.” See Mr. Chandelier, Mr. Res Tacamah, The History of Opium, and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “She would rather sow the whirlwind and reap it”: “For they have sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind” (Hosea 8:7). See The Bible.
- “nothing was sadder than the wisdom which did not help the wise”: Tiresias: “Alas, how dreadful to have wisdom where it profits not the wise!” (Sophocles, Oedipus the King 316-317, translated by R. C. Jebb).
- “Baldness is no cure for sorrow”: Cicero tells the philosopher Bion’s joke about the king who tore out his hair in grief, “as though baldness were a cure for sorrow” (Tusculan Disputations 3.62). See Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “her old dollar watch which was given to her by her dead love”: The silver-dollar watch of Chapter 19. See Love and the Chapter 19 resources.
- “the inner man was all that counted”: “Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). See The Bible.
- “My mother saw everything but mistook everything she saw for something else”: What Vera describes resembles visual agnosia, a term Freud coined in On Aphasia (1891). See Catherine Cartwheel and Freud and Jung.
- “My mother’s mother’s blindness had been only physical”: The blind grandmother of Chapter 12. See Eyes and Blindness and the Chapter 12 resources.
- “What cared she for Issachar, Aaron, Absalom, Togarmah?”: The significance of these names is to situate the novel’s meditation on mortality, loss, and the passing of time within a biblical and mythic framework, underscoring the themes of decay and the search for meaning in the face of inevitable death. See Judaism.
    - Issachar: The Talmud argues that Issachar’s description in the Blessing of Jacob (“Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens: and he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute,” Genesis 49:14-15) is a reference to the religious scholarship of the tribe of Issachar, though scholars feel that it may more simply be a literal interpretation of Issachar’s name. (Wikipedia)
    - Aaron: The rabbis particularly praise the brotherly sentiment between Aaron and Moses. When Moses was appointed ruler and Aaron high priest, neither betrayed any jealousy; instead they rejoiced in each other’s greatness. When Moses at first declined to go to Pharaoh, saying: “O my Lord, send, I pray, by the hand of him whom you will send” (Exodus 4:13), he was unwilling to deprive Aaron of the high

position the latter had held for so many years; but the Lord reassured him, saying: “Behold, when he sees you, he will be glad in his heart” (Exodus 4:14). Indeed, Aaron was to find his reward, says Shimon bar Yochai; for that heart which had leaped with joy over his younger brother’s rise to glory greater than his was decorated with the Urim and Thummim, which were to “be upon Aaron’s heart when he goeth in before the Lord” (Exodus 28:30). Moses and Aaron met in gladness of heart, kissing each other as true brothers, and of them it is written: “Behold how good and how pleasant [it is] for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1) Of them it is said: “Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed [each other]” (Psalm 85:10); for Moses stood for righteousness and Aaron for peace. Again, mercy was personified in Aaron, according to Deuteronomy 33:8, and truth in Moses, according to Numbers 12:7 (Kaufmann Kohler, “Aaron,” Jewish Encyclopedia, 1906).

    - Absalom: “He was a prince who could have had almost anything. The only things he wanted were things he could not have… Wealth is not determined by possessions but by mindset. In his mind, Absalom was a pauper. He only looked at what he did not have.” (Wikipedia) Absalom had erected a monument near Jerusalem to perpetuate his name: “Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king’s dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom’s place” (2 Samuel 18:18). He wanted his father’s throne and led a revolt against David (2 Samuel 15-18). It was his half-brother Amnon who lusted after their sister Tamar, and Absalom killed Amnon for it (2 Samuel 13).
    - Togarmah “is a figure in the Generations of Noah in the Book of Genesis that represents the peoples known to the Hebrews. Togarmah is among the descendants of Japheth and is thought to represent some people located in Anatolia. Medieval sources claimed that Togarmah was the legendary ancestor of several ethnic groups in the Caucasus, including Armenians and Georgians” (Wikipedia, “Togarmah”). He was believed to have 10 sons.
- “What cared she for any translation of the Word of God and flatteries to earthly kings”: The King James Version of Chapter 21. See the Chapter 21 resources.
- “whose garments smelled of myrrh and aloes and cassia”: “All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces” (Psalm 45:8). Young adds “of the dead.” King Ahab built “the ivory house” (1 Kings 22:39). See The Bible.
- “or even the Baptists or even the Free Methodists”: The Free Methodist Church was founded in 1860. See American Religious Movements.

Vocabulary

Aberration

A departure from what is normal or expected.

Acanthus

A Mediterranean plant whose deeply cut leaves are carved as ornament, especially on Corinthian columns.

Aloes

A fragrant resin or wood used in perfume.

Antediluvian

Before the Flood; very old.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Balderdash

Nonsense.

Ballast

Heavy material, such as stones, carried low in a ship to keep it steady.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Bayberry

A shrub of the Atlantic coast whose waxy berries were boiled to make fragrant candles.

Bellwether

The lead sheep of a flock, which wears a bell.

Brusque

Abrupt and blunt in manner.

Burnished

Polished until shining.

Calker

Also caulker. A worker who seals the seams of a wooden ship to make it watertight.

Camisole

A woman’s light undergarment for the upper body. The text has “camesoles.”

Candelabra

A branched candlestick.

Cassia

A spice bark like cinnamon.

Castanets

Pairs of small wooden shells clicked together in the hand, as in Spanish dance.

Celluloid

An early plastic.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Chattels

Movable possessions.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Constitutional

A walk taken regularly for the sake of one’s health.

Corporeal

Having a body; physical.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Counterpane

A bedspread.

Curdled

Thickened into lumps, like soured milk.

Delusive

Misleading; giving a false impression.

Denuded

Stripped bare.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Discursive

Rambling from one subject to another.

Dope sheet

A racing sheet giving information and tips on the horses running.

Dory

A small flat-bottomed fishing boat.

Drouth

Drought.

Emissary

A messenger or agent.

Errant

Wandering; straying from the proper course.

Festering

Rotting and oozing; growing more corrupt.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Fly-specked

Spotted with the tiny marks left by flies.

Forecastle

The forward part of a ship below the deck, where the crew lived. Pronounced “FOHK-sul.”

Forelock

A lock of hair over the forehead.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Gelding

A castrated male horse.

Genealogy

A record of a family’s descent.

Goldeneye

A diving duck with bright yellow eyes, called a whistler for the sound of its wings.

Gregarious

Fond of company; sociable.

Griffin

A mythical beast with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.

Helm

The wheel or tiller that steers a ship.

Hock

The joint in the hind leg of a horse, between the knee and the fetlock.

Homespun

Simple and plain; originally, cloth spun at home.

Hulk

The body of an old ship; a big, clumsy person or thing.

Imploring

Begging earnestly.

Incorporeal

Without a body; not physical.

Inordinately

Excessively.

Invidious

Hateful; likely to cause resentment.

Jeremiad

A long, bitter lament.

Laconically

Using very few words.

Laggard

Slow; falling behind.

Larboard

The old word for the left side of a ship.

Leeward

On the side sheltered from the wind.

Leviathan

A sea monster in the Bible; anything huge.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Lucid

Clear; clear-headed.

Lunar month

The time from one new moon to the next, about 29.5 days.

Mackerel sky

A sky of rippled clouds like the markings of a mackerel.

Mackintosh

A raincoat of rubberized cloth, named for its inventor, Charles Macintosh.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Marcelled

Set in deep, regular waves with heated irons.

Mica

A mineral that splits into thin, shiny, nearly transparent sheets and makes rock glitter.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Monsoon

A seasonal wind in South Asia that brings months of heavy rain.

Morosely

Gloomily, sullenly.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Mundane

Ordinary; of this world.

Myrrh

A fragrant resin used in incense and embalming.

Neap tide

The tide with the smallest difference between high and low water, twice a month at the quarter moons.

Obsolescence

The process of going out of use.

Palings

Pointed wooden stakes, or a fence made of them.

Paraphernalia

Personal belongings or equipment.

Patrimonial

Inherited from one’s father.

Peaked

Thin and pale, as from illness.

Percale

A fine, closely woven cotton.

Phantasmal

Ghostly; like a phantom or an illusion.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Proximity

Nearness.

Quail

A small, plump ground bird hunted as game.

Rabbit punch

An illegal blow to the back of the neck.

Regatta

A series of boat races.

Seine

To fish with a large hanging net.

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard. Spar is also the name for certain shiny, easily split crystalline minerals, such as Iceland spar.

Spindrift

Spray blown from the tops of waves.

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Steeplechase

A horse race over fences, ditches, and water jumps, first run cross-country from one church steeple to another.

Stridently

Harshly and loudly.

Sunday punch

A boxer’s hardest, best blow.

Supernal

Heavenly.

Tallow

Animal fat used for candles and soap. Tallow-colored is a dull, yellowish white.

Tarpaulin

A heavy waterproof cloth for covering things.

Tenement

A crowded, run-down apartment building.

Tonnage

The size or carrying capacity of a ship.

Tumult

A loud, confused uproar.

Tumultuous

Loud, wild, and disorderly.

Tureen

A deep covered dish for serving soup.

Turnstone

A shorebird that turns over stones to find food.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Vainglorious

Excessively proud and boastful.

Visage

A person’s face or expression.

Voluminous

Large, full, or great in volume.

Weathercock

A weathervane shaped like a rooster; also, a person who changes with every wind.

Widow walk

A railed platform on a coastal roof, from which to watch for ships.

Woolgathering

Idle daydreaming.

Chapter 23

Summary

The breakfast continues. Miss MacIntosh denounces vain man, the Emperor Constantine, and Caesar, declares that history lies, and professes her faith in common sense and the middle way. Then she settles on Benjamin Franklin, whose experiments with lightning led to electric light and the end of privacy. Darkness, she argues, once protected marriage and the poor and the ugly. Vera realizes what the tirade is for: a woman who was just seen without her wig is arguing that no one should have to be seen. She talks of igloos and ice floes, of winter's blast, of anything but herself. The chapter ends with Miss MacIntosh quoting Job and crying that the stars have always lit the heavens.

Characters present

Miss MacIntosh · Vera Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Light and Darkness · Memory and the Past · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · Society, Class, and Race · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Lamps, Candles, and Light · Moon and Stars · Snow, Ice, and Winter

Philosophy: Aristotle · Descartes and Dualism · Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) · Epicureanism · Plato and Platonism · Stoicism · William James and Pragmatism

Allusions: American Writers · Dante · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a profound meditation on the futility and vanity of human aspirations, as expressed through Miss MacIntosh's reflections on Emperor Constantine and the "Slough of Despond." The metaphor of life as a marshland filled with brambles and weeds sets a somber tone about the human condition and the closing of the heart from within, emphasizing internal barriers to understanding or connection.
- This passage questions history and knowledge, asserting that "history lies, and geography is uncertain," underscoring the unreliability of accepted truths and the elusive nature of identity in modern times.

- Miss MacIntosh expresses a strong belief in common sense as the “middle brow,” the middle way, and the average life, asserting it as a rare and valuable quality. This passage reveals an internal tension between embracing ordinary life and the cosmic or remote issues that also preoccupy her.
- The comparison of dwarves dreaming they are giants and giants dreaming they are dwarves illustrates the relativity of perception and ambition, hinting at the complexity of human identity.
- One of the most extended and important passages is the critique of electric lights, attributed ironically to Benjamin Franklin, who paved “the way for electric lights” and thereby disrupted natural rhythms of day and night. Miss MacIntosh laments how electric illumination invades privacy, disturbs sleep, and ruins traditional human experiences such as marriage by exposing flaws that darkness once concealed.
- This passage deeply mourns the loss of darkness, which once provided refuge and mystery, and contrasts it with the artificial brightness that keeps us “up all night like Roman soldiers,” contributing to social ills like divorce and loneliness.
- The nostalgia for “bayberry candles” and natural starlight versus intrusive modern electric lights highlights a tension between technological progress and preservation of human dignity and natural order.
- Miss MacIntosh reflects on the role of darkness in protecting the sacredness and mystery of marriage, allowing spouses to be “modest” and sheltered from immediate judgment. The electric light, by exposing all, undermines this protective veil, leading to disillusionment and social problems.
- This meditation extends to a broader social commentary on how modern illumination disrupts traditional human relationships and perceptions.
- Miss MacIntosh’s practical, unadorned manner of dress and demeanor symbolize her serious approach to life, rejecting frivolity, dreams, and illusions. She lives fully in the present reality, “for no other life,” and is skeptical of sentimental or metaphysical distractions.
- This passage highlights her grounded nature and possibly her resistance or inability to engage with deeper or more cosmic concerns that transcend ordinary experience.
- Vera reflects on how Miss MacIntosh’s frequent evocations of cosmic phenomena (creation, tides, stars) serve to mask her own human limitations and inner absences. These grand themes conceal what she does not wish to reveal about herself.
- This passage suggests a tension between the vastness of universal mysteries and the intimate realities of human life.
- The chapter ends with a meditation on the coming of winter, the changing of seasons, and the narrowing spectrum of colors in the natural world, symbolizing transition, loss, and endurance. The imagery of crystalline snow, dimmed colors, and the “luminous colors of the winter sea” evokes both harshness and beauty in nature’s cycles.
- This passage metaphorically connects the natural world’s rhythms to human experience, emphasizing acceptance and preparation for inevitable change.

- The concluding words question why light should be given to those in misery and darkness, affirming the enduring value of natural starlight and rejecting artificial electric light. Miss MacIntosh's exclamation, "Electric lights, fiddlesticks! The stars have lighted the heavens from pole to pole," reaffirms a preference for natural order over human tampering.
- "These were dreams, impersonal and vast, and these did cover, as is said in gambling circles, her hand, for they did conceal her own limitations, the fact that there was something missing from the essential human, something she did not want me to see." This is where Vera sees what the talk is for.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "The heart, my dear, was locked from the inside." Whose heart?
- "How should I know what is true unless I know what is false?" How does Miss MacIntosh answer her own question?
- Why does she blame Franklin and Edison, of all people, this morning?

Characters

- "She would say that she snored, not that she loved." What is Vera beginning to understand?
- "Of herself, of herself alone, what had she ever said that was personal and sad and revelatory?" What has she said instead?
- She speaks of winter "now in the August sunlight." Why skip the autumn?

Connections

- Chapter 19's door was "barred from the inside." What else is locked from the inside here?
- She blamed Constantine for confusing the days (Chapter 22) and now blames Franklin for confusing the nights. What is she defending?
- "A man had married a man, and a woman had married a woman, and no one had been the wiser." How does that line speak to the night of Chapters 17 and 18?

Reflection

- Is there a right to be unseen?
- Does darkness protect love, or hide it?
- What do we talk about so that we don't have to talk about ourselves?

Research: Characters

Miss MacIntosh

- Miss MacIntosh is portrayed as fiercely grounded in what she calls “common sense,” valuing the “middle brow,” the “middle way,” and the “average life,” a disposition she prides herself on as her “greatest love,” even if others despise it.
- This common sense coexists with a pervasive skepticism toward accepted truths such as history, geography, and law, which she dismisses as unstable, uncertain, or outright falsehoods.
- She challenges grand narratives, like that of Caesar crossing the Rubicon or the veracity of historical figures, suggesting that time has neither accumulated nor taught wisdom.
- This skeptical realism reveals a character who questions the foundations of knowledge and human pretensions but does so without despair; rather, she seems to accept human limitations with a certain weary humor and irony.
- Miss MacIntosh’s discourse centers on her criticism of modern inventions, especially electric lights. She associates electricity, notably Benjamin Franklin’s experiments, as a disruptive force that has destroyed natural rhythms, privacy, and the quietness of night. She laments electric lights for erasing darkness, which she sees as essential for sleep, privacy, and even mystery in human relationships, particularly marriage. Electric lights, she argues, expose flaws and imperfections that were once safely hidden in darkness, thereby damaging marriages and social harmony.
- Her detailed critique extends to “electric trains,” “electric irons,” “fluorescent lamps,” and “two-way lighting systems” as unnatural intrusions into life’s natural order.
- This stance encapsulates her resistance to tampering with “old, damaged creation” and her preference for simpler, older ways such as “bayberry candles,” “snuffers,” and natural starlight. Her view is that the modern world’s brightness is a form of extravagant excess that impoverishes human experience and dignity.
- Miss MacIntosh’s practical nature is emphasized by descriptions of her appearance and habits. She dresses plainly, in worn, practical clothing: a grey baseball sweater with a ravelling sleeve, stout shoes, and a patched salt-and-pepper tweed coat.
- She carries her “rigging” everywhere, including an old black umbrella likened to a sail and a whale-boned ice-breaker corset, symbolizing her preparedness and no-nonsense approach to life on a “rough shore.”
- She rejects frivolities such as filmy dresses or adornments, even on significant occasions like weddings or funerals, signaling her seriousness and focus on the immediate, tangible world rather than on dreams or illusions.
- Despite her talk of cosmic and remote issues like glaciers, submerged continents, and the first days of creation, Miss MacIntosh reveals little of her personal emotions or vulnerabilities.

- She claims her consciousness ceases during sleep and that she cannot remember dreams, not even her own, suggesting a detachment from inner emotional life or a guardedness.
- Her conscience “kept guard” as a “lonely vigil,” indicating solitude and perhaps a self-imposed emotional isolation.
- She evades personal disclosures and remains impassive, almost austere, in her demeanor.
- This emotional reserve contrasts with the vastness of the cosmic themes she invokes, highlighting a tension between the grand and the personal.
- Miss MacIntosh’s reflections often shift from the mundane to the cosmic and from daily life and societal critiques to the “first starfish upon the first beach” and “the first moon drawing the first tide.” This oscillation suggests that she perceives human life as part of a vast, impersonal natural order that transcends immediate existence.
- She uses cosmic imagery to mask what she does not want to reveal: her fears, losses, or inner life.
- This duality makes her a somewhat enigmatic figure, connecting the earthly and the universal while remaining personally elusive.
- Miss MacIntosh’s thoughts about the coming winter, the colorlessness of the world under snow and ice, and the need to prepare with warm clothing and supplies reveal a keen awareness of mortality and the cycles of life.
- Winter symbolizes death or hardship, and her sober preparation indicates acceptance rather than fear. Yet, she also acknowledges the subtle beauty of winter’s muted colors, reflecting a nuanced appreciation of life’s phases and transitions.
- Her concern with time’s passing, the loss inherent in change, and the persistence of “dimmed colors” in hardship underscore a mature, grounded philosophy.
- Throughout her discourse, Miss MacIntosh repeatedly condemns human vanity, illusions of grandeur, and false hopes.
- She refers to “vain man” in multiple historical and contemporary contexts, from Emperor Constantine and Caesar to Benjamin Franklin, pointing out the futility of human pretensions to immortality or mastery.
- She warns against illusions, falsehoods that may mask other truths, and the human tendency to stumble blindly in the “broad daylight which God has lighted.”
- Her repeated invocation of vanity and illusion underscores a theme of human limitation and the importance of humility and realism.

Vera Cartwheel

- Notes that Miss MacIntosh never speaks personally or reveals sadness or revelation about herself.

- Senses that the grand themes Miss MacIntosh talks about serve to conceal her own limitations and personal absence.
- Wonders and questions Miss MacIntosh's answers.
- Realizes for the first time that Miss MacIntosh has not shared any personal history with her.
- Questions Miss MacIntosh's insistence on learning about the past and "common sense" and that it might all be false, imaginary, and not real.

Research: Themes

Illusion and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- Miss MacIntosh opens with a critique of "vain man" and the illusions that humans harbor, such as the belief in immortality or the certainty of history.
- She questions the reliability of history and geography, suggesting that what we accept as truth may be unstable or false.
- The idea that truth cannot be known without understanding falsehood is emphasized.

Common Sense and the Middle Way

See: Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- She values common sense and the "middle brow," the average life, as a guiding principle.
- Despite her philosophical musings on vast, cosmic issues, she prides herself on practicality and sensibility.

Critique of Modern Technology: Electric Lights

See: Light and Darkness

- A significant portion of the chapter is devoted to a critical view of electric lighting and its consequences.
- Miss MacIntosh blames Benjamin Franklin for pioneering electricity, which has disrupted natural cycles of day and night.
- Electric lights are portrayed as a destroyer of privacy, natural rhythms (sleep and work), and even marital harmony.
- She laments the loss of darkness, which she sees as essential for personal privacy and the natural order.
- The chapter contrasts the artificial glare of electric lights with the natural, gentle light of stars and candles used by ancestors.

Historical and Cultural Reflections

See: Memory and the Past · Society, Class, and Race

- References to historical figures such as Emperor Constantine, Benjamin Franklin, and President Garfield serve as symbols of human folly or misguided progress.
- The chapter also evokes images from ancient times and myths (e.g., Helen of Troy, Ulysses) to illustrate timeless human experiences affected by modern changes.

Human Relationships and Privacy

See: Isolation and Connection

- The darkness once allowed spouses to be ignorant of each other's full appearance or flaws, preserving marital bliss.
- Electric lighting exposes all imperfections, potentially leading to divorces and the breakdown of relationships.
- This theme extends to a broader loss of innocence and the protective veil of ignorance.

Nature and the Cosmic Order

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- The novel references natural phenomena such as glaciers, tides, northern stars, and the changing seasons.
- Miss MacIntosh's talk about ice floes, winter preparations, and the Arctic environment symbolizes the fragility and impermanence of existence.
- There is a tension between the cosmic, the remote, and the immediate, everyday life.

Mortality and the Passage of Time

See: Death and Mortality · Time

- The inevitability of winter and death is anticipated, reflecting on the cycles of life.
- Despite the harshness of winter, there is beauty in its muted colors and quiet persistence.
- The chapter ends with a meditation on light and darkness as metaphors for life, suffering, and divine presence.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Electric Lights

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light · Light and Darkness

- Symbolize modernity's intrusion into natural human rhythms and privacy.

Darkness and Light

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Represent privacy, natural order, sleep, and the divine versus exposure, artificiality, and disturbance.

Winter and Ice

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Metaphors for death, hardship, and the passage of time.

Stars and Natural Light

See: Moon and Stars · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Symbolize the eternal, natural order, and the divine presence.

Historical References

See: Memory and the Past

- Serve to question accepted narratives and human progress.

Research: Resources

- “a Slough of Despond this life is”: “The slough of Despond,” where Christian sinks under the weight of his sins in Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress (1678). Slough of Despond is an area in the book Pilgrim’s Progress that Miss MacIntosh reads more than the Bible. See the Chapter 3 resources.
- “The heart, my dear, was locked from the inside”: Madge and Homer argued about Josh being locked in the closet and dying at the beginning of the book (Chapter 7). Old Josh, the barkeeper, died in a coat closet that Madge insisted “was locked from the outside.” Miss MacIntosh’s heart is locked from the inside. See Madge Capehorn, Homer Capehorn, and the Chapter 7 resources.
- “great Caesar crossing the Rubicon”: The phrase “crossing the Rubicon” is an idiom that means “passing a point of no return.” Its meaning comes from an allusion to the crossing of the river Rubicon from the north by Julius Caesar in early January 49 BC. (Wikipedia) It symbolizes a critical turning point or a decisive act that cannot be undone.
- “Who knows that he crossed the Rubicon or that there was a Caesar?”: Richard Whately’s satire Historic Doubts Relative to Napoleon Buonaparte (1819) argued, with the same logic, that Napoleon could not be proved to have existed.
- “Ignorance of the law is no excuse”: The Roman maxim “ignorantia juris non excusat.”

- “We make mountains of molehills”: In print by 1548 (Nicholas Udall). See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “We stumble in the broad daylight which God has lighted”: “We stumble at noon day as in the night; we are in desolate places as dead men” (Isaiah 59:10), and “God said, Let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). It encapsulates a moment or idea of transcendence, an acknowledgment that even in the bleakest moments of human experience or the “darkness” of suffering and death there is a possibility of divine light or spiritual awakening. It is a poetic way of expressing hope, mystery, and the complex interplay of life and death that Vera contemplates. See The Bible.
- “these falsehoods which, though false, may be the face of another truth”: Even though something is demonstrably false, it can still hold a certain level of truth or reveal a deeper underlying reality, often by acting as a metaphor or symbolic representation of a complex idea, even if the literal details are inaccurate. This concept is often explored in art and literature where fictional narratives can convey profound truths about human nature or society.
- “Poor mortals all and blind as bats in a cave”: This may echo Plato’s prisoners of the cave, who take shadows for the real (Republic 7). See Plato and Platonism.
- “Deliver not my soul to a turtle or a crab”: “O deliver not the soul of thy turtledove unto the multitude of the wicked” (Psalm 74:19). Young turns the turtledove into a turtle. See The Bible.
- “Am I my brother’s keeper?”: Genesis 4:9. Miss MacIntosh asks what Mr. Spitzer might. It resonates with his struggle with his sense of duty, guilt, and responsibility for his brother’s legacy and the lives entangled in their shared history. It asks whether one is truly responsible for the fate, suffering, or salvation of another, particularly a close other like a brother, and by extension, for others in one’s life or society. See Genesis and Joachim Spitzer.
- “One can be an epicure”: Epicurus lived chiefly on bread and water: “Send me a little pot of cheese, that when I like I may fare sumptuously” (Diogenes Laertius 10.11). See Epicureanism.
- “One can enjoy too much one’s poverty, in fact, and make a great business of it”: Seneca warns against showy poverty, “a rough cloak, unkempt hair, a slovenly beard” (Letters to Lucilius 5). Seneca was a leading Roman Stoic. The school was founded by Zeno of Citium around 300 BC. Seneca’s works discuss both ethical theory and practical advice, and Seneca stresses that both parts are distinct but interdependent. Seneca regards philosophy as a balm for the wounds of life. The destructive passions, especially anger and grief, must be uprooted, or moderated according to reason. He discusses the relative merits of contemplative life and active life, and he considers it important to confront one’s own mortality and be able to face death. One must be willing to practice poverty and use wealth properly, and he writes about favours, clemency, the importance of friendship, and the need to benefit others. The universe is governed for the best by a rational providence, and this must be reconciled with acceptance of adversity. See Stoicism.

- “Dwarves may dream that they are giants”: Gulliver is a giant in Lilliput and a dwarf in Brobdingnag (Swift, Gulliver’s Travels, 1726).
- “What was so rare a thing as common sense”: Thomas Paine’s polemical pamphlet Common Sense (1776) has been described as the most influential political pamphlet of the 18th century, affecting both the American and French revolutions. Today, the concept of common sense, and how it should best be used, remains linked to many of the most perennial topics in epistemology and ethics, with special focus often directed at the philosophy of the modern social sciences. (Wikipedia) See Aristotle, Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume), Descartes and Dualism, and William James and Pragmatism.
    - The philosophy of common sense is a set of beliefs that challenge skepticism and subjective idealism. It’s based on the idea that there is a basic ability to perceive and judge that most people share. Aristotle first used the term, for the faculty that joins the five senses (On the Soul, Book 3). It was also followed by John Locke, Thomas Reid, and G. E. Moore. Basic tenets are sensations are more than just ideas or subjective impressions; beliefs are based on common sense and reason; people of all levels of education can use common sense; starting off on the wrong path can lead to absurdities.
    - Nous is a concept from classical philosophy, sometimes equated to intellect or intelligence, for the faculty of the human mind necessary for understanding what is true or real.
    - Thomas Reid wrote common sense works as such: If all men observe an item and believe the same qualities about that item, then the knowledge of that item is universally true. It is common knowledge, which without explanation is held true by other people; so, what is universally seen is universally believed. Charles Sanders Peirce later wrote (“Some Consequences of Four Incapacities,” 1868), “The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of a community, without definite limits, and capable of a definite increase of knowledge.” The combination of the same ideas, of a thing, by multiple people, is what confirms the reality of an object. Reid also believes that the philosophers of his time exaggerated what is truly real. Where most philosophers believe that what we see is not fully what that thing is, for example, Descartes, Reid counters this argument simply by stating that “such a hypothesis is no more likely to be true than the common-sensical belief that the world is much the way we perceive it to be.” (Wikipedia) Reid’s own book is An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense (1764).
- “the middle brow, the middle way”: “Middlebrow” was new in Young’s day. Russell Lynes’s “Highbrow, Lowbrow, Middlebrow” ran in Harper’s in 1949. The middle way is Aristotle’s mean, virtue as the middle between two extremes (Nicomachean Ethics 2.6). See Aristotle.

- “Vain man, Benjamin Franklin!”: Benjamin Franklin’s philosophy was practical, optimistic, and focused on self-improvement. He believed that a republic could only succeed if its people were virtuous and had the right temper: “only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become corrupt and vicious, they have more need of masters” (letter to the Abbés Chalut and Arnoux, April 17, 1787). His ideas included: practicality, through hard work and self-discipline and improving their character through effort and self-control; optimism, as a supporter of the Enlightenment and the power of reason and scientific discovery people could improve their lives through education, community service, and virtuous living; self-improvement, people could improve their character through effort and self-control and that people should strive to live virtuous and purposeful lives; political philosophy, the importance of freedom of the press, religion, education, pragmatism, and the republic would flourish if the freedoms were secured by the US Constitution combined with wisdom and virtue. His lightning rod (1752) drew the heavens’ fire down a wire into the ground. See American Writers.
- “old President Garfield had seen well enough without them”: Garfield is mentioned in the context of a “time” when people saw well enough without electric lights, implying that even a prominent historical figure like Garfield did not require such artificial illumination to live effectively or happily. The White House was wired for electricity in 1891, under Benjamin Harrison, ten years after Garfield died of an assassin’s bullet.
- “Even Skid Row”: The name comes from Seattle’s Skid Road (1850s), where logs were skidded down to the mill. It came to mean the poor quarter of any city.
- “About the only advantage is midnight baseball”: The first major league night game was played in Cincinnati on May 24, 1935. President Roosevelt pressed a button in Washington to turn on the lights.
- “it was he who had written that early to bed makes us wise”: “Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise” (Poor Richard, 1735), as in Chapter 15. See American Writers and the Chapter 15 resources.
    - While Benjamin Franklin is often mistakenly credited with inventing daylight saving time, he actually penned a satirical essay in 1784 suggesting Parisians wake up earlier to save on candles, not proposing a change to clocks. In 1784, while serving as an American envoy in Paris, Franklin wrote a satirical essay titled “An Economical Project” published in the Journal de Paris. The essay suggested that Parisians could save money on candles and lamp oil by waking up earlier and making the most of the natural daylight. Franklin’s proposal was about changing sleep schedules, not changing the time on clocks, which is what modern daylight saving time involves. Because of this essay, Franklin is often mistakenly credited with inventing daylight saving time, but he was only suggesting a change in sleep habits, not the time itself (Franklin Institute, “Did Ben Franklin Invent Daylight Saving Time?”). The modern concept of daylight saving time, which involves changing clocks, originated later, with some attributing the idea to George Hudson, an entomologist from New Zealand, in 1895. The concept of daylight saving time gained traction during World War I as a way to conserve energy, and it was formally adopted in the US in 1918.

- “had always brought gold in their mouths”: The German proverb “Morgenstunde hat Gold im Munde,” “the morning hour has gold in its mouth.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “Bayberry candles were good enough for our fathers to see by”: The bayberry custom is to burn a candle on Christmas Eve or New Year’s Eve to bring good luck, wealth, and health. It is said to have originated in Colonial America. “A bayberry candle burned to the socket brings food to the larder and gold to the pocket.” See the Chapter 15 resources.
- “Was Helen of Troy ever disturbed by electric lights”: Helen of Troy in Greek mythology was said to be the most beautiful woman in the world. “Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?” (Marlowe, Doctor Faustus, 1604). Young makes it “caused a thousand ships to sail.” See Greek Mythology.
- “Ulysses, if ever he had seen Penelope under electric lights”: Ulysses is the Roman name for Odysseus, a hero in ancient Greek literature. Penelope is the wife of Ulysses and is an example of a faithful wife because she waits for her husband to return and tricks suitors who wish to marry her. Penelope wove a shroud by day and unwove it by night to put off her suitors (Odyssey 2). See Homer’s Epics.
- “of marriage, the sacred union”: Women’s rights in the US were restricted during marriage: married women were legally subordinate to their husbands; they could not own property, keep their own wages, or enter into contracts; they had no rights to their children. Under coverture, “the husband and wife are one person in law” (Blackstone, 1765). New York’s Married Women’s Property Act came in 1848. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “an ugly woman was safe in her husband’s arms”: Only women are called ugly, because the feminine beauty ideal in every country holds that beauty is a woman’s most important asset. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “all these dreadful fluorescent lamps”: Fluorescent lamps went on sale in 1938 and were shown at the New York World’s Fair of 1939, which helps date this breakfast.
- “What business had he flying a kite”: Franklin’s kite experiment of June 1752 showed that lightning is electricity. See American Writers.
- “to meddle and tamper with creation the way God left it last Saturday”: Miss MacIntosh’s creation week of Chapter 22, when God “had stopped” on Saturday. See the Chapter 22 resources.
- “The wisest men are never married”: Most philosophers were in fact childless and/or never married. They did not have progeny or like Descartes, had an infant that died. To the current day philosophers are 75% men and 25% women.
    - There are women philosophers who have made significant contributions to the field: Gargi Vachaknavi, who questions the sage Yajnavalkya in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad (3.6 and 3.8); Ban Zhao, author of Lessons for Women (c. 106 CE); Hypatia of Alexandria (d. 415); Mary Wollstonecraft (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 1792); Simone de Beauvoir (The Second Sex, 1949); Hannah Arendt (The

Human Condition, 1958); and G. E. M. Anscombe (Intention, 1957). They represent a wide range of eras and philosophical fields, from ancient Greece to modern philosophy, covering topics like politics, ethics, and metaphysics.

- “A fine thing, she would say to Thomas Edison”: In the US there was a serious debate about which to use, AC or DC current, and that may be what is referred to in the novel. The war of the currents was a series of events surrounding the introduction of competing electric power transmission systems in the late 1880s and early 1890s. It grew out of two lighting systems developed in the late 1870s and early 1880s: arc lamp street lighting running on high-voltage alternating current (AC), and large-scale low-voltage direct current (DC) indoor incandescent lighting being marketed by Thomas Edison’s company. In 1886, the Edison system was faced with new competition: an alternating current system initially introduced by George Westinghouse’s company that used transformers to step down from a high voltage so AC could be used for indoor lighting. Using high voltage allowed an AC system to transmit power over longer distances from more efficient large central generating stations. As the use of AC spread rapidly with other companies deploying their own systems, the Edison Electric Light Company claimed in early 1888 that high voltages used in an alternating current system were hazardous, and that the design was inferior to, and infringed on the patents behind, their direct current system. In the spring of 1888, a media furor arose over electrical fatalities caused by pole-mounted high-voltage AC lines, attributed to the greed and callousness of the arc lighting companies that operated them. In June of that year Harold P. Brown, a New York electrical engineer, claimed the AC-based lighting companies were putting the public at risk using high-voltage systems installed in a slipshod manner. Brown also claimed that alternating current was more dangerous than direct current and tried to prove this by publicly killing animals with both currents, with technical assistance from Edison Electric. The Edison company and Brown colluded further in their parallel goals to limit the use of AC with attempts to push through legislation to severely limit AC installations and voltages. Both also colluded with Westinghouse’s chief AC rival, the Thomson-Houston Electric Company, to make sure the first electric chair was powered by a Westinghouse AC generator. By the early 1890s, the war was winding down. Further deaths caused by AC lines in New York City forced electric companies to fix safety problems. Thomas Edison no longer controlled Edison Electric, and subsidiary companies were beginning to add AC to the systems they were building. Mergers reduced competition between companies, including the merger of Edison Electric with their largest competitor, Thomson-Houston, forming General Electric in 1892. Edison Electric’s merger with their chief alternating current rival brought an end to the war of the currents and created a new company that now controlled three quarters of the US electrical business. Westinghouse won the bid to supply electrical power for the World’s Columbian Exposition in 1893 and won the major part of the contract to build Niagara Falls hydroelectric project later that year (partially splitting the contract with General Electric) (Wikipedia, “War of the currents”).
- “keeping us up all night like Roman soldiers”: The Roman army divided the night into four watches.

- “a man had married a man, and a woman had married a woman, and no one had been the wiser”: Womanless marriages were staged as community events and fundraisers. It is a “most unique and attractive entertainment,” the Houston Post reported on May 27, 1917. “Some of the most prominent men in the city will be in it. It is filled with fun from beginning to end and every city or town in which it has been given there have been record breaking audiences, even standing room being at a premium.” In nineteenth-century New England, two women living together as a couple were said to be in a “Boston marriage.” See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “is Baffin Bay?”: Baffin Bay is located between Baffin Island and the west coast of Greenland. It is named for William Baffin, who charted it in 1616. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “It’s always well”: An igloo (Inuktitut iglu, “house”) is built of snow blocks. See Exploration and the Poles and Snow, Ice, and Winter.
- “a new broom sweeps clean”: John Heywood’s proverb (1546). See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “fourteen tall white candles”: The candles of Vera’s fourteenth birthday. See the Chapter 9 resources.
- “where the dead souls wandered like flames”: This may recall Dante’s flames, each wrapping a soul, among them Ulysses (Inferno 26). See Dante.
- “the latitude and longitude in which may be located the Austral Islands, ice-locked Baffin Bay or the Magnetic Pole”: The Austral Islands are in French Polynesia. James Clark Ross reached the North Magnetic Pole in 1831. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “dancing like mad dervishes”: The Mevlevi, the whirling dervishes of Turkey, pray by turning.
- “in the August sunlight”: A clue to the time of these events: August.
- “no Indian summer like the Indian summer of the human soul”: “Indian summer,” a warm spell after the first frost, is an American phrase, in print by 1778.
- “no time for the migrations of passenger birds”: The passenger pigeon, once counted in billions, died out with Martha, the last of them, in 1914.
- “winter wore its coat of many colors”: Joseph’s “coat of many colours” (Genesis 37:3). See Genesis.
- “be given to a man who is in misery and whose way is darkness and whom God hath hedged in”: “Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery” and “Why is light given to a man whose way is hid, and whom God hath hedged in?” (Job 3:20, 23). See The Book of Job.
    - The last paragraph may refer to the time Miss MacIntosh worked in a house for the blind.

Vocabulary

Aberration

A departure from what is normal or expected.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Bayberry

A shrub of the Atlantic coast whose waxy berries were boiled to make fragrant candles.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Crystalline

Clear and sparkling, like crystal.

Cuttlefish

A sea creature related to the squid that can change color and squirt ink.

Dervish

A member of a Sufi order known for whirling in worship.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Epicure

One who takes refined pleasure in food and drink.

Festering

Rotting and oozing; growing more corrupt.

Fluorescent

Giving off light through a glowing gas in a tube.

Fuliginous

Sooty; dusky.

Glow-worm

A beetle whose wingless female and larvae give off a greenish light.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Igloo

An Inuit house built of snow blocks.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Lugubrious

Mournful; gloomy.

Mauve

A pale purple.

Middlebrow

Of conventional, middling taste.

Monsoon

A seasonal wind in South Asia that brings months of heavy rain.

Mossback

An old-fashioned person; literally, an old turtle with moss on its back.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Phantasmagoric

Like a phantasmagoria, a shifting series of dreamlike or nightmarish images. A phantasmagoria was an eighteenth-century magic-lantern ghost show.

Precipitous

Very steep; headlong.

Rubicon

A small river in northern Italy. Julius Caesar crossed it with his army in 49 BC, starting a civil war, so “crossing the Rubicon” means passing a point of no return. See Crossing the Rubicon (Ch 23).

Salt-and-pepper

Of cloth or hair: flecked with black and white.

Snuffers

A scissor-like tool for trimming or putting out a candle.

Spruce

An evergreen tree of northern forests.

Tarpaulin

A heavy waterproof cloth for covering things.

Transcended

Went beyond.

Tweed

A rough woolen cloth, often of mixed colors, first woven in Scotland.

Vainglorious

Excessively proud and boastful.

Vigil

A period of staying awake to keep watch, especially at the bedside of someone sick or dying.

Whalebone

Baleen, the flexible plates from the mouths of certain whales, once used to stiffen corsets.

Chapter 24

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Vera's thoughts move through the household. The servants have absorbed Catherine's dreams so completely that they argue whether it is Roman in the morning and Greek in the afternoon, and assign rooms to famous phantom guests. Catherine plans her own funeral, calls Athens on a telephone wired only to the servants' quarters, and tries to reach Cousin Hannah on a number long disconnected. Mr. Spitzer will come again in the evening with his vague certainties about heaven. The servants see the black coachman and the white horses, an old valet waits on Wellington, and a gardener believes he is Potiphar's wife. Mr. Spitzer, in Catherine's eyes, is a roundhouse for trains that run no more, a ghost ship with the captain's table set for two. Vera asks herself to whom she can turn with her questions about love, marriage, birth, and death, and finds no one.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Miss MacIntosh · Joachim Spitzer · Vera Cartwheel · Cousin Hannah · The Black Coachman

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Madness and Sanity · Music, Sound, and Silence · Society, Class, and Race · Time

Symbols: Horses and Carriages · Moon and Stars · Roses and Flowers

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Plato and Platonism · Spinoza

Allusions: Astronomy · Exploration and the Poles · Genesis · Music and Composers · Napoleon and Wellington · Shakespeare · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- The servants in the household are described as deeply immersed in the dream-like atmosphere created by Vera's mother. They engage in elaborate fantasies, imagining themselves serving imaginary guests: historic figures, fictional personages, and legendary characters. This passage illustrates how the servants reflect and perpetuate Catherine's opium-induced dreams, blurring the line between reality and illusion. For example, the old valet believes he serves Wellington, and the gardener imagines himself the spouse of Potiphar, while the Irish housemaid speaks only to herself to

avoid confusion. The servants' acceptance of this unreal environment underscores the theme of escapism and how the household is trapped in a timeless, surreal bubble.

- The descriptions of the house being filled with imaginary guests sleeping "tier above tier" according to rank and station, the lighting of fires for guests who will never arrive, and the arrangement of Renaissance chairs for intimate conversation depict a grand but empty social world. This passage powerfully conveys Catherine's craving for social connection and grandeur, yet it is all sustained by illusion. The "mad lady retouching her make-up" and the drunken second butler stumbling over her train amplify the eerie, ghostly quality of the household's existence.
- Catherine is obsessed with planning her own funeral and other grand events involving the dead returning to life, a motif that symbolically represents her preoccupation with mortality and the afterlife. Her social secretaries, invitations to ambassadors of Heaven and Hell, and the presence of fashionable dogs highlight her attempt to impose order and meaning on a world that is inherently chaotic and illusory. This passage reveals her complex psychology of wanting to be in control, her detachment from reality, and her engagement with the fantastic.
- Catherine's attempts to communicate by telephone with historical figures, relatives, and distant acquaintances only bring frustration and confusion. She calls Athens but reaches Rome, leaves messages for Emperor Hadrian who is never there, and receives only "a cackle of old hen voices" when calling Boston. The telephone is later revealed to be connected only to the servants' quarters, emphasizing the isolation and breakdown of real connection. This passage poignantly illustrates Catherine's alienation and the futility of her attempts to reach beyond her own dream-world.
- Mr. Spitzer, described as a "roundhouse of the trains which run no more" and a "ghost ship with broken mainmasts," symbolizes the unreliability and futility of seeking certainty or solace in Catherine's world. He is a poor companion to her "eternal illness," representing the failure of rationality or conventional comfort in the face of her decaying mental state. His presence contrasts with Vera's desire for answers about life, love, and death, highlighting the gap between illusion and reality.
- The chapter ends with Vera contemplating to whom she might turn for answers or to profound personal questions. This passage captures the existential uncertainty and search for meaning that underpin the narrative, emphasizing that even amidst the surreal, Vera seeks some grounding or truth.
- "My mother herself might be, of course, the only genuine unbeliever, as everyone recognized, for she was very clever. My mother placed her faith only in the unreal."

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "Just to hear the servants talk, anyone might have thought they were all real… especially when they were unreal." What does Vera mean by "especially"?

- Catherine's telephone "was connected only with the servants' quarters." Who answers her?
- "How else should they keep their jobs?" What do the servants gain by believing?

Characters

- Catherine is "the only genuine unbeliever." How can the dreamer be the one who doesn't believe?
- Mr. Spitzer is "a ghost ship… the captain's table set for two, none aboard." What does Catherine see in him?
- Vera sets Miss MacIntosh, "coarse-grained and ruddy," against Catherine's illusions, yet still asks, "To whom should I have turned"? Why not to her?

Connections

- The empty ship of Chapter 22 had "the captain's table still set for two or three or four." Why does the image return here?
- In Chapter 14, Catherine said the white horses were her will and the coachman her conscience. What are the servants seeing?
- Catherine calls the Bishop of Hippo and Hadrian, and Miss MacIntosh scolded Hadrian and Constantine (Chapter 22). What do the two women share?

Reflection

- Can a household share a dream?
- What does it cost to keep one's job by believing?
- To whom do we turn with the questions that matter most?

Research: Characters

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera's mother)

- Central figure, caught in opium dreams, presiding over an imaginary world filled with historical, mythological, and invented guests.
- She is fully immersed in her visionary, dream-like state, discussing grand affairs and social invitations as if real.
- She is aware of her illusionary world but maintains a clever detachment, placing faith only in the unreal.
- Her attempts to reach historical or imaginary figures and the failure of these calls reveal her isolation and the limits of her dream world.

Miss MacIntosh

- Practical, grounded, and coarse-grained, she offers contrast to Catherine and the servants' fantastical world.
- She is a companion to Vera and represents the voice of reality amidst chaos.

The Servants

- Immersed in Catherine's dreams, they adopt roles and beliefs reflecting the surreal environment.
- Some believe they serve historical figures (e.g., Wellington), others think they live in impossible settings (a forest of cuckoo clocks).
- They maintain the household's illusion by preparing for imaginary guests and engaging in conversations about impossible events.
- The servants' conversation about imaginary guests and their roles within the dream world encapsulates the blending of fantasy and reality.

Mr. Spitzer

- A mysterious and somewhat unsatisfactory companion to Catherine, embodying confusion and lost memories.
- He represents uncertainty about earthly matters while espousing nebulous spiritual certainties about an ultimate Heaven.
- His characterization as uncertain, evasive, and disconnected from his own memories contrasts with Catherine's intense visionary life, highlighting themes of memory and reality.

Research: Themes

Reality versus Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality

- The chapter immerses the reader in a world where the boundaries between real and imaginary are fluid. Catherine's opium dreams populate the house with imaginary guests, servants who believe in elaborate fantasies, and environments that shift unpredictably.
- The servants interact with these illusions as if real, discussing imaginary dignitaries, polishing imaginary shoes, and setting places for guests who never arrive. This highlights how illusion can become a shared reality in certain states of mind.

Madness and Sanity

See: Madness and Sanity

- The novel delves into how prolonged exposure to Catherine’s dreams affects the servants, leading some to lose their grip on reality and adopt bizarre identities or behaviors (e.g., thinking they serve Wellington or living among cuckoo clocks).
- This theme raises questions about the fragile line between sanity and madness in a closed, surreal environment.

Time and Space Distortion

See: Time

- The house is timeless and spaceless in a conventional sense, populated by figures from different centuries, places, and mythologies simultaneously.
- Imaginary guests from various epochs co-exist, and the servants debate the time of day as Roman or Greek, reflecting a dislocation from normal temporal experience.

Isolation and Communication

See: Isolation and Connection · Music, Sound, and Silence

- Catherine attempts to communicate with distant or deceased figures through a telephone that only connects to the servants’ quarters, symbolizing her isolation and failed attempts at meaningful contact.
- This motif underscores the theme of disconnection between Catherine’s inner world and external reality.

Death and the Afterlife

See: Death and Mortality

- Catherine’s dreams include discussions about her own funeral rites and arrangements for the dead returning to life, blending death with ongoing social rituals.
- The presence of flowers associated with death and the continual reference to the “dead horses” and “black coachman” suggest a liminal space between life and death.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Imaginary Guests

See: Illusion and Reality

- Imaginary guests and historical figures represent the blending of past, present, and fantasy, showing how Catherine’s mind holds vast, impossible histories simultaneously.

Black and White Horses and Coachman

See: Horses and Carriages · The Black Coachman

- Black and white horses and coachman symbolize the passage between realms, possibly life and death, or reality and illusion. Earlier (Chapter 14) Catherine said the white horses were her will and the coachman was her conscience.

The Telephone

See: Isolation and Connection

- The telephone is a device meant for communication but only connecting to servants' quarters, symbolizing failed outreach and isolation.

Bronze Chrysanthemums

See: Death and Mortality

- Bronze chrysanthemums are flowers for the dead, symbolizing mourning and death's persistent presence.

Cuckoo Clocks and Elephants

See: Time

- Cuckoo clocks and elephants represent distorted time and impossible realities within the servants' transformed perceptions.

Snow Crystals and Halos

See: Moon and Stars

- Snow crystals and halos are visual symbols of the dreamlike, kaleidoscopic nature of Catherine's world, with multiple suns, moons, and shapes reinforcing the surreal atmosphere.

Research: Resources

- "the servants in the servants' quarters": In the 1800s, servants were an essential part of households, performing a variety of tasks, including cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. They were often treated poorly, with low wages and long hours. In the early 1900s, servants worked in large households of wealthy families, performing a variety of tasks. They were expected to follow strict rules and hierarchies, and had little personal freedom. In Chicago, domestic work meant "long hours, low status, lack of freedom, and close supervision"; a reporter working undercover in 1901 toiled 15 hours a day for $2.75 a week plus room and board. By the late 1800s the work fell increasingly to Irish, German, Scandinavian, and Polish women, and in 1900 Black women, 4 percent of the city's wage-earning women, were 30 percent of its domestic workers (Encyclopedia of Chicago).
- "the life-sized chessmen moving across parterres of black and white": Alice becomes a pawn on a living chessboard in Lewis Carroll's Through the Looking-Glass (1871).

- “old Beau Brummells coming to life in a crystal ballroom”: Beau Brummell (1778-1840) is a Regency Era figure who later became associated as a dandy, with fashion, and anything of good quality.
- “one who had discovered a new planet, one who believed he dwelled on Uranus”: William Herschel discovered Uranus in 1781, the first planet found with a telescope. See Astronomy.
- “Some had seen the black coachman”: The coachman and the white horses of Chapter 14. See The Black Coachman, Horses and Carriages, and the Chapter 14 resources.
- “my mother’s opium dreams”: Before 1900, the typical opiate addict in America was an upper-class or middle-class white woman. As long as the opium user was a sick old lady there was no push to punish users. See The History of Opium.
- “seemed to think that he was waiting on Wellington”: Duke of Wellington was a leading figure in 19th-century Britain, victor over Napoleon at Waterloo (1815). See Napoleon and Wellington.
- “he lived in a forest of cuckoo clocks”: The cuckoo clock came from the Black Forest of Germany in the eighteenth century. See Time.
- “Hannibal driving the elephants over the Alps”: Hannibal of Carthage crossed the Alps with his army and elephants in 218 BC to invade Italy.
- “Admiral Peary was to be put into the blue room”: Admiral Robert Peary. See Exploration and the Poles and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “which was already occupied by Plato’s boat”: Plato’s boat might refer to the Ship of State by Plato (Republic, Book 6). It is a metaphor comparing governing a city-state to being the captain of a ship and only philosopher kings should rule. See Plato and Platonism.
- “Sir Christopher Wren and Jenny Lind were to be put into the rose”: Sir Christopher Wren was a highly acclaimed English architect, astronomer, and mathematician, the builder of St Paul’s Cathedral (1675-1710). Jenny Lind, “the Swedish Nightingale,” was a Swedish opera singer of the 19th century who toured America for P. T. Barnum in 1850-52. See Music and Composers.
- “Spinoza and Shakespeare and Mrs. Sydington were already in the green”: Spinoza was a Dutch philosopher, author of the Ethics (1677). Shakespeare was a famous British playwright. See Spinoza and Shakespeare.
- “Or was she a unicorn wearing a necklace?”: In the Lady and the Unicorn tapestries (c. 1500), the lady lays her necklace in a casket beneath the words “À mon seul désir.”
- “believed he was the spouse to Potiphar, the Egyptian captain”: Potiphar’s wife tried to seduce Joseph and then accused him (Genesis 39). The gardener believes he is the wife. See Genesis.
- “the bronze-colored chrysanthemums which are the flowers for the dead”: In France and Italy, chrysanthemums are laid on graves on All Saints’ Day. See Death and Mortality and Roses and Flowers.

- “a sea change, a transformation”: “Nothing of him that doth fade, / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange” (The Tempest 1.2). See Shakespeare.
- “Some were lions with wings”: The winged lion of St. Mark, as in Chapter 16. See the Chapter 16 resources.
- “many mock suns and moons”: Sun dogs (parhelia) and moon dogs are bright spots beside the sun or moon, made by light bending through ice crystals, often on a halo. See Astronomy.
- “The horizontal lady”: Catherine’s name for herself in Chapter 19. See Catherine Cartwheel and the Chapter 19 resources.
- “some antiquated copy of the Boston or Philadelphia telephone directory… circa 1905”: The first telephone directory, a single card of fifty names, was printed in New Haven in 1878.
- “She had called the Bishop of Hippo”: Bishop of Hippo is Saint Augustine who was also a theologian and philosopher. See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “She had left her messages for the Emperor Hadrian”: Emperor Hadrian was a Roman emperor from 117 to 138. See the Chapter 22 resources.
- “King Canute had gone on a long voyage”: King Canute or Cnut the Great was King of England, Denmark, and Norway. See the Chapter 22 resources.
- “How did it happen she never found the Lowells or the Saltonstalls at home”: The Boston Brahmins: “And this is good old Boston, / The home of the bean and the cod, / Where the Lowells talk only to Cabots, / And the Cabots talk only to God” (John Collins Bossidy, 1910).
- “Why had Cousin Hannah never called”: Cousin Hannah. See Cousin Hannah.
- “The Duchess of Spode had gone to a watering place”: The Duchess of Spode may refer to an English brand of pottery: Josiah Spode’s works at Stoke-on-Trent, founded in 1770.
- “she should send her gold-turbaned blackamoor”: “Blackamoor” figures, carved and gilded Black servants in turbans, were a fashion of European decorative art. They turned enslaved people into ornaments. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “Mr. Spitzer was a roundhouse of the trains which run no more”: In Dickens’s “The Signal-Man” (1866), a railway signalman is haunted by a ghost and a red danger light before a fatal crash, which fits Young’s “the red where there should be the green.” See Joachim Spitzer.
- “a ghost ship with broken mainmasts and torn sails, the captain’s table set for two, none aboard”: The Mary Celeste was found adrift and abandoned in 1872, her crew gone. The empty ship of Chapter 22 had its table set “for two or three or four.” See the Chapter 22 resources.

Vocabulary

Blackamoor

An old term for a Black African or any dark-skinned person, common in European art and in decorative figures of Black servants. It is now considered offensive.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Certitude

Certainty.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Chimera

A monster of Greek myth, part lion, part goat, part serpent; any wild, impossible fancy.

Comme il faut

French for “as it should be”; proper, correct.

Concatenation

A linked series.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Cormorant

A large black diving seabird.

Emir

A commander or prince in the Islamic world.

Emissary

A messenger or agent.

Euphemistic

Using a mild word in place of a harsh one.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Obsequies

Funeral rites.

Parterre

An ornamental garden of flower beds laid out in a pattern. A parterred floor is inlaid in patterned sections.

Porte-cochere

A covered entrance where a carriage stops to let passengers out.

Roundhouse

A circular building for storing and turning locomotives.

Taffeta

A crisp, shiny silk.

Trackwalker

A railway worker who walks the line to inspect it.

Chapter 25

Content note: *This chapter dwells on suicide: Mr. Spitzer broods over his twin brother Peron's suicide and calls himself "the hesitant suicide" who lives on as a living death. Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Vera considers Mr. Spitzer, whom Catherine accuses of being dead, or of being his own dead brother. Joachim, the twin born first, has lived on as "this perpetual and unconsummated suicide," thinking his dead brother's thoughts. We learn how Peron died. He fell through a fourteenth-floor window, perhaps by suicide, perhaps mistaking the window for a door. Joachim himself once walked through a glass wall in another lawyer's office without noticing, and his valet later found glass behind his ears. Bills for the wall followed. When Joachim finally tried to collect damages for his discomfort, a clerk told him that Mr. Spitzer had died several years ago.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel · Vera Cartwheel · The Black Coachman · Mr. Chandelier · The Old Clam-Digger

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Duality and Doubles · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence

Symbols: Keys, Doors, and Locks · Mirrors and Reflections · Music and Instruments · Pregnancy, Birth, and Children · Roses and Flowers · Silence and Deafness · The House · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Buddhism · Existentialism · Hinduism · Nietzsche · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres · Schopenhauer · Stoicism

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · Astronomy · Ecclesiastes · Greek Mythology · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter immediately introduces Mr. Spitzer through Vera's perspective, but filtered through Catherine's eyes. He is described as "useless as regret," having missed much of life but content with it. The most striking aspect presented is Catherine's conviction

that he is already dead, buried, or married to the worm or his brother. His living flesh does not convince her; she sees him as a “dead brother” and a “pale version of himself.” This passage is crucial because it establishes the central theme of the blurred line between life and death, particularly concerning Mr. Spitzer’s identity. It also highlights Catherine’s unique, perhaps delusional or enchanted, perception of reality, setting the stage for the surreal atmosphere of their interactions. Her ability to see beyond his physical presence, even if seemingly inaccurate, is presented as a form of “omniscience.”

- The description of Mr. Spitzer’s appearance and behavior reinforces Catherine’s perception of his unreality or partial presence. He wears a “white tuberose or the white carnation” or perhaps just a “door knob” on his lapel, suggesting the ambiguity of his form or Catherine’s perception of it. His “inane apology,” “vapid face,” and habit of “only half listening” and “only half seeing” by closing one eye contribute to the sense of his being only partially present or engaged with the living world. This passage is important because it provides details that embody the abstract idea of his state of being. His actions, like blotting out half his vision and hearing “perhaps to please her,” suggest a passive resignation or even an attempt to conform to her reality.
- The chapter contrasts Mr. Spitzer’s partial state with Catherine’s heightened, albeit unusual, perception. Her “omniscience, though he was dead, was only half of hers, for she was both living and dead, and she could see everything and much more besides.” She is described as an “excellent judge of reality, that which was so unreal, an infinitesimal particle.” This passage is vital for understanding the dynamic between the two characters and the narrative’s exploration of reality and illusion. Catherine isn’t just mistaken; her perception is presented as a different, perhaps deeper, form of knowing, one that encompasses both life and death and sees the unreality inherent in reality itself. Her ability to perceive Mr. Spitzer as “not the Mr. Spitzer she saw” but a “ghostly person” underscores her unique perspective and his ambiguous status.
- Despite Catherine’s fantastical claims (tables being coffins of stars, chairs set above a sea of clouds, bumble bees in the bedroom, a rose being a lady’s ear, Mr. Spitzer being a tower of water or a duchess), Mr. Spitzer is “not inclined to deny completely the interesting possibility” and is “rather willing to concede that there was doubtless some right in her point of view.” This passage is important because it reveals aspects of Mr. Spitzer’s character: his passivity, his inability to argue, and his acceptance of the “mortal chaos” where identity and reality are fluid. It contrasts sharply with his later description as a lawyer, highlighting the transformative effect of Catherine’s presence or his own internal state. His concession suggests either a profound uncertainty about reality or a deep empathy/indulgence towards Catherine.
- The motif of the twin is introduced early and becomes central to Mr. Spitzer’s identity. Catherine accuses him of being married to his brother, and later he is described as a “soul divided” because he is this twin, “and one was dead, and one lived.” The confusion between Peron and Joachim is a key element, suggesting a merging or confusion of their identities. This passage is crucial for understanding Mr. Spitzer’s internal conflict and his perceived state of living death where he embodies the dead

brother, making him a divided soul. The ambiguity surrounding which twin is which (Peron the gambler or Joachim the lawyer and musician) adds to the sense of confusion and blurred identity.

- Mr. Spitzer agrees with Catherine that “Time… was like her opium illusions.” His memory is vague, especially of the “immediate moment or image, even when it was presumably real.” His mind is described as “watery and vague,” even his own face not being real to him. This passage reinforces the theme of the dissolution of conventional reality. His difficulty grasping time and immediate reality contributes to his passive state and his acceptance of Catherine’s surreal world. It suggests that his internal state mirrors the external chaos he perceives.
- The passage where Mr. Spitzer reflects on his past and what might have been is significant. He remembers having loved Catherine, even with his “dying breath,” and believes he found “a refuge from the unreal world, a safe harbor beyond the storms of life” with her. He contemplates how different his life might have been “if ever she had accepted his passive hand in marriage and his undying love.” This passage introduces a layer of pathos and regret to Mr. Spitzer’s character. It reveals a past desire for a conventional life and love, which was apparently unfulfilled, contributing to his current state of perpetual waiting and “living death.” His current life is explicitly described as a “life of patience and of waiting.”
- The chapter delves into the circumstances surrounding the brother’s death and Mr. Spitzer’s ongoing relationship with this event. The confusion over the brother’s identity (Peron/Joachim) and the nature of his death (suicide or accident) is central. Mr. Spitzer feels a “heavy sense of woe, this stain of immortal guilt.” He continues to think “too much of the dead brother, of Peron’s tastes, his attitudes, likes, dislikes, furies and regrets,” suggesting that the dead brother lives on through him. The passage describing the brother’s death (falling from the fourteenth floor of an office building) is a concrete (though surreal) event in a chapter full of abstraction. This event is the catalyst for Mr. Spitzer’s current state, his divided soul, and his perpetual meditation on death. The brother’s suicide (or accident) is presented as final and decisive, contrasting with Mr. Spitzer’s “hesitant suicide” or “perpetual and unconsummated suicide.”
- The anecdote about Mr. Spitzer walking through a glass wall is one of the most important and extended passages in the chapter. It serves as a metaphor for his inability to perceive or interact with conventional reality. He didn’t notice the wall, thinking it was “nothing, a transparency as thin as air or thinner.” This accident, which he recounts hesitantly and almost boasts about, is linked to his absent-mindedness, his perpetual grief, and his inability to distinguish between real obstacles and illusions. The fact that he only learned of it from his valet noticing glass particles and receiving bills underscores his detachment from physical reality. This passage is crucial because it provides a concrete example of Mr. Spitzer’s state of being: someone physically present but mentally elsewhere, prone to blurring the lines between the tangible and the intangible, mirroring his brother’s fatal fall through what looked like clouds. It also

leads to the final, poignant revelation that, according to an “obtuse desk clerk,” Mr. Spitzer is already dead.

- The chapter culminates with Mr. Spitzer attempting to collect compensation for his glass wall “injury” and being told by a desk clerk that he is dead, having “departed this mortal life several years ago.” This passage is the most significant as it brings Catherine’s initial perception into a different, external context. It confirms (or at least presents as a bureaucratic fact) Mr. Spitzer’s state of being dead, rendering his arguments and claims void. This final interaction encapsulates the chapter’s core themes: the unreality of life, the reality of death (or vice versa), the confusion of identity, and the ultimate futility of navigating the living world when one is already perceived, or actually is, among the dead. His arguments falling upon “empty air” is a powerful final image of his non-existence in the eyes of the living world.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “He was not his living brother.” Whom does Catherine think she is entertaining?
- “It had made an impression only on the glass.” What does the glass record that Mr. Spitzer does not?
- Why does the chapter end with a desk clerk telling Mr. Spitzer that he is dead?

Characters

- Peron, “fickle and faithless,” had “the faith, the finality,” and Joachim, “who had been faithful had had no faith.” What does each brother’s faith cost him?
- Catherine denies his existence, and yet he owes her “some sense of his own precarious being.” How can denial keep him alive?
- “Only through him… his brother lived.” Is Joachim keeping Peron alive, or is Peron living Joachim’s life?

Connections

- In Chapter 2, “Oblivion was his brother,” and Sleep and Death were twins. How does this chapter carry that on?
- Miss MacIntosh is not seen at Niagara Falls (Chapter 65), and Mr. Spitzer is not seen at the lawyer’s office. Who in this novel is seen?
- The old clam-digger notices the glass his master never felt. What do servants see in this house?

Reflection

- Can grief make a person invisible?

- Is a life of waiting a life?
- What do we owe the dead we carry?

Research: Characters

Joachim Spitzer (Peron's twin brother)

- Described as "useless as regret," a man trapped in liminality, between being alive and dead, reality and illusion, a "soul divided."
- Portrayed with physical and psychological frailty: fat, slow, hesitant.
- He embodies indecision and ambiguity, unable to commit or fully engage with life.
- Haunted by his brother Peron's death and his own survival, which he views as a "living death."
- Experiences illusions and confusion; his senses and memory are unreliable.
- His life is marked by routine, melancholy, and a lack of clear purpose, yet he retains a faint spark of life and pride.
- He comes to Catherine each evening, "when the moon arose," and there his ambiguous existence is both challenged and sustained.
- He remembers that he loved Catherine "even with his dying breath," and imagines what his life might have been "if ever she had accepted his passive hand in marriage."
- He reflects endlessly on Peron's mysterious death.
- He walks through a glass wall without noticing or being hurt, a sign of his tenuous grasp on reality.
- The glass wall brings bills and threatening letters, and finally a claim of his own.
- He is caught between a life unresolved and a death he keeps rehearsing.

Peron Spitzer (Joachim's twin brother)

- The deceased twin, described as quick, impetuous, and decisive.
- Died in a fall through a fourteenth-floor window, perhaps suicide, perhaps an accident; his death is enveloped in mystery and doubt.
- Contrasts with Mr. Spitzer's hesitant survival.
- Represents, to Mr. Spitzer, a life fully lived and a death perhaps fully embraced.
- His legacy haunts Mr. Spitzer, who often thinks in his brother's voice or perspective.
- A gambler, "quick to live, quick to die," a man of many superficial loves who would always "take another chance."

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera's mother)

- A strong, discerning woman who sees through Mr. Spitzer's facade.

- She maintains a complex relationship with Mr. Spitzer, accusing him of falsehood yet drawing him into her dreamlike world.
- Serves as a bulwark for Mr. Spitzer's fragile existence.
- Her bedroom is depicted as a magical, enchanted space where reality blurs and transformations occur.
- She addresses him "as if he were already dead," reminding him of "those vast areas of life he had surely missed."

Research: Themes

Life and Death, Liminality

See: Death and Mortality · Suicide in History and Literature · Twins and Doubles

- Mr. Spitzer exists in a state between life and death, embodying the ambiguity of human existence.
- The chapter explores death as both a physical end and a metaphysical continuum.
- The interplay between living and dead, memory and oblivion, is central.

Identity and Duality

See: Identity and the Self · Duality and Doubles · Twins and Doubles

- The twin brothers symbolize duality: life/death, faith/faithlessness, decisiveness/hesitation.
- Mr. Spitzer's identity is fractured, as he carries both his own life and that of his dead brother.
- The confusion over who he is and who he might become reflects existential uncertainty.

Reality versus Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality

- Reality is unstable, shifting like "distorted mirror images."
- Objects and people are sometimes perceived as other things (e.g., a rose as a lady's ear).
- Mr. Spitzer's experience walking through a glass wall symbolizes the fragility of boundaries between reality and illusion.

Memory and Forgetting

See: Memory and the Past

- Memory is unreliable, often blending with imagination or dream.

- Mr. Spitzer struggles with recalling events accurately and questions the nature of his own existence.
- The dead are both remembered and forgotten, complicating the notion of legacy.

Faith and Doubt

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- Mr. Spitzer lacks faith in an afterlife, which contributes to his hesitant living.
- His brother's suicide suggests a belief in an afterlife or at least a finality that Mr. Spitzer cannot embrace.
- The tension between hope and despair permeates the narrative.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Twin Iron Beds and Golden Cradles

See: The House · Pregnancy, Birth, and Children · Twins and Doubles

- Symbolize the intertwined destinies of Mr. Spitzer and his brother.
- Represent infancy, death, and the passage of time.

The Glass Wall Incident

See: Mirrors and Reflections · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Illusion and Reality

- Symbolizes Mr. Spitzer's fragile boundary between reality and illusion.
- His walking through the wall without injury suggests his partial nullification and disconnection from the physical world.
- The unnoticed shattering of glass reflects his invisible wounds and fractured self.
- Peron mistook a window for a door, and Mr. Spitzer once "mistaken a door for a window." The glass wall is where the two mistakes meet.

Music and Silence

See: Music and Instruments · Silence and Deafness · Music, Sound, and Silence

- Mr. Spitzer is an ex-musician; music (or the lack thereof) symbolizes harmony, loss, and silent elegy.
- The "cryptic silence" represents unfulfilled potential and the ineffable nature of existence.

The Rose in the Buttonhole

See: Roses and Flowers

- Initially a symbol of life and vitality, it is doubted: Mr. Spitzer concedes it may be “in all probability a lady’s ear,” and to Catherine it may be a door knob.
- Highlights the instability of perception.

Research: Resources

- “of having been married to the worm or to his brother”: “I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister” (Job 17:14). See The Book of Job.
- “The white tuberose or the white carnation in his buttonhole”: Both white flowers were worn or sent in mourning. The white carnation became the emblem of a mother who has died when Anna Jarvis founded Mother’s Day (1908). See Roses and Flowers and Grief, Loss, and Mourning.
- “and even in the twinkling of an eye”: “We shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). See The Bible and the Chapter 10 resources.
- “who did not believe in Heaven except as a state of mind”: The concept of heaven “as a state of mind” originates from interpretations of Jesus’ teachings, particularly the phrase “the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21), which suggests that a state of peace, love and spiritual fulfillment can be achieved here on Earth through one’s mindset and actions, rather than being solely a place one goes to after death (Leo Tolstoy took the verse for the title of The Kingdom of God Is Within You, 1894); this interpretation is often associated with mystical or spiritual traditions that emphasize inner consciousness and personal transformation. It captures a key existential and metaphysical perspective in the novel, emphasizing the internal, often ambiguous nature of spiritual experience over fixed external realities. See The Bible and Faith, God, and the Supernatural.
- “In the still chambers which had never bisected life from death, its twin”: In Hesiod’s Theogony, Sleep and Death are twin brothers, the sons of Night. See Twins and Doubles and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “he being the ambiguous twin”: Joachim and Peron Spitzer may refer to Castor and Pollux, also known as the Dioscuri, twin brothers in Greek and Roman mythology. They are depicted as demigods, associated with horses, sports, and considered patrons of travelers, especially sailors. (Wikipedia) The constellation Gemini, the twins, in the sky is named after them. When mortal Castor died, Pollux shared his immortality with him, and the brothers took turns between Hades and Olympus, one dead while the other lived. See Greek Mythology, Astronomy, and Twins and Doubles.
- “the cold mirrors of Lethean streams”: Lethe is one of the five rivers in Hades, with the Styx, Acheron, Cocytus, and Phlegethon. When someone drinks from this river they forget everything. See Greek Mythology and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “as if it had been mathematically planned by a higher power”: Fate refers to a predetermined destiny where events are beyond one’s control, while “self-

determination” means actively shaping one’s own life through choices and actions.

- “circles within circles, orbs within orbs, many spheres of influence”: The Pythagoreans held that the planets, turning in their spheres, make a music of the heavens that human ears cannot hear. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres.
- “clouds of eyeless witnesses”: “Seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1). See The Bible.
- “dead sparrows falling”: “One of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (Matthew 10:29), and Hamlet’s “There’s a special providence in the fall of a sparrow” (5.2). See The Bible and Shakespeare.
- “for they were as fickle as wind or water or woman”: The Duke’s aria in Verdi’s Rigoletto (1851): “La donna è mobile / qual piuma al vento” (“Woman is fickle, like a feather in the wind”). See Music and Composers.
- “her beautiful swan boat which was her bed”: Catherine’s bed is described as a “swan boat,” and there are Swan Boats in Boston, Massachusetts that have been in operation since 1877. See the Chapter 2 resources.
- “his existence which she denied”: Proving existence through denial refers to a philosophical concept where the act of actively denying something’s existence can inadvertently reveal its presence, often used in arguments where the very act of trying to refute something implies its reality, particularly in discussions about abstract concepts like God or the nature of consciousness. In his Proslogion (1078), Anselm answers “the fool” who “hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Psalm 14:1): to deny God, the fool must first understand “that than which nothing greater can be conceived,” and such a being, Anselm argued, must exist in reality as well as in the mind. This concept can be misused to manipulate arguments by implying that simply denying a claim equates to its truth, which is a logical fallacy. See Faith, God, and the Supernatural.
- “stealing the lanterns of the gods”: This recalls Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods for humankind (Hesiod, Theogony). See Greek Mythology.
- “the black coachman’s property”: The black coachman who drives Catherine’s horses. See The Black Coachman and the Chapter 24 resources.
- “those heavenly harmonies”: The push and pull between silent music and the music of the spheres or harmonious music form much of Mr. Spitzer’s tale, particularly in light of Schopenhauer’s view of music as the highest form of art. The philosophy of silence in music is that silence can be a powerful tool for making a statement, conveying emotion, and organizing structure. The novel embodies Schopenhauer’s belief in music as the highest art through its intricate portrayal of Mr. Spitzer’s silent and profound music, the use of musical metaphors to explore existential themes, and the depiction of music’s transcendence beyond the physical and intellectual world. The novel’s deep engagement with music as both expression and mystery reflects the Schopenhauerian vision of music as the direct and ultimate language of the will. Schopenhauer sets this out in The World as Will and Representation (1818), Book 3,

where music, unlike the other arts, is a copy of the will itself. See Schopenhauer, Music, Sound, and Silence, and the Chapter 6 resources.

- “bread tasted like ashes in his mouth”: “For I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping” (Psalm 102:9). See The Bible.
- “as no man knew the time of his birth, no man knew when he died”: “For man also knoweth not his time” (Ecclesiastes 9:12). See Ecclesiastes.
- “he had died with every minute since his brother’s death”: Paul’s “I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31). See The Bible.
- “this perpetual and unconsummated suicide”: The will-to-live by Schopenhauer could be used to rationalize why Mr. Spitzer did what he did and how Jock, the Black Coachman, Joachim and Peron are all the same person. Mr. Spitzer’s actions (his tireless searches, his care for others, and his internal conflicts) are driven by this fundamental will, compelling him to persist despite loss and disintegration. The multiplicity of characters such as Jock, the Black Coachman, Joachim, Peron, and Mr. Spitzer symbolically represents different manifestations of this singular will struggling within one being, blurring the lines between self and other, life and death, reality and illusion. Schopenhauer’s term is Wille zum Leben, from The World as Will and Representation (1818). “In psychology, the will to live is the drive for self-preservation, usually coupled with expectations for future improvement in one’s state in life. The will to live is an important concept when attempting to understand and comprehend why we do what we do in order to stay alive, and for as long as we can.” (Wikipedia) See Schopenhauer, Suicide in History and Literature, and The Black Coachman.
- “the only music worth hearing was the music he had never heard”: “Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter” (Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” 1819). See Romantic Poets and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “only Mr. Chandelier”: Catherine’s companion of the candles. See Mr. Chandelier and the Chapter 2 resources.
- “all the people who were more than three miles tall should be put out of the house”: The King’s “Rule Forty-two. All persons more than a mile high to leave the court,” in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865). See Alice in Wonderland.
- “this life which was no life but a temporary incarnation, a mistaken embodiment”: Both Hinduism and Buddhism believe in reincarnation, the cycle of rebirth, but their understanding of it differs. Hinduism sees a soul (atman) that is reborn into various forms, while Buddhism views rebirth as a continuation of consciousness, not a soul, and focuses on Nirvana as a path to end suffering, not a destination for the soul. In Hinduism, liberation comes with realizing that “the eternal core of the individual (atman) and the Absolute reality (brahman) are one”; Buddhism teaches anatman, “non-self,” in which karma, not a soul, carries over into a new life (Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Reincarnation”). See Hinduism and Buddhism.
- “What death was this which was no death?”: The philosophy of death explores the meaning of death, our relationship to it, and the various ways it impacts human existence and understanding. It delves into questions about what happens after death,

the nature of consciousness, and the ethical implications of death, including suicide. The Nature of Death: Dualism (the soul continues to exist after death, potentially in a separate realm or afterlife), Materialism (death is the permanent cessation of all bodily functions, including consciousness), Annihilationism (death is the end of all conscious experience, and nothing exists after death). Philosophical Perspectives on Death: Stoicism (death is not something to be feared, as it is a natural part of life and a release from suffering), Existentialism (thinkers like Kierkegaard and Heidegger, in Being and Time, 1927, emphasized the importance of confronting our mortality to understand our own existence and the meaning of life), Nietzsche (proposed that individuals have the freedom to define their own death, suggesting it could be a conscious choice rather than an inevitable fate: “Die at the right time,” in “On Free Death,” Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 1883). Ethical Considerations: Suicide (philosophy engages with questions about the moral permissibility of suicide, including whether it’s ever justifiable). See Stoicism, Existentialism, Nietzsche, and Suicide in History and Literature.

- “having been the jester with bells”: The court fool’s cap and bells. In Yeats’s “The Cap and Bells” (1894), a jester wins the queen only by sending her his cap and bells. See Shakespeare, whose fools wear them.
- “into the outer darkness where was no individual life or memory”: “Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 25:30). See The Bible.
- “Peron had rushed impetuously ahead, and he had fallen through a glass window on the fourteenth floor”: Peron’s death, left between suicide and accident: “this intention made to seem this irrational accident.” See Peron Spitzer and Suicide in History and Literature.
- “Mr. Spitzer had once mistaken a door for a window”: The doors that are not doors in Chapter 24, where the servants “open doors which were not doors.” See Keys, Doors, and Locks and the Chapter 24 resources.
- “tread softly where angels feared to rush ahead”: Pope’s “For fools rush in where angels fear to tread” (An Essay on Criticism, 1711), which gave E. M. Forster the title Where Angels Fear to Tread (1905). Young turns it around: Mr. Spitzer treads softly where angels fear to rush. Yeats wrote “Tread softly because you tread on my dreams” (“He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven,” 1899). It underscores Mr. Spitzer’s uncertainty, a man who never knows “what the next step would bring.”
- “whether he would stare at that wild, precipitous abyss which would stare at him”: Nietzsche’s quote, “If you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss gazes also into you,” is a famous aphorism warning against becoming consumed by the things you are confronting. It suggests that prolonged engagement with negativity, suffering, or challenging ideas can have a transformative effect on the person observing them, potentially altering their perspective and even their character. Mr. Spitzer, a man whose prolonged confrontation with death, identity, and existential uncertainty has led to a profound internal transformation, shows how the abyss he peers into ultimately gazes

back, shaping and haunting his very being. The aphorism is from Beyond Good and Evil (1886), §146, which begins “He who fights with monsters should be careful lest he thereby become a monster.” See Nietzsche.

- “a famous actress of the gay nineties”: “The Gay Nineties,” the American 1890s, remembered for music halls, gaslight, and stars such as Lillian Russell.
- “The other lawyer had simply failed to see him”: Mr. Spitzer is not seen at the lawyer’s office, just as Miss MacIntosh is not seen at Niagara Falls. See the Chapter 22 resources.
- “the lost chords, the silent keys, the broken strings”: Adelaide Procter’s poem “A Lost Chord” (1858), set by Arthur Sullivan as “The Lost Chord” (1877): “I struck one chord of music, / Like the sound of a great Amen.” See Music and Composers.
- “his gentleman’s valet, the old clam-digger”: Mr. Spitzer’s valet. See The Old Clam-Digger and the Chapter 22 resources.
- “There had been still, it seemed, a spark of life in Mr. Spitzer”: Friedrich Nietzsche proposed the “will to power” as a driving force behind human behavior, instead of the “will to live” of his predecessor Arthur Schopenhauer. Nietzsche develops it in Thus Spoke Zarathustra (1883-85), “On Self-Overcoming”: “Wherever I found a living thing, there found I Will to Power” (trans. Thomas Common). Will to live: an irrational force drives humans to strive endlessly. Will to power: a dynamic force drives humans to overcome resistance and become who they truly are. Nietzsche believed that the will to power is more useful than the will to live for explaining human behavior. He used the will to power to explain both life-affirming and life-denying impulses, as well as master and slave morality. He believed that the will to power is the expression of self-realization, and that it is a condition for growth. He held that life itself is will to power, a striving that is never done. In the chapter it reflects Nietzsche’s “will to power” through its exploration of internal conflict, the striving for control amid chaos, the tension between life and death, and the dynamic, creative force underlying human existence, as embodied in Mr. Spitzer’s character and experiences. See Nietzsche and Schopenhauer.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Acrid

Sharp and bitter to taste or smell.

Bemused

Puzzled and lost in thought.

Bisect

To cut or divide into two parts.

Bracken

A large coarse fern.

Bulwark

A defensive wall; a protection.

Capacious

Roomy; able to hold much.

Chagrin

Distress or annoyance at having failed or been humiliated.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Circumspect

Careful; wary.

Cobalt

A deep blue.

Concave

Curved inward.

Convex

Curved outward.

Corporeal

Having a body; physical.

Cryptic

Mysterious; hard to make out.

Deference

Polite respect, or yielding to someone else’s wishes or judgment.

Egregiously

Outstandingly; shockingly.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Fecundity

Fertility; the power to produce abundantly.

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Fortuitous

Happening by chance.

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Heterogeneous

Made of unlike parts; mixed.

Imperceptibly

So slowly or slightly as to go unnoticed.

Inane

Silly; empty of meaning.

Infinitesimal

Extremely small.

Insensate

Without feeling or sense.

Jester

A clown kept at a royal court.

Lethean

Of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness; causing oblivion.

Lumbering

Moving heavily and clumsily.

Madcap

A reckless, impulsive person.

Miasmic

Foul-smelling and unhealthy, like a miasma, the vapor once thought to cause disease.

Nocturnal

Of or happening in the night.

Nullification

The act of making something void.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Obtuse

Slow to understand.

Ominous

Threatening; foreboding.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Phantasmagoric

Like a phantasmagoria, a shifting series of dreamlike or nightmarish images. A phantasmagoria was an eighteenth-century magic-lantern ghost show.

Phosphorescent

Glowing faintly in the dark.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Precipitous

Very steep; headlong.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Quiescent

Still; at rest.

Raucous

Harsh and loud.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Slumberous

Sleepy; inducing sleep.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Tacitly

Silently; without being said.

Taciturn

Habitually silent; saying little.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Tuberose

A Mexican plant with heavily fragrant white flowers.

Vapid

Dull and empty of life or interest.

Vicariously

Experienced through another person.

Chapter 26

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Mr. Spitzer's field of law is the dead: wills, deeds, archives, and lost heirs. One case involves two Boston spinsters, each believing she is Cleopatra. One left her fortune to her Siamese cats under his supervision, and the cats seem likely to live forever. He relives the hour he identified his twin in a city morgue, and the day Catherine refused his hand for the last time. He asks what Peron would have done had their places been reversed. He concludes that Peron would never have been faithful to Catherine's bedside, but would have dragged her into the living sunlight even if it killed her. He reflects that to reach the upper world one must first travel through the lower.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel · Vera Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Duality and Doubles · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Horses and Carriages · Roses and Flowers · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Heraclitus and Flux · Hinduism · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres · Schopenhauer

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Dante · Edgar Allan Poe · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Book of Job · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, Mr. Spitzer's role is described as one dealing with "the dead," wills, deeds, secret archives, and old houses haunted by ghosts: both literal and metaphorical. He has encountered many baffling situations, such as lost heirs and numerous wills designed to confuse even the most conscientious attorney. This has led him to doubt the very idea of inheritance and continuity through generations, extending even to physical traits like hair and eyes, which he likens to "properties… of a dream"

that fade while observed. This passage underscores the theme of uncertainty and the fragile, illusory nature of identity and legacy.

- Mr. Spitzer recalls an eccentric case of an old Boston lady who believed herself the reincarnation of Cleopatra and left her house and garden to her numerous Siamese cats, with the caretaker to live in the house as long as the cats lived. The cats are described almost mystically, with “nine lives,” prowling the house and garden as if they owned it, playing piano keys, and embodying a kind of magical, surreal presence. This passage conveys a haunting atmosphere and illustrates Mr. Spitzer’s encounters with the bizarre and uncanny elements of death and legacy. It also reflects his cautious and conservative approach to administering such an unusual estate.
- This is a deeply poignant section where Mr. Spitzer recalls the shock of identifying his dead brother in a morgue among the homeless and faceless corpses. He reflects on how his life has since been shadowed by this event, feeling as if he lives his brother’s life and dies his brother’s death. The passage reveals Mr. Spitzer’s internal struggle with grief, memory, and the passing of time. It also illuminates the contrast between the brothers: Mr. Spitzer’s “cosmic serenity” versus his brother’s impatience, competition, and instability. This reflection on personal loss and identity is central to the chapter’s emotional core.
- Mr. Spitzer expresses a belief in a future beyond the law and human institutions, a future of “silent music” and “heavenly harmonies” is fixed beyond time’s fluctuations. He contemplates the idea that perfect life should be perfect death, where there is no rivalry, no immortal derangement, but complete oblivion rather than memory. This is contrasted with Catherine’s opium-induced desire for complete memory. These meditations reveal Mr. Spitzer’s somber, even nihilistic, outlook on existence, death, and what, if anything, lies beyond.
- The chapter contrasts Mr. Spitzer’s faithful, solemn devotion to Catherine and the dead with his brother Peron’s impetuous love of life, fear of death, and competitive nature. Mr. Spitzer doubts that his brother would have been so faithful or so enduring in grief, emphasizing Peron’s preference for the “great crowds of Derby Day” and his inability to face death or prolonged farewell. This contrast highlights different ways of confronting mortality and loss, and the complex dynamics of family loyalty and love.
- Mr. Spitzer contemplates Catherine’s opium-induced visions and her tendency to “narcotize” her memory to avoid facing reality, creating an opaque inner world filled with imaginary beings. He serves as a guardian of her property and life, yet his presence is often ignored or rejected, and he is caught in a paradox of faithfulness and absence. This passage captures the theme of elusive truth, memory, and perception, and the isolating burden of care and love.
- Toward the end, Mr. Spitzer reflects that to reach the upper world (perhaps a metaphor for peace, truth, or heaven), one must first pass through the lower world: the streets and alleys inhabited by thieves and painted street women. This metaphor suggests a journey through all aspects of life, including its sordid or painful parts, before reaching

any transcendence. It ties into the chapter’s exploration of death, memory, and the complexity of existence.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “His department was that of the dead.” How has the law shaped what Mr. Spitzer believes about inheritance?
- The cats “seemed to know they owned the place.” Who owns whom in this house?
- “Perfect life should be perfect death.” What kind of heaven does Mr. Spitzer want?

Characters

- Catherine wants “a complete memory,” and Mr. Spitzer wants “a complete oblivion.” Why does she drug her memory, then?
- Would Peron “have endured my mother’s pleasure in ignoring him”? What does Joachim’s faithfulness cost him?
- Catherine “held it against him that he did not rescue her.” What would rescue mean for her?

Connections

- Catherine’s canary “had died already many times without her knowledge” (Chapter 2). How do the immortal cats echo it?
- In Chapter 25, Mr. Spitzer did not believe in heaven “except as a state of mind.” How does he describe it here?
- One must “travel through the lower world” to reach the upper. Where has Vera’s own journey gone downward?

Reflection

- Should the dead control the living through what they leave behind?
- Is faithfulness without hope a virtue?
- Would you choose a complete memory or a complete oblivion?

Research: Characters

Joachim Spitzer (Peron’s twin brother)

- Family lawyer, guardian of the dead’s legacy.
- Scrupulous, conservative, somber, introspective.

- Struggles with the paradox of his profession and personal grief over his twin brother. He is caught between duty and emotional turmoil.
- Believes in a final peace beyond life and law, emphasizing oblivion rather than memory after death.
- His work involves dealing with the hidden past, dusty archives, and eccentric clients, many of whom create baffling legal puzzles through multiple wills or lost heirs.
- This career, entered reluctantly, “only because of his father’s wishes,” keeps him continually close to death and the mysteries of inheritance.
- A notable case in Mr. Spitzer’s youth involved an elderly Boston lady who believed she was Cleopatra reincarnated. She left her house and garden to her innumerable Siamese cats, with the ancient caretaker to live there and draw an income as long as the cats lived, and Mr. Spitzer to supervise. The cats are described almost as immortal beings, with a mysterious presence that haunts the house, symbolizing the blurred lines between life and death, reality and illusion.
- He also considers Catherine’s narcotic-induced oblivion as a form of escape from reality, pondering the value of memory and oblivion in death.
- Mr. Spitzer philosophizes on the necessity of traveling through the “lower world” (a metaphorical space of moral and social darkness) before reaching the “upper world” or enlightenment. This journey includes encountering thieves, street women, and the underbelly of life, suggesting his awareness of the complex layers of existence beyond his legal profession.
- He identified his brother at “the morgue of a great city… among homeless men and fallen women and faceless creatures,” and his life has not been entirely his own since.
- He proposed to Catherine, and when she refused “for the last fickle and unconstant time” his “passive hand,” he “turned so silently away.”
- He hires the servants, pays her “astronomical bills,” and pays Peron’s debts “with every new day of his life.”

Peron Spitzer (Joachim’s twin brother)

- Impulsive, competitive, impetuous, and restless.
- His and Joachim’s lives and deaths intertwine; Peron’s death haunts Joachim.
- He distrusted the law and wanted only “a crooked lawyer,” one who “would fix the witness and the judge,” and he often tried to fix his brother.
- He preferred “the great crowds of Derby Day” to any dream, and “had been afraid of death.”
- Represents the chaotic, fleeting nature of life and human memory.
- He would have swept Catherine “into the living sunlight,” even if the sunlight were her death.

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera's mother)

- Bedridden and addicted to opium.
- Mr. Spitzer handles her estate.
- Represents illusions of grandeur and the persistence of the past into the present.
- Central to Mr. Spitzer's personal life, her illness and narcotic use create a complex emotional dynamic.
- Embodies memory, oblivion, and the tension between awareness and escape.
- Mr. Spitzer believes she drugs herself "so that she should not see him, this old family lawyer with his brother's face."

Research: Themes

Mortality and the Legacy of the Dead

See: Death and Mortality

- The chapter explores how death shapes the living through legal, emotional, and mystical legacies. The dead control the living via wills and memories, but these connections are uncertain and fraught with paradox.

Memory versus Oblivion

See: Memory and the Past

- Mr. Spitzer contrasts Catherine's desire for memory with his own preference for oblivion after death, questioning what form of afterlife or peace is truly desirable.

Illusion and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- The recurring motif of illusions, reincarnations, the cats' seeming immortality, and fragmented memories highlights the fragile, dream-like quality of existence. This is similar to Catherine's canary, which "had died already many times without her knowledge" (Chapter 2).

The Law and Its Limits

See: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice

- The law is portrayed as an imperfect, sometimes arbitrary system that tries to impose order on the chaos of life and death. Mr. Spitzer hopes for a future beyond law, where harmony replaces discord.

Duality of Human Nature

See: Duality and Doubles · Twins and Doubles

- Through the contrast between Joachim and his twin brother Peron, the duality of restraint versus impulsiveness, order versus chaos, and life versus death is examined.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Siamese Cats

See: Ancient Egypt

- Symbolize mystery, immortality, and the blurred boundary between life and death. Their dominance in the Boston lady's house reflects ongoing life amid death.

The Pyramid and the Sphinx

See: Ancient Egypt · Greek Mythology

- Represent ancient legacies, riddles of existence, and the enigmatic nature of identity and memory.
- These are Egyptian sphinxes, built in rival Boston gardens by two old women who each believed she was the reincarnation of Cleopatra.

The Dead Brother

See: Twins and Doubles · Peron Spitzer

- A symbol of lost potential, memory, and the haunting presence of the past in the present.

Opium and Narcotics

See: The History of Opium

- Reflect escape, oblivion, and the tension between retaining memory or seeking peace through forgetfulness.

The Upper and Lower Worlds

See: Dante · Greek Mythology

- Mr. Spitzer's lower world of "the thief who had stolen bright jewels" and "the painted street woman leering under a lamp" must be crossed to reach the upper, a journey "endless like some of those journeys taken by my mother."

Research: Resources

- “those who were poor and imagined they were rich and dwelled in many castles of illusion”: “Castles in Spain,” castles in the air, are in print in the Roman de la Rose (c. 1230) as chastiaus en Espaigne.
- “handed down in golden perpetuity through the generations of the dead who thus controlled the living”: In the US, property can be passed down through generations in perpetuity, ensuring a lasting legacy. Promoting Inequality: A significant critique of inherited wealth is that it exacerbates economic inequality, enabling wealth acquisition without labor and hindering social mobility. Critics say perpetual trusts are “truly creating an American aristocracy” (Ray Madoff, New York Times, July 2010, as reported in the ABA Journal). Unrestricted perpetual trusts can hold wealth indefinitely, and could lead to the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few families, potentially creating a privileged class. Inheriting wealth without earning it can undermine a sense of accomplishment and make inheritors feel like mere placeholders for future generations. The US has a history of enacting estate and gift taxes, though their reach and rates have fluctuated over time, often tied to war financing or efforts to curb wealth concentration. There is ongoing debate about the role and impact of these taxes, with some advocating for their repeal and others for their reform. Traditional legal principles like the Rule Against Perpetuities, which began in the Duke of Norfolk’s Case (1682) to limit the “dead hand” of the grave over property, aimed to prevent perpetual trusts, but many states have modified or abolished this rule, leading to renewed debate about the implications of trusts that can last indefinitely. Other viewpoints have called for the complete abolition of inheritance, asserting that it is incompatible with a fair and equitable society.
- “so many lost heirs, so many lost heiresses”: Salic law barred women from inheriting the French throne, and English succession preferred sons over elder daughters until 2013.
- “There had been heirs who had been heiresses, heiresses who had been heirs”: Women’s property rights have expanded over time in the United States, but they have been restricted by gender stereotypes and laws. Under the English common law of coverture, a married woman’s property passed to her husband. In 1718, Pennsylvania’s Feme Sole Traders Act let the wives of absent mariners run businesses in their own names. In 1848, New York passed the Married Women’s Property Act, which allowed women to keep their property when they married. By the end of the Civil War, 29 states had passed some version of a Married Women’s Property Act, yet as late as 1887 a third of the states still did not let married women control their own earnings. (Wikipedia) Enslaved women could own nothing, not even themselves, and free women of color were often shut out of these rights in practice. Gender stereotypes and ideologies have historically been barriers to women’s property rights. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and the Chapter 23 resources.
- “the reincarnation of Cleopatra”: Cleopatra VII (69-30 BC), the last ruler of Ptolemaic Egypt and Mark Antony’s lover. Belief in reincarnation runs through Hinduism, and

through Theosophy, founded in New York in 1875. See Ancient Egypt and Hinduism.

- “a Sphinx in her garden… a greater pyramid than her neighbor could afford”: The Great Sphinx and the Great Pyramid of Khufu at Giza. Egyptian Revival garden ornaments were a fashion after Napoleon’s expedition to Egypt (1798). See Ancient Egypt.
- “leaving her house and garden to her innumerable Siamese cats”: Siamese cats came from Siam (Thailand). The first known in America was sent to Lucy Hayes at the White House in 1878.
    - There were cases of pets and animals inheriting estates, though some are legends. Gunther VI, a German Shepherd, descends from a dog said to have inherited $80 million from Countess Karlotta Liebenstein in 1992. The Times of London called it “a ruse concocted by the scion of an Italian pharmaceutical company,” Maurizio Mian, and the Countess apparently never existed (Netflix, Gunther’s Millions, 2023). The poodle said to have inherited a fortune from New York heiress Ella Wendel in 1931 is an urban legend: Time reported in 1933 that her poodle Tobey “was not even mentioned in the will.” Blackie, a cat, inherited Ben Rea’s £7 million fortune in 1988 and was named the wealthiest cat by Guinness World Records (Guinness World Records, “International Cat Day,” 2017).
- “Egyptian securities, and New England shipping”: Egypt’s foreign debts led to the Anglo-French Dual Control (1876) and the British occupation of 1882. Egyptian bonds were a favorite of cautious Victorian investors. See Ancient Egypt.
- “each having nine lives”: “A woman hath nine lives like a cat” (John Heywood, 1546). See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “the windy garden where no birds sang”: “The sedge has withered from the lake, / And no birds sing” (Keats, “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” 1819). See Romantic Poets.
- “eating from golden dishes fit for the dead pharaohs”: In ancient Egypt, cats were sacred to the goddess Bastet and were mummified by the hundreds of thousands. See Ancient Egypt.
- “he had hesitantly called to leave his engraved calling card, to pay, in fact, his respects to the new owners”: Leaving an engraved calling card was the ritual of a nineteenth-century social call. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “cats walking about like flower-faced sibyls”: The Sibyls were the prophetesses of the ancient world, among them the Cumaean Sibyl who guides Aeneas into the underworld. See Greek Mythology.
- “less fearful than the raven might have been”: Poe’s “The Raven” (1845), perched “upon a bust of Pallas just above my chamber door.” See Edgar Allan Poe.
- “A cat had walked up and down on the piano keys, playing a little tune from the works of one of the more obscure eighteenth-century musical composers”: Domenico Scarlatti’s Sonata in G minor, K. 30, has been called “The Cat’s Fugue” since the nineteenth century, after the story that his cat walked across the keyboard. See Music and Composers.

- “like an old mummified pharaoh wrapped in his body which was his boat”: Pharaohs were buried with boats to carry them through the afterlife. Khufu’s cedar ship was found beside the Great Pyramid in 1954. See Ancient Egypt.
- “this old family lawyer with the sombre, weedy look”: “Weeds,” from Old English wæd, “garment,” survives in “widow’s weeds,” the black dress of mourning. See Grief, Loss, and Mourning.
- “the attitude of a perpetual grief”: This may refer to the philosophy of Arthur Schopenhauer, who believed that death is a natural part of life and a return to a state of non-existence that existed before birth. He thought that individual consciousness is impermanent and that the life of an individual is meaningless. His key ideas are will-to-live (the driving force behind our attachment to life and our fear of death), knowledge (shows the meaninglessness of life and the worthlessness of living), suicide (pointless because it affirms the will-to-live, though it destroys the individual), palingenesis (the will, not the individual mind or soul, is reborn in new beings), redemption (that death is an opportunity for redemption through the negation of the will). The portrayal of Mr. Spitzer’s lifelong sorrow, his recognition of life as a series of losses and unfulfilled desires, and his contemplation of the illusory nature of reality all echo Schopenhauerian themes. The passage reflects a worldview where grief and suffering are continuous and intrinsic to life. His fullest statement is in The World as Will and Representation, vol. 2 (1844), chapter 41, “On Death and Its Relation to the Indestructibility of Our Inner Nature.” See Schopenhauer and Suicide in History and Literature.
- “only his elegiac music”: An elegy is a song or poem of mourning. Mr. Spitzer’s “elegiac music” is music he has written “only for himself or for no mortal ear.” See Music, Sound, and Silence and the Chapter 25 resources.
- “the heavenly harmonies forever fixed above the floods of time, dark time, those unmoving golden spheres”: “Musica universalis,” the music of the spheres: Boethius, in De institutione musica (c. 500), divided music into musica mundana (the music of the spheres), humana, and instrumentalis. The idea goes back to Pythagoras. Mr. Spitzer imagines “the silent music which requires neither instruments nor voices.” Mr. Spitzer, a semi-retired lawyer and composer of “silent music,” is attuned to the music of the spheres, the eternal, silent harmonies beyond earthly sounds. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres, Astronomy, and Music, Sound, and Silence.
- “He could believe in probably no hell more than this present individual life”: Mephistophilis in Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus (c. 1592), 1.3: “Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it.”
- “a state of mind”: In Chapter 25, Mr. Spitzer did not believe in Heaven “except as a state of mind.” Here it is a state “when we should have completely forgotten who we were.” See the Chapter 25 resources.
- “when we should have put off this mortal clay”: “Thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?” (Job 10:9), and Hamlet’s “When we have shuffled off this mortal coil” (3.1). See The Book of Job and Shakespeare.

- “united in heavenly mansions”: “In my Father’s house are many mansions” (John 14:2). See The Bible.
- “by the opium doses, by the needle points”: The hypodermic syringe (Alexander Wood, 1853) brought injected morphine into nineteenth-century medicine and addiction. See The History of Opium.
- “sleeping car porters with golden roosters on their heads”: Pullman sleeping-car porters were Black men, many of them formerly enslaved, hired by the Pullman Company from 1867 for low wages and long hours, and passengers called every one of them “George.” The Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, led by A. Philip Randolph, was founded in 1925. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “and headless horsemen”: Washington Irving’s “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (1820). See American Writers and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “all horses should come in first”: The Dodo’s verdict on the Caucus-race: “Everybody has won, and all must have prizes” (Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 1865). See Alice in Wonderland.
- “he had lost his life, or he had gained his life through death”: “He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 10:39). See The Bible and Suicide in History and Literature.
- “a bouquet of winter violets”: Ophelia’s “I would give you some violets, but they withered all when my father died” (Hamlet 4.5). Violets were a flower of faithfulness. See Shakespeare and Roses and Flowers.
- “turning to dust and ashes”: “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19), and the burial service’s “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust” (Book of Common Prayer, 1549). See Genesis.
- “the great crowds of Derby Day”: The Derby at Epsom, run since 1780. William Powell Frith painted its crowds in “The Derby Day” (1858). See Horses and Carriages and Peron Spitzer.
- “His brother would not have sat up all night with any corpse”: The wake, the old custom of keeping watch over the dead until burial. See Grief, Loss, and Mourning.
- “held it against him that he did not rescue her, carry her away as Peron might have done”: Catherine is expecting a man to save her, which is the damsel in distress. This is a narrative device in which one or more men must rescue a woman who has been kidnapped or placed in other peril. The “damsel” is often portrayed as beautiful, popular, and of high social status; she is usually depicted as a princess in works with fantasy or fairy tale settings. Kinship, love, lust or a combination of those motivate the male protagonist to initiate the narrative. Critics have linked the helplessness of these women to societal views that women as a group need to be taken care of by men and treated nicely. Throughout the history of the trope, the role of the woman as the victim in need of a male savior has remained constant, but her attackers have changed to suit the tastes and collective fears of the period: “monsters, mad scientists, Nazis,

hippies, bikers, aliens…" (Wikipedia) See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- "wandering through the intricate streets of a dark city in perhaps the underworld": Dis, the walled city of Hell in Dante's Inferno (cantos 8-9). See Dante.
- "in order to reach the upper world, one must first travel through the lower world": Mr. Spitzer's belief that people need to travel through the lower world to reach the upper world mirrors The Pilgrim's Progress (1678) and/or Dante's writings. Purgatory has seven terraces for the seven deadly sins, and there are seven virtues. Hell has nine circles and Heaven has nine spheres: the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the fixed stars, and the primum mobile. According to Dante the cosmos depends on God, who exists in the Empyrean, an immaterial heaven beyond space and time. The Empyrean is made up of God's love and light, and is home to angels, the blessed, and the souls of the faithful. Interesting note that the woman with the Siamese cats believes she was the reincarnation of Cleopatra and Dante meets Cleopatra in the circle of Hell called Lust ("Cleopatràs lussurïosa," Inferno 5.63). Virgil wrote "Facilis descensus Averno," "the descent to Avernus is easy… but to retrace one's steps and climb back to the upper air, that is the task, that is the labor" (Aeneid 6.126-129), and Heraclitus, "The way up and the way down are one and the same." See Dante, Heraclitus and Flux, and Greek Mythology.

Vocabulary

Allay

To ease or quiet.

Conscientious

Careful to do what is right; thorough.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Discursive

Rambling from one subject to another.

Disdain

Scorn; contempt.

Dour

Stern and gloomy.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Enigmatic

Mysterious; puzzling.

Grudgingly

Unwillingly.

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Incorruptible

Not subject to decay or to bribery.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Insolent

Rude and disrespectful.

Irremediable

Impossible to cure or put right.

Issue

In law, a person’s children or descendants.

Makeshift

Serving as a rough, temporary substitute.

Metamorphic

Having to do with a change of form. In geology, rock that heat and pressure have changed.

Morgue

A place where the bodies of the dead are kept for identification.

Mummified

Preserved by embalming and drying, as in ancient Egypt.

Narcotize

To dull with a drug.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Paradox

A statement or situation that seems to contradict itself and yet may be true.

Pedestal

The base on which a statue or bust stands.

Perpetuity

Endless time; in law, an interest meant to last forever.

Pigeon-hole

A small open compartment in a desk for papers.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Proffered

Held out; offered.

Raucous

Harsh and loud.

Recluse

A person who lives shut away from others.

Restive

Restless; resisting control.

Scrupulous

Very careful to do what is right.

Secretary

A writing desk with drawers and pigeon-holes; also a person who handles another’s letters.

Sibyl

A prophetess of the ancient world.

Sombre

Dark and grave.

Spinster

An unmarried woman, especially an older one. The word first meant a woman who spun thread.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Tremulous

Trembling; quivering.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Unilateral

One-sided.

Chapter 27

Content note: *This chapter mentions the suicide of Mr. Spitzer's twin brother, Peron. Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Vera grows exasperated with the adults who circle their problems endlessly. Mr. Spitzer carries calling cards and an old passport so that, if he is found dead, he will be identified as himself and not his brother. He wears Peron's accurate wristwatch, and has lately rediscovered his own identical watch, broken and stopped near the time of Peron's death, and wears it too. He fears nothing so much as the loss of his dignity, yet he is proud of walking through a glass wall and of being declared dead. He is always too early or too late, and always caught between streams of traffic. A stranger once asked him on a crowded street whether he wanted to die. He said no while nodding yes, and was led safely across.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel · Vera Cartwheel · Peron Spitzer · Mr. Chandelier

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence · Time

Symbols: Birds · Clocks and Watches · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Horses and Carriages · Mirrors and Reflections · Music and Instruments · Opium · Roses and Flowers · Silence and Deafness · The Bus and the Journey · The Sea and Water · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres

Allusions: Astronomy · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Greek Mythology · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with Vera's exasperation at "these ancient people," forever turning upon the same spiral problems, and at her mother's habit of living in an imaginative, surreal world rather than facing reality. Catherine imagines herself as historical or fantastical figures (e.g., Catherine the Great) and engages in imagined dialogues, addressing absent entities. This highlights her detachment from actual life and the dreamlike, opium-induced nature of her thoughts. It sets the tone for understanding her

as a figure caught between illusion and reality, embodying a perennial lack of faith that paradoxically makes everything possible for her.

- In contrast to Catherine, Mr. Spitzer is portrayed as being more aware of his difficulties and realities. Yet, he is burdened by his isolation, preferring neutrality and distance from the competitive world. His existence is described as “intermittent,” marked by memory lapses and confusion, symbolized by the possibility of walking “through a wall of shimmering glass” or forgetting destinations. This motif emphasizes his fragile grasp on reality and self-identity, as well as his struggle with time and memory.
- The chapter deeply explores the symbolism of time through the motif of watches. Mr. Spitzer wears his dead brother’s fine, accurate watch, contrasting it with his own broken and rusted timepiece. The brother’s watch marks “the course of the inaccurate planets.” Timing the breakers with it becomes “his elegiac music in memory of his brother.” This duality of watches reflects the tension between order and chaos, memory and loss, and the elusive nature of time itself. The mention of the brother’s death and Mr. Spitzer’s confusion about timing around this event underscores the theme of temporal dislocation and the impossibility of fully grasping or controlling time.
- Mr. Spitzer reflects on the artifice of time, comparing it to Catherine’s opium dreams and the “great coffin of stars” that might contain “the body of her love.” This passage philosophically questions the reality of time, suggesting it is an artificial construct. The image of Peron “jumping headlong into time with screaming stars” conveys a sense of fatalism and the overwhelming force of existence that defies human control.
- Despite his solemn reflections, Mr. Spitzer is conscious of his external dignity, fearing ridicule and the loss of respect. The passage describing the humor in a “fat man slipping on a banana peel” humanizes him, showing his vulnerability and self-awareness. His concern with maintaining dignity despite physical and mental frailty illustrates a profound human struggle against decline and absurdity.
- The motif of musical discord parallels the confusion and disorder in Mr. Spitzer’s life. This metaphor extends to his experience of reality, where signals, timing, and order are unreliable. The image of being caught between two traffic streams or crossing streets at wrong lights symbolizes his dislocation in time and place. The stranger who asks if he “wanted to die” and then guides him through chaotic traffic encapsulates his precarious existence, teetering between life and death, clarity and confusion.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “It was this lack of faith which made all things possible to her.” What does Catherine’s unbelief give her?
- Why does Mr. Spitzer carry calling cards, an old passport, and his silent music?
- “Almost any fool, including himself, could tell him that there was no time.” Then why does he wear two watches?

Characters

- Peron’s watch is accurate, and Joachim’s own is broken. Which brother keeps time?
- Mr. Spitzer is “proud” of walking through glass and of being told he was dead. Why?
- Asked if he wanted to die, he said no “at the same time shaking his head in the affirmative.” Which answer is true?

Connections

- Miss MacIntosh’s “silver-dollar watch” is the kind Mr. Spitzer says “should have done for” Peron. What does the plain watch say about each of them?
- The false signal lights, “the red where there should be the green,” return from Chapter 24. Who sees them first?
- His brother “had not been Mr. Spitzer,” and the desk clerk said Mr. Spitzer was dead (Chapter 25). How does a man prove who he is?

Reflection

- Does time heal all wounds, “even the wounds of time”?
- Why is a fat man slipping on a banana peel funny, and to whom?
- What would you carry so that the world would know who you were?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- A man burdened by his awareness of his difficulties and haunted by memories and illusions.
- He is isolated, secretive, and struggles to reconcile his inner world with external reality.
- His interactions with Catherine and his own sense of time and self are central.
- Mr. Spitzer rarely leaves his home except for business and is burdened by his fragmented memory and difficulties.
- He wears his deceased brother’s watch, and under his cuff on his left wrist his own broken one, as a memento and a symbol of time and loss.
- Mr. Spitzer experiences dislocation in time and space: arriving early or late, encountering sudden weather changes, and experiencing shifts in scenery.
- Mr. Spitzer struggles with the notion that life, time, and events are illusions, yet he continues to strive for dignity and order in his existence.
- Mr. Spitzer’s clothes are always described, and he carries things that were Peron’s, above all Peron’s accurate watch.

- He carries calling cards, an out-dated passport, and his silent music, so that if he is found in a city morgue, “all men should know that he had not been his brother.”
- He fears “the loss of his dignity” above all, yet is proud of walking through glass and of the clerk who “insisted that he was dead,” “thinking of the joke he had played.”

Peron Spitzer (Joachim’s twin brother)

- A man of “blatant tastes” who “had worn loud checks” and preferred “low company, lapsed souls, void characters, dice-rattlers.”
- He “laughed at Mr. Spitzer’s silence,” yet left a fine, accurate watch, which he seems to have “most thoughtfully removed” before he jumped.
- The twins “had always suffered, except for this final accident, the same accidents, one not falling unless the other fell.”

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s mother)

- A woman lost in opium dreams and fantasies, disconnected from reality.
- She imagines herself in surreal, historical, or symbolic roles, often interrupting conversations with remarks addressed to absent figures.
- Her lack of faith paradoxically makes “all things possible” for her.
- Catherine insists on assigning significant interpretations to minor details and ignores major events, suggesting her detachment from reality.
- She enjoys “her present sense of omniscience” about Mr. Spitzer’s goings and comings, yet ignores him “in favor of God knew whom.”

Research: Themes

Isolation and Alienation

See: Isolation and Connection

- Mr. Spitzer prefers solitude and neutrality, finding the competitive world burdensome.
- Catherine is isolated in her opium-induced fantasies and mental state.
- Both characters exhibit a disconnection from ordinary social interactions and time.

Perception of Reality and Imagination

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination

- Catherine confuses or replaces reality with elaborate fantasies (e.g., imagining herself as Catherine the Great).
- Mr. Spitzer’s reality is complicated by his own fragmented memory and sense of identity.

Time and Memory

See: Memory and the Past · Time

- Time is portrayed as fluid, unreliable, and artificial.
- Mr. Spitzer’s broken and inherited watches symbolize the fractured nature of time and memory.
- The struggle with remembering and forgetting is a persistent motif, especially in relation to Mr. Spitzer’s brother’s death.

Death and Existence

See: Death and Mortality

- The idea of death is ever-present, especially concerning Mr. Spitzer’s brother.
- Mr. Spitzer contemplates his own mortality and the notion of life as an illusion or transient state.

Dignity and Self-Image

See: Identity and the Self

- Mr. Spitzer is deeply concerned with preserving his dignity and avoiding ridicule.
- His physicality (notably his size) and the fear of losing control over his image are recurring concerns.

Music and Harmony

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Mr. Spitzer finds solace in musical metaphors: the “Pythagorean harmonies,” “music of the silent spheres,” and the discordant experiences of life.
- Music represents both order and chaos, reflecting the tension in Mr. Spitzer’s internal state.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Watches

See: Clocks and Watches · Time

- Mr. Spitzer wears both his own watch and his brother’s. Miss MacIntosh also has a watch, her “old dollar watch which was given to her by her dead love” (Chapter 22).
- The brother’s unbroken, elegant watch contrasts with Mr. Spitzer’s broken, dust-clogged timepiece.

- Watches symbolize the passage and distortion of time, memory, and connection between the brothers.

Opium Dreams and Fantasies

See: Opium

- Catherine's opium-induced visions illustrate altered perception and escapism.
- These dreams blur the line between reality and imagination.

Phantasmagoric Facts

See: Illusion and Reality

- Catherine's interpretation of Mr. Spitzer's life is described as "phantasmagoric," highlighting the surreal and distorted nature of her view.

Invisible Glass Wall

See: Mirrors and Reflections · Chapter 25 resources

- Metaphor for Mr. Spitzer's barriers between himself and the external world, also referencing an incident where he "walked through a wall of invisible glass," symbolic of his fragile state.

Traffic and Crossings

See: The Bus and the Journey · Chapter 24 resources

- Recurring images of Mr. Spitzer being caught in dangerous or confusing traffic symbolize his existential confusion and vulnerability.

Calling Cards and Passport

See: Identity and the Self

- His calling cards, out-dated passport, and scroll of silent music are what he carries so that the world will know him from his brother.

Further notes from the text

- The chapter opens with Vera's exasperation at "these ancient people," forever turning on the same spiral problems, and at her mother imagining she is Catherine the Great in a bed with pillars of twisted amethyst rather than facing the living sunlight.
- Mr. Spitzer objects less to Catherine's "phantasmagoric facts" about his life than to her interpretation of them: she insists that minor details matter most and major events not at all.

- His life, which should be continuous, is “intermittent.” He takes the wrong train, gets off at the wrong city, “the wrong station, the wrong star,” though he is painfully accurate and covered with exact reminders to himself.
- Almost any fool, he admits, including himself, could tell him there is no time, that it is all artifice like Catherine’s opium dreams, and yet Peron’s watch is a convenient timepiece for a poor lawyer and musician.
- Peron’s watch was made for clocking horses. Mr. Spitzer now uses it to time the breakers coming in with their foaming manes and tails, thinking of the long horse race of life.
- His fear of losing his dignity runs alongside a frank admission that a fat man slipping on a banana peel is the funniest thing there is. See Comedy in Chapter 27.

Research: Resources

- “perhaps Catherine the Great sleeping in a bed with pillars of twisted amethyst”: Catherine II, Empress of Russia (reigned 1762-96). Catherine Cartwheel shares her name. See Catherine Cartwheel.
- “her mind distilled by the juices of languorous poppy flowers”: Opium is the dried latex of the opium poppy, Papaver somniferum. See The History of Opium and Opium.
- “it was this lack of faith which made all things possible to her”: It inverts Mark 9:23, “All things are possible to him that believeth.” See The Bible.
- “the Pythagorean harmonies, the muffled planetary voices, the music of the silent spheres”: The music of the spheres. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres and the Chapter 26 resources.
- “even the company of Mr. Chandelier”: Catherine’s companion of the candles. See Mr. Chandelier.
- “likely to walk through a wall of shimmering glass”: The glass wall of Chapter 25. See the Chapter 25 resources.
- “his high silk hat and black necktie and rosebud with maidenhair”: Maidenhair fern (Adiantum) was the usual green set behind a buttonhole rose. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts and Roses and Flowers.
- “unfinished epithalamiums and dirges and vast recessionals”: Epithalamiums are songs that celebrate a marriage, while dirges are a lament for the dead. Spenser wrote his “Epithalamion” (1595) for his own wedding, and Kipling’s “Recessional” (1897) is remembered for “Lest we forget!” See Music, Sound, and Silence.
- “for the tongue-less nightingales”: Philomela, whose tongue Tereus cut out, became the nightingale (Ovid, Metamorphoses 6). See Greek Mythology and Birds.
- “in a city morgue among the drowned women and the fallen men”: It reverses the “fallen woman” drowned in Thomas Hood’s “The Bridge of Sighs” (1844): “One more Unfortunate, / Weary of breath.” See the Chapter 26 resources.

- “time healing, he believed, all wounds”: The proverb is old. Chaucer has “As tyme hem hurt, a tyme doth hem cure” (Troilus and Criseyde, c. 1385).
- “storks’ nests on the roof-tops”: In northern Europe a stork’s nest on the roof brought luck, and storks brought babies. Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Storks” (1838). See Birds and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “Any old silver-dollar stop watch should have done for him”: Miss MacIntosh’s “silver-dollar watch,” which she always wears (Chapters 3, 9, and 22). Ingersoll’s Yankee (1896), sold for a dollar, was “the watch that made the dollar famous.” See Clocks and Watches and Miss MacIntosh.
- “the course of the inaccurate planets”: “Planet” is from the Greek planētēs, “wanderer.” See Astronomy.
- “searching through time for that which was already lost”: Proust’s In Search of Lost Time (À la recherche du temps perdu, 1913-27).
- “her dream of some great coffin of stars”: “The table might easily be a coffin of stars” (Chapter 25). See the Chapter 25 resources.
- “the groupings of beats or pulses into equal measures, accelerated or delayed”: Meter and tempo: accelerando and ritardando. See Music and Instruments.
- “they had always suffered, except for this final accident, the same accidents, one not falling unless the other fell”: The twins, like Castor and Pollux in Chapter 25. See Twins and Doubles and the Chapter 25 resources.
- “when not one wind would blow through the sails of a ship stuck at the far horizon”: “As idle as a painted ship / Upon a painted ocean” (Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” 1798). See Romantic Poets.
- “the great breakers coming in with their foaming manes and tails”: Poseidon was god of the sea and of horses, and breaking waves are still called “white horses.” See Greek Mythology, Horses and Carriages, and The Sea and Water.
- “more accurate than the sundials in the windy gardens”: The sundial motto “Horas non numero nisi serenas,” “I count only the sunny hours.” See Clocks and Watches.
- “had died a thousand deaths”: “Cowards die many times before their deaths; / The valiant never taste of death but once” (Julius Caesar 2.2). See Shakespeare.
- “the old desk clerk had insisted that he was dead”: The end of Chapter 25. See the Chapter 25 resources.
- “there is nothing funnier than a fat man slipping on a banana peel”: Henri Bergson’s Laughter (1900): “A man, running along the street, stumbles and falls; the passers-by burst out laughing.” We laugh, he argued, at “something mechanical encrusted upon the living.” The banana-peel fall was a vaudeville and silent-film staple. See Comedy in Chapter 27.
- “his elephantine avoirdupois”: Avoirdupois is a system of weights based on a pound of 16 ounces. The word comes from Old French aveir de peis, “goods of weight.”

- “these loud noises ringing in his dead or deafened ear”: His “dead ear” of Chapter 25. See Silence and Deafness.
- “the holding over of one or more tones of a chord into the following chord”: In music, a suspension is a note held over from one chord into the next. It clashes, then resolves, and here the resolution never comes. See Music and Instruments.
- “caught ponderously in a revolving door”: Theophilus Van Kannel patented the revolving door in 1888.
- “just when the red light turned to green”: The first electric traffic signal was installed in Cleveland in 1914. See the Chapter 24 resources.

Vocabulary

Abstruse

Hard to understand; obscure.

Aggregate

A whole formed by combining parts.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Artifice

Clever trickery, or the art of making things seem other than they are.

Avoirdupois

The system of weights based on a pound of 16 ounces; humorously, body weight.

Blatant

Loud and showy; obvious.

Bravado

A show of boldness.

Chancel

The part of a church near the altar, for clergy and choir.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Consummate

Complete; perfect in its kind.

Corpulent

Fat; stout.

Cranium

The skull.

Crystalline

Clear and sparkling, like crystal.

Deprivation

The lack or loss of something needed.

Derision

Mockery; scorn.

Devious

Winding; straying from the direct way.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Distilled

Purified or concentrated, as by boiling and condensing.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Elephantine

Huge and heavy.

Epithalamium

A song or poem celebrating a marriage.

Immunized

Made safe against something.

Impassive

Showing no emotion.

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Intermittent

Stopping and starting.

Languorous

Oppressive stillness or tiredness, inactivity of a pleasurable kind. Young spells it “langorous.”

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Morgue

A place where the bodies of the dead are kept for identification.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Pacific

Peaceful.

Paraphernalia

Personal belongings or equipment.

Paucity

Scarcity.

Perennial

Lasting or returning year after year.

Phantasmagoric

Like a phantasmagoria, a shifting series of dreamlike or nightmarish images. A phantasmagoria was an eighteenth-century magic-lantern ghost show.

Ponderous

Heavy; slow and labored.

Recessional

A hymn sung as the clergy and choir leave the chancel.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Squall

A sudden, violent gust of wind, often with rain or snow.

Taciturn

Habitually silent; saying little.

Tactlessly

Without tact; bluntly.

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Thoroughfare

A main road.

Undertow

A current beneath the surface that pulls back out to sea.

Visage

A person’s face or expression.

Chapter 28

Content note: *This chapter mentions the suicide of Mr. Spitzer's twin brother, Peron. Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Mr. Spitzer admits that he may be only another of Catherine's hallucinations, and that he truly lives only during these evenings in her room. Peron, who loved "the wastrel wheels of chance," had no patience "for the caterpillar to become the butterfly." Mr. Spitzer recalls the butterfly collecting he gave up two or three years after Peron's death, his correspondence with fellow collectors, and the births and deaths of butterflies he watched. If one were called away at the crucial moment, he observes, one could never tell whether one had seen a beginning or an end.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel · Vera Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Fate and Chance · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth · The Search for Meaning · Time

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · Opium · Pregnancy, Birth, and Children · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Kant and Hegel · Plato and Platonism · Taoism and Zhuangzi

Allusions: Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Romantic Poets · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- The opening passage describes Mr. Spitzer's nightly visits as a kind of faithfulness, drawing "him each evening here as to a brilliant star," despite his life feeling like a "dark and empty plain" except for these "delusive evenings." This passage highlights the blurred boundary between his corporeal reality and the narcotic, hallucinatory world of Catherine. He is portrayed as a "living ghost" caught between life and death, reality and fantasy, which underscores the chapter's exploration of existence, memory, and identity. The imagery of "the vastness of this trembling flesh enclosing his feeble spirit like a flame" poignantly captures the fragility of his being.

- There is a significant reflection on Mr. Spitzer's dead twin brother, who had a very different approach to life. While Mr. Spitzer was thinking "only of the impossible future," his brother "had loved the cruelty of actual life" and seemed to live only in the present moment. The brother's death profoundly affected Mr. Spitzer, dividing his soul almost to lunacy. This contrast illuminates themes of mortality, memory, and the divergent ways individuals confront existence and loss. It also sets up a tension between rationality and passion, foresight and immediacy.
- Mr. Spitzer's passion for collecting butterflies is portrayed not merely as a hobby but as a meditative and symbolic pursuit. The butterflies are described with poetic richness. This imagery conveys a mystical quality, indicating that these ephemeral creatures represent moments of beauty, transformation, and perhaps spiritual truth. His care for butterflies is contrasted with Catherine's visions of "imaginary sea bishops," "mermaids," and other fantastical figures, suggesting a shared yet distinct engagement with the invisible or transcendent world.
- The chapter notes that after Peron's "devastating funeral," many aspects of Mr. Spitzer's life ended, including his butterfly collecting and his "own capacious heart." Peron's pragmatic, earthly interests are contrasted with Mr. Spitzer's more spiritual and impersonal passions. This marks a turning point, emphasizing loss not only of a person but of a way of life and a kind of inner vitality. Peron's skepticism about the afterlife and the significance of spiritual phenomena positions him as a foil to Mr. Spitzer's contemplative nature.
- The closing passage reflects on the indistinguishability of birth and death moments: "if one were suddenly called away in the midst of these proceedings, one should never know whether it was death or birth, beginning or end." This philosophical observation encapsulates a central motif of the chapter, the fluid boundary between beginnings and endings, life and death, seen through the metaphor of the butterfly's emergence and expiration. It also explains the impetus for Mr. Spitzer's studies: the search for meaning in "impalpable butterflies," or elusive spiritual truths.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "He might well have been… among my mother's irresponsible hallucinations." Why does the thought not frighten him?
- Why does Mr. Spitzer find "his only sense of his unbroken continuity" in a room where "no chair had changed its place for years"?
- "One should never know whether it was death or birth." What does the butterfly teach him?

Characters

- Peron had no patience “to wait for the caterpillar to become the butterfly.” What did he love instead?
- Mr. Spitzer gave up his butterflies after Peron’s death. Why give up the thing that consoled him?
- Catherine sees “all these beauties which he could no more see than if he were a mole.” What does each of them see that the other cannot?

Connections

- The butterfly on the flower was “as identical to the flower as twin to twin.” How does that echo the twins?
- In Chapter 24, Catherine imagined “a unicorn wearing a necklace.” Here the unicorn is “enclosed by a picket fence.” What has changed?
- The “painted ladies fluttering through the darkness” are butterflies and street women at once. Where else does Young let one word carry two worlds?

Reflection

- Is a beginning ever distinguishable from an end?
- What do we collect, and why?
- Does the dead person return “except in our thoughts”?

Research: Characters

Joachim Spitzer (Peron’s twin brother)

- The central figure of this chapter, haunted by his brother’s death and Catherine’s narcotic-induced visions.
- A collector and contemplator of butterflies, symbolizing his search for meaning and beauty.
- A man of solitude, haunted by existential questions about life and identity.
- He may be, he admits, “among my mother’s irresponsible hallucinations,” and only in her room is he “still renewed.”
- He gave up his butterflies “two or three years after his brother’s irrational death,” and much else ended “on the day of Peron’s devastating funeral.”
- He finds “his only sense of his unbroken continuity in life” in her room, “perhaps because no chair had changed its place for years.”

Peron Spitzer (Joachim’s twin brother)

- A loudmouthed, pragmatic man who embraced the cruelty of actual life and seemed indifferent to spiritual or afterlife concepts.
- His untimely death deeply affects Mr. Spitzer’s psyche and way of life.
- He loved “the wastrel wheels of chance, the games of loaded dice, the croupiers, the billiard hall artists… the drugged horses.”
- He “would most certainly have seen no value, no unearthly significance as to butterflies or any other spirits.”

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s mother)

- A figure whose narcotic dreams create the enchanted, surreal world Mr. Spitzer visits each evening.
- Her “obtuse faith that he would always return” and her hallucinations sustain Mr. Spitzer’s sense of renewal and continuity despite his personal losses.
- She sees “all these beauties which he could no more see than if he were a mole under the ground,” even when her eyes are closed.

Research: Themes

The Intersection of Life and Death

See: Death and Mortality

- Mr. Spitzer exists in a liminal space, described as “this living ghost,” caught between corporeal reality and spiritual or hallucinatory realms.
- The chapter reflects on how death and memory interact, emphasizing that the dead do not return except in the thoughts of the living.
- The novel suggests a tenuous grasp on identity after death or loss, especially in relation to Mr. Spitzer’s dead twin brother, whose absence profoundly impacts him.

Memory and Identity

See: Memory and the Past · Identity and the Self

- Mr. Spitzer’s struggle to understand “the actual man he was” highlights the elusive nature of self-knowledge and the effect of loss on personal identity.
- Memory serves as a bridge to the past and as a means to preserve continuity, especially through his recollections of his brother.
- The chapter suggests that memory may be deceptive or limited, with “things not possible” entering the mind through “the deceived memory of the unknown.”

The Role of the Narcotic and Hallucinatory World

See: Dreams and Imagination · Opium

- Mr. Spitzer is drawn each evening to a place shaped by Catherine's narcotic dreams, a surreal, enchanted world filled with fantastical figures (e.g., Russian bishops, lighthouse keepers, moon-faced duchesses) and imagery (snow owls, serpents, music boxes).
- This dreamlike space is where, though "still denied and turned away," he is "still renewed," suggesting a complex relationship between reality and illusion.

Butterflies as a Symbol

See: Butterflies and Moths

- Butterflies serve as a powerful metaphor for fleeting beauty, transformation, and the ephemeral nature of life and memory.
- Mr. Spitzer's passion for collecting butterflies reflects his attempt to capture and preserve moments of beauty and meaning amid loneliness and loss.
- The novel details the vividness and variety of butterflies he treasured, symbolizing spiritual messengers or incarnations of beauty in various realms.
- His butterfly collection and memories also contrast with the pragmatic and mundane approach of his brother Peron, who dismissed such ethereal concerns.

Contrast Between Mr. Spitzer and His Brother Peron

See: Twins and Doubles · Peron Spitzer

- Peron is portrayed as a man focused on the immediate, material world, indifferent to spiritual or afterlife concepts, and unconcerned with the delicate beauty Mr. Spitzer values.
- Peron's death, "by accident or suicide," marks a turning point for Mr. Spitzer, leading to the end of many of his pursuits and a deepening of his introspection.

Philosophical Reflections on Birth, Death, and Time

See: Death and Mortality · Time · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth · The Search for Meaning

- The chapter explores the ambiguity between birth and death, suggesting moments in life where beginning and end are indistinguishable.
- Mr. Spitzer muses on how one could never be sure if a certain moment signifies death or birth, reflecting on the cyclical and interconnected nature of existence.
- This ambiguity first set him on his study of the "impalpable butterflies," symbolizing ineffable and transient moments in life.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Butterflies

See: Butterflies and Moths

- Represent transformation, beauty, and the fleeting nature of life.
- Emblematic of Mr. Spitzer’s desire to preserve ephemeral moments amid existential uncertainty.

The Enchanted Dream World

See: Illusion and Reality · Fairy Tales and Folklore

- Filled with fantastical figures and surreal imagery (e.g., snow owls with human faces, headless horsemen, mermaids).
- Symbolizes the blurred line between reality and illusion, life and death, sanity and madness.

The Candle Flames and Venetian Mirrors

See: Mirrors and Reflections · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Reflect the delicate, transient nature of perception and memory.

The Ambiguity of Birth and Death

See: Pregnancy, Birth, and Children

- The duality of beginning and end, highlighting the cyclical nature of existence.

Research: Resources

- “perhaps the Antarctic Queen Maud Mountains”: The Queen Maud Mountains are a major group of mountains in the Antarctic. Roald Amundsen named them in 1911 for Queen Maud of Norway, on his way to the South Pole. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “perhaps Queen Charlotte Islands in a storm”: The Queen Charlotte Islands, now called Haida Gwaii, are an archipelago off the coast of British Columbia in Canada. Captain George Dixon named them in 1787 after his ship, the Queen Charlotte, which was named for George III’s queen.
- “perhaps the headless horseman fording a brook”: Washington Irving’s headless horseman. See the Chapter 26 resources.
- “that spindle of creative flame which is said to sleep in the eternal darkness, weaving our bodies”: Weaving plays a significant role in the mythologies of various cultures, often symbolizing creation, destiny, and even the weaving of life itself. In many stories, weaving is attributed to deities or individuals who control fate or have supernatural

abilities. For example, the Greek Moirae (Fates) spin, measure, and cut the thread of human lives, and the Norse goddess Frigg is associated with weaving and seiðr magic, which involves weaving destiny. Greek mythology: Athena, Arachne, Moirae (Fates), Penelope, Philomela. Norse mythology: Frigg, The Norns. Other mythologies: Neith, Laima, Päivätär and Kuutar, Spider Woman, Arianrhod. In Plato's Myth of Er (Republic 10), the Spindle of Necessity turns the spheres on the knees of Necessity, and her daughters, the Fates, spin each life. In the chapter the "spindle of creative flame" weaves bodies, souls, and dreams, so that identity is woven like a tapestry from many threads of experience and memory, made of many intertwined selves rather than one. See Plato and Platonism, Fate and Chance, and Greek Mythology.

- "deserts suddenly flowering": "The desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1). See The Bible.
- "no patience to wait for the caterpillar to become the butterfly": The Greek psychē means both "soul" and "butterfly." In Apuleius's The Golden Ass (2nd century AD), Psyche is the soul who marries Cupid. See Greek Mythology and Butterflies and Moths.
- "as of the great shell of Venus": Botticelli's The Birth of Venus (c. 1485), the goddess rising from the sea on a scallop shell. See Greek Mythology.
- "a booming sound like that of the loud sea bittern": The bittern, a marsh heron, is known for its deep, booming call. See Birds.
- "these candle flames reflected in dark Venetian mirrors": The mirror-makers of Murano, near Venice, held the secret of fine glass mirrors from the sixteenth century. See Mirrors and Reflections.
- "the Hesperides like spirit messengers": Hesperides in Greek mythology are nymphs of the evening. They guarded the golden apples at the western edge of the world. The skippers, a family of butterflies, are the Hesperiidae, named for them. See Butterflies and Moths.
- "brimstone-colored butterflies": The brimstone (Gonepteryx rhamni), a sulphur-yellow butterfly. Its butter color is one guess at the origin of the word "butterfly."
- "bejeweled butterflies as precious to him as the most precious jewels or mosaic emperors": The emperors are butterflies too, among them the Purple Emperor (Apatura iris).
- "more precious than the cuckoo singing as it flies": Wordsworth's "To the Cuckoo" (1807): "No bird, but an invisible thing, / A voice, a mystery." See Romantic Poets and Birds.
- "the griffins flying over the roof-tops": The griffin, with an eagle's head and wings and a lion's body, guarded gold in Greek legend (Herodotus, Histories 3.116). See Greek Mythology.
- "the imaginary sea bishops with mitre-shaped heads and vestments of silver scales": The Sea Bishop, a fish-man in a bishop's mitre, was said to have been caught off

Poland in 1531. It is pictured in Conrad Gesner's Historia animalium (1558). See Fairy Tales and Folklore.

- "walking in the cool of the evening shade": "They heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Genesis 3:8). See Genesis.
- "the mermaids feeding their infants at their breasts": Mermaids nursing their young. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- "the milk-white unicorn enclosed by a picket fence": The Unicorn in Captivity, the last of the Unicorn Tapestries (c. 1495-1505), shows the unicorn inside a round wooden fence. It hangs at The Cloisters in New York. See the Chapter 24 resources.
- "as she had cared for things invisible made visible to her": "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen" (Romans 1:20). See The Bible.
- "the wastrel wheels of chance, the games of loaded dice, the croupiers": Roulette ("little wheel"), whose croupier spins it. See Gambling and Playing Cards, Fate and Chance, and Peron Spitzer.
- "the harlequins, the painted ladies fluttering through the darkness": Harlequin was the patched, masked trickster of the commedia dell'arte. The Painted Lady (Vanessa cardui) is a butterfly, and "painted lady" was also slang for a woman of the streets. Young lets both meanings fly at once. See Butterflies and Moths.
- "a large correspondence with other meditative butterfly hunters": The great collectors corresponded and traded specimens. Vladimir Nabokov, novelist and lepidopterist, worked on butterflies at Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology (1942-48).
- "the phenomenal world of the butterfly in all its illusive manifestations": For Kant, the phenomenal world is the world as it appears to us, as against the thing in itself (Critique of Pure Reason, 1781). See Kant and Hegel and Illusion and Reality.
- "the butterfly perching upon the flower had seemed as identical to the flower as twin to twin": Zhuangzi (c. 300 BC) dreamed he was a butterfly, and woke to write: "Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man" (trans. Herbert Giles, 1889). See Taoism and Zhuangzi and Twins and Doubles.
- "watching the amazed birth of a butterfly, the first tremblings of the feeble, dew-lit wings": The emergence of the butterfly from the chrysalis is called eclosion. See Butterflies and Moths.

Vocabulary

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Belie

To show to be false.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Bittern

A marsh heron with a booming call.

Brimstone

Sulfur. The brimstone butterfly is named for its sulfur-yellow wings.

Capacious

Roomy; able to hold much.

Corporeal

Having a body; physical.

Croupier

The attendant who runs a gambling table.

Delusive

Misleading; giving a false impression.

Derangement

Disorder, especially of the mind.

Ephemeral

Lasting a very short time.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Expiration

A last breath; death.

Fluted

Marked with long rounded grooves, like a column.

Gossamer

A fine film of cobweb; anything light and delicate.

Griffin

A mythical beast with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Harlequin

The patched, masked trickster of Italian comedy.

Heterogeneous

Made of unlike parts; mixed.

Impalpable

Unable to be touched or grasped.

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Incorporeal

Without a body; not physical.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Macabre

Grim and concerned with death.

Metamorphic

Having to do with a change of form. In geology, rock that heat and pressure have changed.

Mitre

The tall pointed hat of a bishop.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Motley

Of many mixed kinds; the fool’s patched dress.

Mundane

Ordinary; of this world.

Obtuse

Slow to understand.

Paddock

A small field where horses are kept.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Problematical

Doubtful; hard to settle.

Quiescent

Still; at rest.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Torpid

Sluggish; inactive.

Vestments

Robes or garments, especially ceremonial ones.

Vivacity

Liveliness.

Vortex

A whirlpool or whirlwind.

Wastrel

Wasteful; a good-for-nothing.

Weathercock

A weathervane shaped like a rooster; also, a person who changes with every wind.

Chapter 29

Summary

Mr. Spitzer speaks at length about butterflies. He compares the difficulty of telling butterfly from moth to telling brother from brother, and happiness from sorrow. He names species by the hundreds and dwells on the butterfly as psyche, the soul. He gives God many names, from the True Vine to the King of Light “opposed… by the necessary King of Darkness,” and counts the gods who visit Catherine’s bedroom. He describes Peron’s funeral, crowded with gamblers and merry mourners, and the one person who saw his grief, an old lamplighter weeping on a street corner. He wonders whether a sock darned again and again until no original thread remains is still the same sock. The chapter ends with him as a dark atheist who knows more of the life beyond the grave than of this one.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel · Vera Cartwheel · Mr. Chandelier · The Black Coachman

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past

Symbols: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · Music and Instruments · Silence and Deafness · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Bus and the Journey · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Aristotle · Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Augustine and Christian Theology · Buddhism · Descartes and Dualism · Hinduism · Nietzsche · Plato and Platonism · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres · Stoicism

Allusions: American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Angels and Archangels · Astronomy · Dante · Deafness and Sign Language · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer’s Epics · Judaism · Music and Composers · Napoleon and Wellington · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens by discussing the difficulty of distinguishing butterflies from moths, creatures that exist on a boundary line, symbolic of the blurred lines between happiness and sorrow, day and night, life and death.

- Mr. Spitzer’s observations on butterfly and moth behavior are presented as metaphors for life’s uncertainties.
- The mystery of night-flying butterflies and oceanic migrations suggests the theme of wandering souls or psyches, with butterflies representing spiritual voyagers seeking reunion with immortal love.
- The transformation of the caterpillar into the chrysalis and then the butterfly is described with deep symbolism: death and rebirth, the chrysalis as a shroud or mummy, and the butterfly as an epitome of immortality within mortality.
- The enduring and recurring memories of butterflies in Mr. Spitzer’s mind serve as a metaphor for memory, identity, and the persistence of the soul beyond physical death.
- The chapter elaborates on the spectacular colors of butterflies, which are illusions created by light on scales, not pigmentation, paralleling the illusory nature of life and perception.
- The idea that male butterflies emit perfumes to attract scentless females introduces a sensual, almost spiritual dimension to the butterfly’s existence, with Mr. Spitzer even imagining he can smell these perfumes as extensions of his own thoughts or memories.
- Mr. Spitzer reflects on the unknowability of life beyond death, the multiplicity of gods and spirits, and the possibility that butterflies may have originated beyond Earth, highlighting the vast unknown and the limits of human reason.
- The metaphor of the “bipart soul” and the questioning of selfhood and identity are central to the chapter’s existential inquiries. Who really owns a soul, and can one be alive and dead simultaneously?
- The death of Mr. Spitzer’s brother Peron and the impact of that loss loom large. The chapter contrasts Peron’s early death and wild life with Joachim’s (Mr. Spitzer’s) long survival marked by grief, memory, and the pursuit of meaning through butterflies.
- The funeral scene with its bizarre, lively crowd reflects the complexities of social death and memory.
- Mr. Spitzer’s mental state and his ongoing internal struggle with grief and identity are woven through the reflections on butterflies and memory.
- Despite his age and diminished faculties, Mr. Spitzer retains and even deepens his knowledge of butterflies, from common species to exotic and mythical varieties, associating them with gods, myths, and celestial bodies.
- The chapter gives a sense of the butterfly as a cosmic and spiritual symbol, embodying life’s fragility and transcendence.
- The analogy of Mr. Spitzer’s patched socks and tattered coat illustrates the human condition of decay and endurance, the fragility of identity, and the process of continual repair and reinvention.
- The regal butterflies, despite their vulnerability, symbolize dignity and persistence amid mortality.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “Just as it might at times be difficult to distinguish between brother and brother.” Why does the chapter begin with butterflies and moths?
- “Yet butterflies were colorless.” What does that discovery mean to a man who doubts his own reality?
- Are the darned socks “new socks or old”?

Characters

- Joachim played Peron’s role to break off Peron’s affairs. What did it cost him to be taken for his brother?
- At the funeral, only an old lamplighter saw his grief. Why a lamplighter?
- “This dark atheist, this believer in nothing” says no one can “speak with greater authority than he of the life beyond the grave.” How can both be true?

Connections

- The butterflies are “wandering psyches” here. In Chapter 28, the butterfly was “as identical to the flower as twin to twin.” How has the image grown?
- Catherine’s gods include “the goddess with the head of a cat,” and Chapter 26 had the Siamese cats eating from dishes “fit for the dead pharaohs.” What does Egypt mean in this house?
- Catherine the Great’s amethyst bed returns from Chapter 27. What do the beds of the famous dead share?

Reflection

- Is happiness always “tinctured by sorrow”?
- If every thread is replaced, are you the same person?
- Can a grief be too great to be seen?

Research: Characters

Joachim Spitzer (Peron’s twin brother, who allegedly lived)

- An old, reflective lawyer and butterfly collector.
- He embodies melancholy, wisdom, and the quest for understanding life through the metaphor of butterflies.

- His thoughts are clouded by grief and age, yet his butterfly knowledge grows even in mental decline.
- His grief after his brother's death is profound and almost hidden, and it shapes his worldview.
- He played "Peron's role" as his brother's "reluctant go-between," breaking off Peron's affairs by seeming to be him.
- At the funeral he seemed serene, "strange as the phoenix," but he was "utterly devastated," and only an old lamplighter saw his tears.
- He calls himself "this dark atheist, this believer in nothing."
- He gave up knitting socks for himself and Peron, for fear of "the ribbing he would get," and apologizes for the pun.

Peron Spitzer (Joachim's twin brother, allegedly dead by suicide)

- A mysterious, volatile figure who lived a fragmented life.
- His death profoundly impacts Mr. Spitzer, whose mourning colors his worldview.
- Peron's character contrasts with Mr. Spitzer's logical nature; he is seen as a greater mystery.
- His funeral drew "the merriest mourners who ever were": dice shooters, vaudeville stars, mountebanks, and "ruined gamblers."
- He "airily dismissed Joachim from his mind when a purpose had been served" and would have shown "not a spark of gratitude."
- His coffin "had been sealed, and no one had looked upon his dead brother's shattered face."

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera's mother)

- She believes herself "both living and dead, this animated and bejeweled corpse," and imagines the migratory beds of the famous dead drifting to her.
- She is imagined alongside Mr. Spitzer's butterfly reflections, creating a shared atmosphere of mystery.
- She "would spend hours, years talking to someone who was not there."

Research: Themes

Butterflies as Symbols of the Soul and Immortality

See: Death and Mortality · Butterflies and Moths

- Butterflies represent the psyche or soul, echoing the Greek notion where "psyche" means both soul and butterfly.
- They symbolize transformation, immortality, and the elusive nature of life and death.

- Despite their mortality, butterflies are portrayed as perfect images of immortality, transcending their ephemeral physical existence.

The Boundary Between Life and Death

See: Death and Mortality

- The novel explores the liminal space between life and death through Mr. Spitzer's reflections.
- His own existence is depicted as an oscillation between these states, likened to butterflies fluttering between light and darkness.
- The chapter meditates on memory, loss, and the persistence of the soul or consciousness beyond physical death.

Memory, Loss, and Mourning

See: Memory and the Past · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Mr. Spitzer mourns his dead brother Peron, whose life was full of mystery and volatility.
- His butterfly memories serve as a means to keep his brother's essence alive, reflecting the human struggle to grasp and preserve fleeting moments.
- The grief is profound yet hidden, affecting Mr. Spitzer's mental state deeply.

The Mystery of Origin and Existence

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The chapter speculates on the origins of butterflies and existence itself.
- Questions arise about whether butterflies predate time and space or came from cosmic or otherworldly realms.
- This reflects broader metaphysical inquiry into creation, existence, and the nature of the divine.

The Role of God and the Divine

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Augustine and Christian Theology

- Mr. Spitzer contemplates the nature of God, presenting a multifaceted and paradoxical image of divinity.
- God is the King of Light, "opposed… by the necessary King of Darkness," who must "create… bless, absolve, curse, forgive," and is elusive beyond human comprehension.
- The divine is intertwined with the symbolism of butterflies and the cosmic order.

Ephemeral Beauty and the Illusion of Permanence

See: Illusion and Reality

- Butterfly colors are not from pigmentation but the play of light on scales, symbolizing the illusory nature of beauty and permanence.
- Life’s fleeting moments are compared to bubbles: transient, yet significant.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Butterflies

See: Butterflies and Moths

- Transformation, resurrection, soul, ephemeral beauty, and immortality.
- Seen as voyagers between stars, realms, and states of being.
- Metaphors for memory, identity, and the human condition.

Light and Darkness

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Represent knowledge and ignorance, life and death, existence and the unknown.
- Moths are drawn to light, symbolizing the soul’s yearning for truth or transcendence.

Colors and Patterns on Wings

See: Illusion and Reality

- The intricate markings and iridescence symbolize complexity of life, divine artistry, and the illusory nature of reality.

Winter and Hibernation

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- The mourning cloak butterfly hibernating symbolizes endurance, waiting, and the hope of rebirth.

Music and Silent Music

See: Music and Instruments · Silence and Deafness

- Mr. Spitzer’s connection to “silent music” parallels the intangible, mysterious qualities of butterflies and memory.

On Butterfly and Moth Distinctions and Flight Times (Day versus Night)

See: Butterflies and Moths · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- The ambiguous boundary and symbolic contrast between butterflies and moths, day and night, happiness and sorrow.

Butterflies as Psyche and Their Cosmic Journeys

See: The Bus and the Journey · Butterflies and Moths

- The belief that butterflies wander seeking immortal love and may journey through the stars.

Mr. Spitzer’s Butterfly Collection as Memory and Identity

See: Butterflies and Moths

- The collection holds symbolic and emotional weight, paralleling memories of his brother and his own identity.

Reflections on God and Creation

See: Mirrors and Reflections · Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The multifaceted nature of God and the mystery of creation, mirrored in the symbolism of butterflies.

Butterfly Names and Mythological Associations

See: Butterflies and Moths · Angels, Devils, and Myth

- Butterflies named after gods (Aphrodite, Apollo, Morpheus, Leto), mythological figures (Io, Atlas), and symbolic concepts.
- These names embed butterflies in a rich symbolic and cultural context.
- The rich tapestry of cultural and mythological references deepens the symbolism.

The Illusion of Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- Questions about the nature of reality and dreams; whether life is a dream, imitation, or transient impression.

Multiplicity of the Soul

See: Twins and Doubles · Identity and the Self

- The idea of multiple souls or a divided self, reflecting Mr. Spitzer’s sense of identity and the presence of his brother’s spirit within him.

The Paradox of Immortality

See: Death and Mortality

- Butterflies symbolize immortality through transformation, yet their physical life is brief.
- This paradox reflects human mortality and hope for life beyond death.

Research: Resources

- “between the ecstasy of happiness and that of sorrow”: In philosophy, happiness and sorrow are intertwined, with sorrow often seen as a necessary component for experiencing the depth of joy and vice versa rather than as simple opposites. It can be viewed in a number of ways: a dialectical relationship (yin and yang-complementary forces where one cannot exist without the other); the contrast highlights the value of positive experiences; a catalyst for growth, introspection, and a deeper understanding of life’s complexities. Philosophical perspectives are found in Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Stoicism, Utilitarianism, Hedonism, Life Satisfaction Theory. Plato and Aristotle’s eudaimonia where flourishing and well-being are achieved by living a virtuous life, not simply experiencing happiness. Nirvana is a state of liberation from suffering and the cycle of rebirth. Equanimity is the ability to remain calm and balanced in the face of both pleasure and pain. Mr. Spitzer finds it as hard to tell butterfly from moth as “to distinguish between brother and brother or between the ecstasy of happiness and that of sorrow,” for “Seldom did happiness and sorrow occur in pure and disrelated states.” See Aristotle, Plato and Platonism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Stoicism.
- “a butterfly performed its peregrinations by day”: Butterflies are generally active during the day and are brightly colored.
    - Moths are generally active at night and have more muted colors.
- “when the trumpets of Jericho were blowing in the windy gardens”: Trumpets of Jericho refers to Joshua 6:1-27 in the Bible. The walls of Jericho fell after the Israelites marched around the city walls once a day for six days and seven times on the seventh day and blew their trumpets. Here the “trumpets” are also flowers blowing in the garden. See The Bible.
- “clouds of luna moths with moons of passage upon their wings”: Luna moths are found in North America and are commonly known as giant silk moths.
- “clouds of migratory butterflies had sometimes been observed far out at sea”: Butterflies and moths migrate on all continents except Antarctica. They do not like water or mountains but butterflies have been found across an ocean from where they are normally found and scientists do not know exactly how.
- “According to the Greek, the butterfly was psyche”: Butterflies feature prominently in mythology across various cultures. They often symbolize the soul, death, rebirth and transformation and, to some, good luck and messengers from the spirit world. Psyche, in Greek mythology a goddess of the soul, is often depicted with butterfly wings, symbolizing her connection to the soul and transformation. See Greek Mythology, Fairy Tales and Folklore, and the Chapter 28 resources.
    - Moths have a rich history in folklore and mythology and are often associated with death, the afterlife, and even messengers from the spirit world as well as good fortune and cleansing. Black moths can symbolize mortality, divinity, and universal secrets. White moths can symbolize death or ill wishes. Brown moths symbolize the

need for a purification and the slow, unseen destruction of things. Moths in Matthew 6:19-21 are something that destroys treasures on earth so treasures in heaven should be created instead.
    - Butterflies and moths are considered symbols of the soul. In Europe they are symbols of the dead or the newly dead. In Jacobite symbolism they are rebirth and renewal or the ‘return of the soul.’
- “achieving immortality within the logic of mortality”: Immortality within the framework of mortality is a philosophical exploration of extending life, potentially indefinitely, while acknowledging the inherent limitations of our biological existence. Collective immortality suggests that while individuals are mortal, their legacy and impact on others can create a form of enduring existence. Some argue that immortality could strip life of its meaning and urgency, while others believe it could offer an opportunity for greater exploration and purpose. Exploring the concept of death and its implications for our understanding of life and existence is central to the discussion of immortality. Mortality can also be a source of meaning and value, as it can make experiences more precious and urgent. Mr. Spitzer, the surviving twin, knows that his brother will never return, “for the dead did not return except in our thoughts,” so that immortality may lie in memory. The “immortal invalid” and the “deathless dead” are beings neither fully alive nor fully dead.
- “as if there were a frog in his throat”: Nietzsche’s frog is a way to metaphorically understand perspective and belief. Nietzsche believed that all knowledge and values are perspectival, meaning they are shaped by our individual experiences and values. Nietzsche himself borrowed the painters’ term: values may be seen “perhaps from below, ‘frog perspectives,’ as it were” (Beyond Good and Evil, 1886, §2, trans. Helen Zimmern). This is reflected in the idea of a “frog’s perspective,” which can be understood as a belief system that is constantly changing and shifting. The term “frog’s perspective” can also be associated with the idea of narrow-mindedness or being unable to see the bigger picture. Another metaphorical expression, “swallowing the frog” can refer to confronting unpleasant realities or difficult emotions in order to grow or achieve a higher level of understanding. This aligns with Nietzsche’s emphasis on confronting difficult truths and embracing the “unpleasantness” of life. The frog can also symbolize a sense of “being in the muck,” referring to the lower aspects of oneself that need to be overcome in order to reach a higher level of awareness. Frogs appear symbolically connected to themes of life, death, transformation, and communication beyond ordinary human experience. Mr. Spitzer encounters a mute man who uses a frog as a musical instrument, training it to croak and even mimic human speech. The mute grieves the frog’s death, and Mr. Spitzer mourns it as a loss greater than many others. Young’s frog is closer to fragility and loss than to Nietzsche’s perspectives. See Nietzsche.
- “many mementoes of golden coppers dazzling as sunlight and white admirals”: Golden copper is a small butterfly found in Greece and Asia Minor.
    - White Admiral butterfly is found in Europe (Limenitis camilla) and North America (Limenitis arthemis), and the American one is studied for its evolution of mimicry

where the butterfly evolves to resemble another organism.

- “speckled woods and pearl crescents and mountain ringlets”: The Speckled Wood (Pararge aegeria) and Mountain Ringlet (Erebia epiphron) are European. The Pearl Crescent (Phyciodes tharos) is North American.
- “black-bordered white handkerchief which he had worn in his breast pocket over his heart ever since his brother’s death”: Black borders on handkerchiefs and letter paper marked mourning. The wider the border, the closer the loss. See Grief, Loss, and Mourning.
- “The old caterpillar sleeping like the infant Moses in his cradle among the bulrushes”: “She took for him an ark of bulrushes… and laid it in the flags by the river’s brink” (Exodus 2:3). See The Bible.
- “pearly eyes and eyed browns”: The Northern Pearly-eye and the Eyed Brown, butterflies of North American woods and marshes.
- “before the sleeping coachman driving his sleeping horses in the long avenue”: The coachman and horses of Chapter 14. See The Black Coachman and the Chapter 14 resources.
- “the beautiful mourning cloak butterfly hibernating in a hollow tree trunk”: Mourning Cloak butterfly is found across North America and Eurasia, where the English call it the Camberwell Beauty. It lives eleven to twelve months.
  - Some species of adult butterflies do hibernate through the winter.
- “He remembered many meadow browns”: The Meadow brown butterfly is found in Europe, Asia and North Africa.
- “the Essex skippers and the Lulworth skippers”: Essex and Lulworth skipper are European butterflies.
  - Chalkhill blue butterflies are found in Eurasia and North Africa.
  - Orange tips are found in Europe and Asia.
  - Large browns (Large wall brown butterfly) are found in Europe and Asia Minor.
  - Bath whites are found in Europe.
  - Pale veined marble butterflies may be the Marbled White (Melanargia galathea), which is found in Europe, not western North America.
  - Pale clouded yellows are found in Europe and Asia.
  - Purple hairstreaks: the Purple Hairstreak (Favonius quercus) is a European butterfly of oak woods.
  - Black hairstreaks are found in Europe and the Far East.
  - White mountain butterflies are only found in the Presidential Zone of the White Mountain National Forest in New Hampshire.
  - Arctic satyrs are found in North America.
  - Monarchs are found in North America and are famous for their multi-generational, long migration from the north to the south, including into Mexico.

- “regal viceroys and vicereines and small gate-keepers”: The Viceroy (Limenitis archippus) mimics the Monarch, and the Gatekeeper (Pyronia tithonus) haunts the gates and hedgerows of Europe.
    - Red-spotted purples: the Red-spotted Purple is the same species as North America’s White Admiral, Limenitis arthemis.
- “brilliance as of the jewels of Aaron’s breastplate, colors like Japheth’s enlarged opals”: Aaron’s breastplate (Priestly breastplate) was a sacred breastplate worn by the high priest of the Israelites. Its twelve stones stood for the twelve tribes (Exodus 28:15-21). See The Bible and Genesis.
    - Japheth is one of the three sons of Noah in the Book of Genesis.
    - Joseph’s coat of many colors is from Genesis 37:3 where his father gave him a coat of many colors.
- “Yet butterflies were colorless”: Butterflies have two ways to display the color of their wings: ordinary and structural. The ordinary color comes from normal chemical pigments that absorb certain wavelengths of light and reflect others. Structural color stems from the specific structure of the butterflies’ wings and explains why some of a butterfly’s colors seem to shift and appear so intense. It happens when light passes through a transparent, multilayered surface and is reflected more than once. The multiple reflections compound one another and intensify colors.
    - Collectively our brain makes up colors to help humans find food and avoid danger.
- “some of the male butterflies were perfumed”: Both male and female butterflies use pheromones to communicate during the breeding cycle. Many males carry androconia, scent scales, on their wings.
- “when the heavenly harmonies were established on a surer foundation”: The music of the spheres. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres and the Chapter 26 resources.
- “when he was divested of desire”: To Buddhists desire is the craving for worldly pleasure, material objects and immortality. Since all these things can never be attained they only lead to suffering. See Buddhism.
- “to shuffle off these mortal coils”: “When we have shuffled off this mortal coil” (Hamlet 3.1). See Shakespeare and the Chapter 26 resources.
- “the purple pharaohs in their swan boats, the Irish poets wrapped in bands of fog”: The swan boats are from Chapters 2 and 25. The fog-wrapped Irish poets recall Yeats’s The Celtic Twilight (1893). See the Chapter 25 resources.
- “the creature of mystical metamorphosis, of many transfigurations and conversions”: Mystical Metamorphosis generally refers to a transformative process that involves a shift or change, often with a mystical or spiritual element. It can be applied to various contexts, including artistic creations, self-discovery, and the transformative nature of life itself. The term can evoke the natural process of metamorphosis, like that of a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly, which is seen as a symbol of change and

transformation. It can also be used to describe the mystical journey of self-discovery and spiritual growth.

  - Transfiguration refers to a significant transformation, often involving a shift in understanding, perspective, or even a change in one's self or the world. In the Gospels Jesus "was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Matthew 17:2). Nietzsche viewed transfiguration as an aesthetic process, where individuals can transform their brokenness and misfortune into a form of artistic creation and redemption, calling philosophy itself an art of transfiguration (The Gay Science, preface to the second edition, 1887, §3).
  - The philosophy of conversion explores the concept of a significant and transformative change, often in belief, behavior, or identity. It can be viewed within religious, philosophical, and psychological contexts, examining the nature of this change, its motivations, and its implications for individuals and societies. Religious conversion takes different forms in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam; Hinduism has no formal conversion process. In Plato's philosophy, the concept of conversion is represented in the allegory of the cave, where a prisoner's awakening involves turning away from shadows and towards the light of truth. Philosophical conversion can also refer to an existential change in the individual, adopting new moral standards or making a fundamental shift in their understanding of reality. Moral conversion involves a change in an individual's moral beliefs, values, and actions, often driven by a critical self-reflection and a new understanding of moral principles. Philosophers like Descartes and Husserl are considered to have undergone a form of philosophical conversion in their pursuit of universal science and phenomenology, respectively.

- "the expanding crystals of Mr. Chandelier": Catherine's companion of the candles. See Mr. Chandelier.
- "a nine days' wonder at the most": A proverb in Chaucer: "eek wonder last but nyne nyght" (Troilus and Criseyde, c. 1385).
- "eyes like the eyes of Argus": Argus Panoptes was a many-eyed giant in Greek mythology who watched over a heifer-nymph Io. Hera set Argus to guard Io, and after Hermes killed him she set his hundred eyes in the peacock's tail (Ovid, Metamorphoses 1). Young makes the same link in Chapter 5: "eyes like the eyes of Argus if he had lived, full of eyes like the peacock's burning tail." See Greek Mythology.
  - Eyespot mimicry in butterflies is thought to have evolved in order for them to evade predators.
- "those who could hear the grass grow, those who needed less sleep than a bird": Heimdall, watchman of the Norse gods, "needs less sleep than a bird" and "hears the grass grow on the earth" (Snorri Sturluson, Prose Edda, c. 1220).
- "the Happy Isles, the Fortunate Isles, the Isles of the Blessed": The list runs from the Happy Isles to Aldebaran, Venus, the Garden of the Hesperides, the third and seventh heavens, Valhalla, Nirvana, and the happy hunting grounds, and ends: "God was not

God in Himself, Mr. Spitzer believed, but in these pitiful images of God." See Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Astronomy.

  - The Happy Isles are the Isles of the Blessed, as in Tennyson's "Ulysses" (1842): "It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles."
  - Fortunate Isles or Isles of the Blessed are semi-legendary islands in the Atlantic Ocean in Greek mythology.
  - Garden of the Hesperides is Hera's orchard where the golden apples grow.
  - The third heaven in Judaism, Islam, Church of the Latter Day Saints and early Christianity is a division of heaven in religious cosmology as either the abode of God or a lower level of paradise (one of seven). (Wikipedia) Paul was "caught up to the third heaven" (2 Corinthians 12:2).
  - The seventh heaven is one of the seven heavens found in various religious and mythological cosmologies.
  - Valhalla in Norse mythology is the majestic hall located in Asgard and ruled by Odin.
  - Nirvana is a concept in Indian religions that is a state of perfect quietude, freedom, highest happiness, liberation from worldly attachment, suffering and an end to existence.
  - The happy hunting grounds is a concept of the after-life attributed to Native Americans in the US and was most likely made up by US settlers.
  - The stars and planets are rich metaphors for the complexity and mystery of life, death, and the soul's journey. They embody the fluid boundaries between states of being, the transient nature of beauty and reality, and the cosmic scale of human existence.
  - Aldebaran is a giant star in the constellation Taurus.
  - Venus is the second planet from the sun.
- "God, it had been said, was the True Vine": The list mixes titles of Christ from the Bible and Christian devotion (the True Vine, the Bread of Life, the Door, the Good Shepherd, the Light of the World, the Man of Sorrows, the Prince of Peace) with the Great Spirit of many Native American traditions, and Young sums it up: "God was many things to many people." See The Bible, Augustine and Christian Theology, Revelation and the Apocalypse, and Judaism.
  - True Vine: an allegory or parable in John 15:1-5 where Jesus's disciples are described as branches of himself, who is described as the "true vine" and God the Father as the "husbandman."
  - Bread of Life: John 6:35, a statement by Jesus signifying that he is the source of spiritual nourishment and eternal life, not just physical sustenance.
  - Gate and Door (John 10:9): words often used metaphorically to represent opportunities and access to God's presence and salvation, with Jesus himself being referred to as both.

- Wine symbolizes joy, God’s blessings and provisions, and even the blood of Jesus Christ, but it also warns against the dangers of excessive drinking and intoxication. Can represent the fullness of God’s Kingdom (Isaiah’s prophecy).
- Mediator: a go-between or intercessor who reconciles two parties, particularly God and humanity, with Jesus Christ being the one and only mediator, bridging the gap between the divine and human. Moses was also a mediator between God and Israel. Kings, priests, and prophets also acted as mediators in the Old Testament, representing God to the people. 1 Timothy 2:5, Hebrews 8:6, Hebrews 9:15. Young’s “Methator” is likely a misprint for Mediator.
- Only-Begotten: emphasizes the unique relationship and divine nature of Jesus Christ as God’s Son. John 1:14 and John 3:16. The Nicene Creed is a foundational Christian statement of belief that affirms Jesus as the only-begotten Son of God.
- Anointed: signifies being consecrated or set apart for a special purpose or role, often through the ritual of anointing with oil which symbolizes God’s favor, power, and divine authority. 1 Samuel 10:1 and 16:13, Exodus 28:41 and Leviticus 8:12, 1 Kings 19:16. The Hebrew word for anointed is the root term of Messiah meaning The Anointed One. Psalm 23:5.
- Word: the Word refers to the concept that Jesus Christ, the divine Son of God, is the Word who existed with God from the beginning and through whom all things were made. John 1:1.
- Restorer: signifies God’s ability and desire to bring back to their former state, or even to a better state, what has been lost, damaged or broken, whether spiritually, physically, or relationally. The story of Job, Israel, and Jesus are examples.
- Resurrection: the belief that Jesus rose from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion. In Islam, the resurrection is also a key belief.
- Great Spirit: in many American Indigenous Nations represents a divine force that created and sustains all life with interpretations varying across different Nations. The Great Spirit emphasizes harmony with nature, communication, and guidance.
- Light of the World: signifies God’s role as a source of truth, guidance, and salvation, illuminating humanity from spiritual darkness. 1 John 1:5, John 8:12, Matthew 5:14-16, Psalm 119:105.
- Man of Sorrows or Man of Pains is in Isaiah 53:3-5 which describes Jesus Christ (God’s suffering servant) and his suffering and identification with humanity’s pain, as he bore our griefs and carried our sorrows.
- Old Man is an image used to describe God (Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling) with a long white beard and robes. It is not universal but common in Western religious art and literature. Daniel 7:9, Revelation 1:14.
- King of Glory Psalm 24 It emphasizes his majesty, power, and sovereign rules over all creation. Jesus is also referred to as the Lord of glory 1 Corinthians 2:8.
- King of Kings is a title used in Judaism and Christianity to describe God’s supreme authority and power over all earthly rulers and powers. 1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation

17:14, 19:11-16.

- Prince of Peace Isaiah 9:6 is used to describe Jesus and his role as a bringer of peace and reconciliation between humanity and God, as well as among people. Philippians 4:7.
- Good Shepherd: Jesus Christ appears as the guide, the protector, the healer and shepherd of his sheep.
- Narrow Way: Matthew 7:13-14 (narrow gate and broad way), suggesting the path to salvation is difficult and requires effort. Psalm 24:7, John 10:2.
- Rose or Rose of Sharon refers to Jesus Christ as stated in the Song of Solomon 2:1. The rose in general can symbolize love, beauty, and hope. In Islamic mysticism the rose represents divine beauty, as in Saadi's Gulistan (The Rose Garden, 1258). The rose of Tawhid means to make one, to integrate, to bring unity to that which is fragmented.
- Thorn: in 2 Corinthians 12:7 Paul refers to a "thorn in the flesh" given to him by God to keep him humble and dependent on Christ's power, rather than becoming conceited from his revelations. When Paul prayed to God to remove the thorn, God's response was to strengthen him in his weakness rather than remove it.
- Risen: the belief that Jesus Christ through his resurrection demonstrated victory over death and offers hope of eternal life.
- Immanuel: meaning "God with us," a title for Jesus Christ highlighting God's presence and intimate relationship with humanity. Isaiah 7:14 and Matthew 1:23.
- Word made Flesh: God, who through Jesus Christ is believed to have taken on human form, becoming both fully God and fully human. John 1:14, John 1:1.
- Advocate: Jesus Christ, who is seen as mediator and intercessor between humanity and God, pleading for forgiveness and reconciliation. 1 John 2:1. The Holy Spirit is also referred to as an advocate for God.
- Intercessor: Jesus Christ as the ultimate intercessor between God and humanity, always living to intercede for those who come to God through him. Hebrews 7:25, 1 John 2:1, John 1:9, Romans 8:26-28. In Islam Shafa'a is the act of pleading to God by an intimate friend of God for forgiveness. In Judaism Moses is the model of intercessory prayer. In Hinduism the Grand Intercessor symbolizes the Divine Mother's pivotal role in connecting humanity with God, notably embodied by Shri Lakshmi, called purushakara, the one who intercedes with Vishnu for the devotee, in the Sri Vaishnava tradition.
- Dove: a prominent symbol of the Holy Spirit. Matthew 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32, Genesis 8:8-12. In Judaism the dove is a symbol of the soul. In Greek mythology doves are associated with Aphrodite, the goddess of love.
- King of Light often describes God symbolizing purity, truth, and divine presence, contrasting with darkness and evil. 1 John 1:5, John 8:12, James 1:17. God is also referred to as The Lord of Light and The Red God.

    - King of Darkness or prince of darkness refers to Satan, the leader of spiritual forces of evil, who opposes God and His kingdom. Ephesians 6:12, John 8:44, Colossians 2:15, 2 Corinthians 11:14.
- “many other gods, the god of the sun, the goddess of the moon, the judge of the dead, the busy clerk of the underworld”: The gods are Egyptian. Osiris judged the dead, and Thoth, the scribe of the gods, recorded the weighing of the heart (Book of the Dead, spell 125). Young’s list goes on to “the goddess with the head of a cat” (Bastet) and “the jackal god who was the conductor of the dead” (Anubis). See Ancient Egypt.
    - The god of the sun may refer to a solar deity which is a sky deity who represents the Sun, or an aspect of it. Such deities are usually associated with power and strength. Solar deities and Sun worship can be found throughout most of recorded history in various forms. In Egypt, the sun god was Ra. (Wikipedia)
    - The goddess of the moon may refer to a lunar deity and sometimes as a personification. These deities can have a variety of functions and traditions depending upon the culture, but they are often related. Some form of moon worship can be found in most ancient religions. (Wikipedia)
    - The goddess with the head of a cat may refer to Bastet who is a goddess of ancient Egyptian religion, worshiped as early as the Second Dynasty. In ancient Greek religion, she was known as Ailuros.
    - The goddess of wisdom may refer to Ma’at or Isis of Egypt, or to Athena from Greek mythology.
    - The jackal god may refer to Anubis who is the god of death, mummification, embalming, the afterlife, cemeteries, tombs, and the Underworld, in ancient Egyptian religion.
    - The judge of the dead is Osiris, who presided over the weighing of the heart in ancient Egyptian religion. In Christianity, God is the judge of the dead.
    - The busy clerk of the underworld is Thoth, the ibis-headed scribe of the gods, who records the weighing of the heart.
- “screeching harpies, wailing banshees, salamanders”: In Paracelsus, salamanders are the spirits of fire. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.
- “before the separation of the waters from the land, before the division of light from darkness”: “God divided the light from the darkness… and let the dry land appear” (Genesis 1:4, 9). See Genesis.
- “Did it come through the strings of the golden lyre of the stars”: The constellations Lyra, Sagittarius (the archer), Argo Navis, and Centaurus. The Small Magellanic Cloud is a dwarf galaxy, named for Magellan’s crew, who described it on the first voyage around the world (1519-22). See Astronomy, Greek Mythology, and Exploration and the Poles.
    - Argo in Greek mythology was a ship built with the help of the gods which Jason and the Argonauts sailed to find the Golden Fleece.
    - The “small cloud of Magellan” is the Small Magellanic Cloud, named for Ferdinand Magellan, the Portuguese explorer. Explorers in general serve as metaphors for the

human condition: our navigation through life's mysteries, the search for meaning, and the inevitable encounter with the unknown and the unknowable.

- "the Milky Way, the thin stream of stars streaming from the breast of Juno": Juno was an ancient Roman goddess. In the myth, milk spilled from Juno's (Hera's) breast as she nursed the infant Hercules, and became the Milky Way. See Greek Mythology.
- "had originated not at all upon this planet": This may refer to the hypothesis of panspermia, first proposed by Anaxagoras in ancient Greece: life exists throughout the universe and is deposited by comets, meteors, space dust, etc. Svante Arrhenius revived the idea in 1903. (Wikipedia)
- "when one bird should sing for a thousand years": The medieval legend of the monk who listened to a bird for what seemed a moment and returned to find a hundred years gone, told as the tale of Monk Felix in Longfellow's The Golden Legend (1851). See American Writers.
- "flying out of the flame-colored butterfly bushes and elder bushes": This may refer to actual butterfly bushes. They are found on four continents and attract pollinators.
    - Elder bushes, particularly American Elderberry (Sambucus canadensis), attract butterflies with their vibrant, nectar-rich flowers. Besides elderberry, other bushes that attract butterflies include butterfly bush (Buddleja), lilacs, and rose of sharon.
- "They had survived the deaths of stars, the cyclic whirlwinds, the ages of fire, the ages of ice": Each of these has a place in Earth's long history.
    - Fire has been a part of Earth's history for at least 420 million years, coinciding with the emergence of terrestrial plants. Fossil evidence of charcoal, a sign of fire, shows its presence in the Late Silurian period. (Wikipedia)
    - Earth has experienced at least five major ice ages throughout its history, with the most recent one starting about 2.6 million years ago and continuing today. These ice ages are characterized by periods of extensive glaciation followed by warmer interglacial periods. The Huronian ice age occurred around 2.4 to 2.1 billion years ago, the Cryogenian ice age from 720 to 630 million years ago, the Andean-Saharan ice age from 460 to 420 million years ago, the late Paleozoic ice age, and the Quaternary ice age, which began about 2.6 million years ago. The last major glaciation peaked around 18,000 years ago and ended about 11,700 years ago. (Wikipedia)
    - Earth has survived the deaths of countless stars in the Milky Way's past, but this is largely due to the vast distances between stars and the relatively short lifespan of massive stars that undergo supernova explosions. The Sun's death, although inevitable, is a more gradual process.
    - Earth has survived through periods of intense environmental stress. These events have included massive asteroid impacts, volcanic eruptions, and periods of extreme climate change, all of which have led to mass extinctions and reshaped the planet.
    - Butterflies are estimated to have originated around 100 million years ago, splitting from their moth ancestors during the mid-Cretaceous period. This evolution likely

occurred in what is now North or Central America. By the time dinosaurs went extinct 66 million years ago, the six modern butterfly families had already emerged (Akito Kawahara et al., Nature Ecology & Evolution, May 2023).

- “Only his silent music”: There is such a thing as “silent music” that was done by several musicians as experimental. John Cage’s 4’33” (1952) is an example. Mr. Spitzer “had written only silent music, that which, for many years now, no one else had ever heard.” See Music and Composers.
- “his failure to win the object of his love”: Catherine, who refused him (Chapter 26). See the Chapter 26 resources.
- “Perhaps she heard, beyond the wild oceanic gales, a canary twittering”: Catherine’s canary of Chapter 2. See the Chapter 2 resources.
- “It was his own personal theory that a butterfly could hear”: Science has found membranes on some butterfly wings that allow it to hear. The hearing organ on the wings of some butterflies is called Vogel’s organ, after Richard Vogel, who described it in 1912. His own “dead ear” is from Chapter 25. See Deafness and Sign Language.
- “even in a dark night of the human soul”: Dark Night of the Soul is a poem written by a Spanish Christian mystic St. John of the Cross (c. 1578). Dark night in Roman Catholic spirituality describes a spiritual crisis in the journey toward union with God. See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “eye shell, ear shell, wing shell”: Seashells: ear shells are abalones, wing shells are Pteria, and the “golden mouthed” is the gold-mouth turban shell.
- “the bipart soul”: Aristotle’s bipartite psychology divides the soul into two main parts: the rational soul and the non-rational soul. The rational soul is responsible for reason, intellect, and higher thinking, while the non-rational soul encompasses emotions, appetites, and bodily functions. Aristotle further subdivided the rational soul into two parts: the calculating and the scientific. He also divided the non-rational soul into vegetative and appetitive (Nicomachean Ethics 1.13, 6.1). Young sets it beside Mr. Spitzer’s divided self. See Aristotle.
- “thirteen moons in a cloudless sky”: The phrase, 13 moons, often refers to a lunar calendar with 13 months. It is often seen as a way to track the changes in nature and the cycles of life and each moon is associated with specific teaching and practices. Many Indigenous peoples of North America count thirteen moons in a year by the thirteen plates on a turtle’s back, as retold in Joseph Bruchac and Jonathan London’s Thirteen Moons on Turtle’s Back (1992).
- “the bed of the sleeping beauty who would sleep until she was awakened by the kiss of a fairy prince”: Perrault’s “La Belle au bois dormant” (1697) and the Grimms’ “Briar Rose” (1812). See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “the bed of Charlemagne, the amethyst bed of Catherine the Great”: See Napoleon and Wellington, Ancient Egypt, and the Chapter 27 resources.
    - Charlemagne or Charles the Great, Charles I, was King of the Franks, King of the Lombards, and Emperor of the Romans. (Wikipedia)

    - Catherine the Great was known for favoring amethysts and using them in buttons, earrings, necklaces, and hair ornaments. Amethyst has been a gemstone associated with royalty and has been used in jewelry by various royal families. Amethyst has been associated with humility, modesty, and royalty throughout history.
    - Catherine the Great was empress regnant of Russia, the country's longest-ruling female leader.
    - Cleopatra was Queen of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt.
    - Martin Luther was a German professor of theology, priest, author, composer, former Augustinian monk, and seminal figure in the Protestant Reformation.
    - Napoleon (Bonaparte) was a French military and political leader during the French Revolution. He died on his camp bed at Longwood, St. Helena, in 1821.
- "the beds of Arabs whose beds were tents and shrouds in which they wrapped themselves and quietly stole away": "Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs, / And as silently steal away" (Longfellow, "The Day Is Done," 1844). See American Writers.
- "butterflies of the antipodes": The antipodes are the far side of the earth.
- "butterflies in Elysium": Elysium (Elysian Fields) is the Greek religious and philosophical concept of an afterlife. See Greek Mythology.
- "He knew Urania Sloanus, Ornithoptera Paradisea, Saturnia Pyri, eyeless whites, green hair-streaks": Urania Sloanus was a moth from Jamaica last seen in 1895.
    - Ornithoptera Paradisea (Paradise birdwing) is found in New Guinea.
    - Saturnia Pyri (Giant peacock moth) is native to Europe.
    - Eyeless whites may refer to Cabbage White Butterflies or Small White Butterflies. These butterflies are easily recognized by their white wings with small black spots, and are a common sight in many gardens and agricultural areas.
    - Green hair-streaks are small butterflies found in Europe and Asia.
    - Butterflies of the mountain ranges: Himalayas, the Alps, the Andes and Mt. Olympus. Mt. Olympus was the home of the Greek gods.
- "Homeric butterflies which were like persons who had passed through many unknown forms of being": Io Vanessa is the Peacock butterfly. The Aphrodite Fritillary and the Apollo (Parnassius apollo) are named for gods. Morpheus, "the fashioner," shapes dreams in Ovid's Metamorphoses 11. The Atlas moth is among the largest moths in the world. Papilio homerus of Jamaica is the largest swallowtail in the Americas, and Papilio antimachus is the largest butterfly in Africa. See Homer's Epics and Greek Mythology.
- "the last infernal circle of this Divine Comedy": Divine Comedy (c. 1308-21) is a long Italian narrative poem by Dante Alighieri. It depicts the afterlife according to the Western Church medieval world view of the time. (Wikipedia) Like The Pilgrim's Progress (1678) it is a journey from sin to heaven. See Dante.

- “not even a ghostly captain lashed to the mast and wound in a winding sheet of snow”: Longfellow’s “The Wreck of the Hesperus” (1840), where the skipper’s daughter is found “Lashed close to a drifting mast,” with “The salt sea… frozen on her breast.” See American Writers.
- “the Stygian night”: Stygian refers to the River Styx of the underworld in Greek mythology. See Greek Mythology.
- “Were these two souls which moved through him”: The soul is the purported immaterial aspect or essence of a living being. It is typically believed to be immortal and to exist apart from the material world. The three main theories that describe the relationship between the soul and the body are interactionism, parallelism, and epiphenomenalism. Anthropologists and psychologists have found that most humans are naturally inclined to believe in the existence of the soul and that they have interculturally distinguished between souls and bodies. In philosophy, the soul has been the central area of interest since ancient times. Socrates envisioned the soul to possess a rational faculty, its practice being man’s most godlike activity. Plato believed the soul to be the person’s real self, an immaterial and immortal dweller of our lives that continues and thinks even after death. Aristotle sketched out the soul as the “first actuality” of a naturally organized body: form and matter arrangement allowing natural beings to aspire to full actualization. (Wikipedia) The chapter’s “two souls” and “three souls or the amalgamations of many souls” reflect the fragmented and overlapping nature of consciousness and existence. See Descartes and Dualism.
    - In Mongolian shamanism every person has three souls, two mortal and one immortal: “the female spirit of flesh and blood, the male spirit of bones and lastly the Heaven spirits,” in the words of the Mongolian scholar Byambyn Rinchen (1965). The mother’s soul of flesh and blood stays in the body until the heart stops, the father’s soul of bone stays until the bones decay, and the immortal soul rises (Otgony Pürev, Mongolian Shamanism). Other Siberian and East Asian peoples hold related beliefs in more than one soul, such as the Chinese hun and po. Aristotle, Plato, Christian theology, and Hinduism also have versions of a three part soul. Aristotle ranks three kinds of soul by what living things can do: the nutritive soul of growth and reproduction, which plants have; the sensitive soul of perception and movement, which animals add; and the rational soul of thought, which belongs to humans (On the Soul, Book 2). Plato divides the human soul into three parts in the Republic, Book 4: the rational (logistikon), which seeks truth; the spirited (thymoeides), which drives emotion and honor; and the appetitive (epithymetikon), which governs bodily desires.
- “that a new tenant had not taken over an old, empty house”: Spirit possession is an altered state of consciousness and associated behaviors which are purportedly caused by the control of a human body and its functions by spirits, ghosts, demons, angels, or gods. The concept of spirit possession exists in many cultures and religions, including Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Wicca, Haitian Vodou, Dominican Vudú, and Southeast Asian, African, and Native American traditions. Depending on the cultural context in which it is found, possession may be thought of as voluntary or

involuntary and may be considered to have beneficial or detrimental effects on the host. (Wikipedia)

- “the seal of hermetic privacy”: Hermeticism is a philosophical and religious system based on the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, a legendary figure in ancient Greece and Egypt. The core principles are: the belief in a single, transcendent God or cosmic principle, there is a correspondence between the macrocosm (universe) and the microcosm (humans and the world around them) as used in the term “As above, so below,” and, in the modern Hermetic book The Kybalion (1908), seven principles (mentalism, correspondence, vibration, polarity, rhythm, cause and effect, gender). Hermeticism has influenced various religious and philosophical traditions. A “hermetic seal” is airtight, named for Hermes Trismegistus, supposed inventor of the alchemist’s sealed glass. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.
- “even like the midnight rainbow”: A moonbow, a rainbow made by moonlight.
- “Clearwing Aurora”: Clearwing Aurora may refer to a butterfly found in Mexico and South America.
- “Did he not remember Croesus, the golden bambino in a golden cradle”: Croesus may refer to one or two different butterflies found in South America and Indonesia. Ornithoptera croesus, Wallace’s golden birdwing, was found by Alfred Russel Wallace in 1859.
    - Croesus and Fate: Croesus is a rich king in ancient Lydia who is quite enamored with his own wealth. When the wise man Solon comes to visit his kingdom, Croesus asks Solon if he had ever seen greater opulence than his own. In Plutarch’s telling, Solon answers that cocks, pheasants, and peacocks are clothed in colors more brilliant than any king’s finery (Life of Solon 27). Croesus disagrees, and he tries to impress Solon with a list of vanquished foes and claimed territories. Solon still disagrees, telling Croesus that the happiest man he had known was Tellus of Athens, who lived in a prosperous city, saw his children and grandchildren grow, and died bravely in battle for his country. Croesus takes this as an insult and Solon leaves. Soon after Solon’s departure, tragedy befalls Croesus. His son Atys is killed in a hunting accident, and then Emperor Cyrus invades. Cyrus’ army is triumphant, and Croesus’ kingdom is ravaged and Croesus himself is captured and ordered to be executed. As Croesus is about to be burned on a pyre, he cries out Solon’s name. Cyrus stops the pyre to hear what Croesus has to say. Croesus relates Solon’s story to Cyrus, and Cyrus is moved by the notion that Fate can bring misery to a rich man and happiness to a poor man. Croesus is freed and the emperor and the king become good friends. (Herodotus, Histories 1.30-45, 1.86-88)
    - “False Greatness” by Isaac Watts: “Thus mingled still with wealth and state, / Croesus himself can never know; / His true dimensions and his weight / Are far inferior to their show.”
- “out of the whirlwind”: “Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind” (Job 38:1). See The Book of Job.

- “as the plume of Raphael”: The plume (feather) of Raphael may refer to the archangel. See Angels and Archangels.
- “as the Venus-comb upon the beach”: The Venus comb murex (Murex pecten), a seashell with long comb-like spines.
- “the nebulous mass of golden light like hairs surrounding the nucleus of a comet”: “Comet” comes from the Greek komētēs, “long-haired,” for the glowing coma around its nucleus. See Astronomy.
- “How out of the heart of darkness”: Heart of Darkness (1899) is a novella by Polish-English novelist Joseph Conrad. The novel is widely regarded as a critique of European colonial rule in Africa, while also examining the themes of power dynamics and morality. (Wikipedia)
- “one rose evoke a garden, one sea shell evoke a sea”: “To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower” (Blake, “Auguries of Innocence,” c. 1803). See Romantic Poets.
- “old Beau Brummells who had risen from their graves”: The dandies of Chapter 24. See the Chapter 24 resources.
- “where the turf meets the surf”: The slogan of the Del Mar racetrack, opened in 1937 by Bing Crosby and Pat O’Brien. Crosby sang “Where the Turf Meets the Surf.” See Gambling and Playing Cards and Peron Spitzer.
- “merry andrews and fat aldermen”: A merry-andrew was a clown at a fair, and a domino a hooded masquerade cloak.
- “wild goose chases and pretty chicks… pigs in the poke”: Mercutio’s “Nay, if our wits run the wild-goose chase” (Romeo and Juliet 2.4). A “pig in a poke” is a bargain bought unseen in its sack. See Shakespeare.
- “strange as the phoenix, the perfumed bird of Arabia arising from its ashes”: Herodotus describes the phoenix that comes from Arabia every five hundred years (Histories 2.73). See Greek Mythology.
- “an old lamp-lighter”: Lamplighter is a person employed to light and maintain candle, oil, or gas street lights. Very few exist today.
- “like Jacob with his ladder of dreams”: Jacob’s Ladder is a ladder leading to heaven that was featured in a dream the biblical Patriarch Jacob had during his flight from his brother Esau in Genesis 28:12. The significance of the dream has been debated, but most interpretations agree that it identified Jacob with the obligations and inheritance of the people chosen by God, as understood in Abrahamic religions. (Wikipedia) The King James text reads: “And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it.” See Genesis.
- “the similitude of death, its twin brother”: Sleep and Death are twins in Hesiod (Chapter 25), and sleep is “death’s counterfeit” in Macbeth 2.3. See Twins and Doubles and Shakespeare.

- “the powdery pollen gold freighting the bright wings of transcendental butterflies”: Transcendental butterflies may refer to the Butterfly curve which is a transcendental plane curve discovered by Temple H. Fay (“The Butterfly Curve,” American Mathematical Monthly 96, no. 5, May 1989, 442-443).
- “the veined leaf green, the milky midnight blue”: The veined leaf green is a butterfly found in Europe and Asia.
  - The milky midnight blue is found in tropical Mexico, Central and South America.
- “the old Diomedes with planets and half moons”: Diomedes (Deudorix) is a butterfly found in Africa. See Homer’s Epics.
  - Diomedes is a prominent figure in Greek mythology. He is known as a brave and skilled warrior who participated in the Trojan War and is renowned for his exploits in Homer’s Iliad.
- “the ethereal tortoise-shell”: Tortoise-shell butterflies are found in Europe, Asia, and North America.
- “the white-veined blacks, the black-veined marble whites”: The white-veined blacks are a common butterfly found in northwest Africa and Asia.
  - The black-veined marble white may be the Black-veined White (Aporia crataegi), a large butterfly of Europe that died out in Britain in the 1920s.
- “butterflies as big as the wailing lapwing”: Lapwing is a ground nesting bird found in Europe. See Birds and Astronomy.
  - Tropic of Cancer (Northern Tropic) is the most northerly circle of latitude on Earth.
  - The Tropic of Capricorn (Southern Tropic) is the circle of latitude closest to the equator.
  - Aurora Borealis is the northern lights.
  - Aurora Australis is the southern lights.
- “the emerald, the amethyst, the coxcomb red”: The emerald (Papilio palinurus) butterfly is found in Southeast Asia.
  - The amethyst may refer to the Purple emperor butterfly found in Europe and Asia.
  - The “coxcomb red” most likely refers to the Coxcomb Prominent moth (Ptilodon capucina). This moth is named for the white tuft of scales on its head, which resembles a coxcomb or the crest of a rooster. It’s a fairly common moth in Britain and is known for its camouflaged appearance when at rest, resembling a dead leaf. The moth’s caterpillar is green with two red projections and has a unique defense mechanism of curling its head back when alarmed.
- “the red admiral of the light-wing fleet”: The red admiral is a butterfly found on five continents.
- “the old butterfly geographers drawing their maps of this world”: The Piri Reis map (1513), drawn by an Ottoman admiral from older sources.

- “the uniform of the checkered skipper”: The checkered skipper is a butterfly found in the US.
  - The silver-spotted skipper is a butterfly found in North America.
  - The grizzled and dingy skippers are butterflies found in Europe and Asia.
  - The greylings is a butterfly found in Europe.
  - Adonis blues butterflies are found in Europe and Asia.
  - Wood white butterflies are found in Europe.
- “Io on one wing and Io on the other wing as if they knew they had two souls”: Io was one of the mortal lovers of Zeus in Greek mythology. See Greek Mythology and Twins and Doubles.
- “the cabbage-haunting butterflies”: Cabbage white butterflies are found in Europe and North America. See the Chapter 28 resources.
  - The painted lady is a butterfly found on every continent except Antarctica and South America.
  - Swallowtail butterflies are found mostly in tropical regions but are found on every continent except Antarctica.
- “crowding through his mind in empty hours”: Young is describing a hyperfixation where a person is completely engrossed by something, to the point where it becomes all-consuming and disrupts day-to-day functioning. It gets hard to focus on anything other than the object of hyperfixation. With hyperfixation, passion can turn into obsession. The object of interest takes up so much time, it comes at the cost of personal wellbeing, relationships, and responsibilities. It can even be a symptom of an underlying mental health condition. (Jackie Menjivar, “What Is Hyperfixation, and How Can You Manage It?” I Don’t Mind, March 8, 2022)
- “the harmless hobby of knitting fine socks”: Knitting’s history traces back to the Middle East and North Africa, with evidence suggesting its origins around the 10th century. It spread to Europe via trade routes and became a widespread craft.
- “the ribbing he would get”: Ribbing is both the knitted rib of a sock and teasing, and Mr. Spitzer apologizes for the pun. See Comedy in Chapter 29.
- “to ask himself the philosopher’s question”: Mr. Spitzer has applied the philosophical question of the Ship of Theseus to his socks. Ship of Theseus is a thought experiment that questions if an object that has had all of its components replaced remains fundamentally the same object. There have been three proposed solutions: there is no identity over time, four-dimensionalism, and according to cognitive science it is an example of extreme externalism, the assumption that what is true in our minds is true in the world. In philosophy of mind, the ship is replaced by a person, whose identity over time is called into question. The puzzle is from Plutarch, Life of Theseus 23.
- “and all the dogs of creation would bark at him”: The nursery rhyme “Hark, hark, the dogs do bark, / The beggars are coming to town; / Some in rags, and some in tags.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore.

- “butterflies of Byzantium”: The gold mosaics of Byzantine churches, made of small pieces of colored glass and stone, as the next lines say.
- “purple emperors the wind had blown ten thousand miles from shore”: The Purple Emperor of Chapter 28. See the Chapter 28 resources.
- “old monarchs with their orange-brown wings”: King butterfly is another name for a Monarch butterfly.
  - Queen butterflies are found in North and South America.
  - Cardinal butterflies are found in Europe and Asia.
- “He swore that their chant would be almost Gregorian”: Gregorian chant is a form of monophonic, unaccompanied sacred song in Latin of the Roman Catholic Church. (Wikipedia) See Music and Composers.
- “this dark atheist, this believer in nothing”: Mr. Spitzer considers himself a dark atheist. A negative atheist is someone who does not believe in the existence of deities but does not explicitly assert that there are none. (Wikipedia)

Vocabulary

Amalgamation

A blending into one.

Ambient

Surrounding.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Aperture

An opening.

Apocryphal

Of doubtful truth.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Attar

A fragrant oil of roses.

Banshee

In Irish folklore, a spirit whose wail foretells a death.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Bindlestiff

A hobo who carries his belongings in a bundle.

Breastplate

A piece of armor covering the chest.

Burnished

Polished until shining.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Chimerical

Imaginary, fanciful, or wildly unrealistic. From the Chimera, the fire-breathing monster of Greek myth made of a lion, a goat, and a serpent.

Coalescence

A growing together.

Cockle

A small saltwater clam with a ribbed, heart-shaped shell. A cockleshell boat is a small, flimsy one.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Conformation

The shape and proportions of an animal’s body, especially a horse’s.

Coxcomb

The red crest of a rooster, or the jester’s cap shaped like one; also a vain, foolish man.

Crow’s-nest

A lookout platform high on a ship’s mast.

Deference

Polite respect, or yielding to someone else’s wishes or judgment.

Demented

Out of one’s mind.

Dervish

A member of a Sufi order known for whirling in worship.

Devious

Winding; straying from the direct way.

Diaphanous

Delicate and translucent.

Diminuendo

A gradual softening in music.

Dominoes

A game played with small oblong tiles marked with spots.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Ducal

Belonging to a duke.

Effigy

A sculpture or model of a person, especially one lying on a tomb.

Emanation

Something that flows out from a source.

Empyreal

Of the highest heaven.

Ephemera

Things that last a very short time; the mayflies.

Epitome

A perfect example; a summary.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Evanescent

Quickly fading or vanishing.

Extant

Still existing.

Extempore

Spoken or done without preparation.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Gannet

A large white seabird that dives for fish.

Gauze

A thin, transparent fabric.

Grizzled

Streaked with grey.

Harpy

In Greek myth, a monster with a woman’s face and a bird’s body.

Headland

A high point of land jutting into the sea.

Heterogeneous

Made of unlike parts; mixed.

Hulk

The body of an old ship; a big, clumsy person or thing.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Inane

Silly; empty of meaning.

Incongruent

Not in agreement.

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Inviolable

Never to be broken or harmed.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Keel and list

To keel over is to capsize, with the keel, the ship’s backbone along the bottom, turning upward. To list is to lean to one side, usually from water taken on.

Lagoon

A stretch of shallow water separated from the sea by a reef or sandbar.

Lambent

Softly glowing or flickering.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Luna moth

A large pale green moth of North America with long tails on its hind wings.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Mercurial

Quick and changeable in mood. From the swift Roman messenger god Mercury and the liquid metal named for him.

Metamorphic

Having to do with a change of form. In geology, rock that heat and pressure have changed.

Monsoon

A seasonal wind in South Asia that brings months of heavy rain.

Morgue

A place where the bodies of the dead are kept for identification.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Mountebank

A swindling showman.

Mutable

Changeable.

Myopic

Nearsighted.

Myriad

A countless number.

Myrrh

A fragrant resin used in incense and embalming.

Nadir

The lowest point.

Nocturnal

Of or happening in the night.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Oscillate

To swing back and forth.

Pander

A go-between in love affairs.

Peregrinations

A journey, especially a long or meandering one.

Phaeton

A light, open, four-wheeled carriage; also a name for some seashells.

Phantasmal

Ghostly; like a phantom or an illusion.

Piebald

Of a horse: with irregular patches of two colors, usually black and white.

Plumage

A bird’s feathers.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Preternatural

Beyond what is natural.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Pristine

Fresh and pure, as if new.

Problematical

Doubtful; hard to settle.

Protracted

Drawn out.

Quixotic

Idealistic and impractical, like Don Quixote.

Reciprocation

A return in kind.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Revivification

A bringing back to life.

Scintillation

A spark or flash.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Sibyl

A prophetess of the ancient world.

Similitude

A likeness.

Skein

A loosely coiled length of yarn or thread.

Slumberous

Sleepy; inducing sleep.

Snood

A hairnet or band worn to hold the hair at the back of the head.

Sombre

Dark and grave.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Soporific

Causing sleep; dulling the senses.

Spectre

A ghost.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Spruce

An evergreen tree of northern forests.

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Stygian

Of the river Styx in the Greek underworld; dark and gloomy.

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Tincture

To tinge.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Tremulous

Trembling; quivering.

Tuberose

A Mexican plant with heavily fragrant white flowers.

Tumultuous

Loud, wild, and disorderly.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Unctuous

Oily and soothing. Young spells it “unctious.”

Undulating

Rising and falling in waves.

Volatile

Changeable; quick to evaporate.

Winding sheet

The cloth a corpse is wrapped in for burial.

Chapter 30

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Catherine and Mr. Spitzer discuss unreal persons as if they were real, especially Eustace, an invisible visitor who takes many shapes. Then Cousin Hannah Freemount-Snowden enters through memory. She was a Boston suffragette, archer, duelist, climber, and traveler who crossed deserts disguised as an Arab king, and she seemed to foresee assassinations. She is now dead and buried. She never cared for the Spitzer twins. Hannah once rode in Arab disguise against Spanish soldiers to defend a caravan of Riffs, and she was dedicated to "the overthrow of the dream and of the dreamer." Catherine longs for her company and imagines sending her to search the Alps for Jock, Catherine's husband, who vanished while mountain climbing.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Eustace · Joachim Spitzer · Cousin Hannah · Jock Cartwheel · Vera Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Freedom and Escape · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Butterflies and Moths · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Moon and Stars · Mountains · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Marguerite Young on Her Craft

Allusions: Ancient Egypt · Angels and Archangels · Astronomy · Dante · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Napoleon and Wellington · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with Catherine and Mr. Spitzer endlessly discussing unreal persons, treating the dead as if they were alive and present. Catherine converses with an invisible figure named Eustace, who takes on many forms symbolizing the fluidity and multiplicity of identity, and the suspension of natural laws in her mental state. This

passage highlights her detachment from the tangible world and immersion into a dreamlike or hallucinatory realm.

- Catherine imagines inviting ancient relatives and historical personages to play card games. Cousin Hannah, a figure of vast duplicity and adventurous spirit, is considered an ideal partner. This fantasy reflects Catherine's desire for companionship and the bridging of past and present through imagination, as well as her yearning for connection beyond loneliness.
- A substantial portion of the chapter is devoted to a vivid, expansive biography of Cousin Hannah. She is depicted as a fearless, resourceful, and mercurial adventurer who defied conventional limits of gender and geography. Her life spans numerous cultures and eras symbolically: an archer, dueler, mountain climber, yachtsman, and traveler through remote deserts and cities. Her knowledge of global politics, secret whispers, and historical assassinations underscores a mystical or prescient quality. Importantly, Cousin Hannah embodies a rebellious spirit dedicated to overthrowing dreams and illusions, including those of Catherine.
- Despite facing numerous mortal dangers, Cousin Hannah survives through her prescience and determination. The narrative contrasts her survival with the fate of others lost to the elements or violence. Her life is portrayed as a continuous journey through perilous lands, reinforcing themes of resilience and the confrontation of fate.
- Catherine romanticizes and mourns her lost husband, Jock Cartwheel, imploring Cousin Hannah to search for him in the Alps and other remote places. This longing underscores Catherine's refusal to accept finality and death, blending memory, fantasy, and hope. The imagery of snow-capped peaks, dark valleys, and silent towers evokes a haunting atmosphere of loss and the persistence of love beyond death.
- Catherine imagines herself sailing two ships simultaneously, one for the living and one for the dead, symbolizing a liminal existence between life and death, consciousness and unconsciousness. The dialogue with the star watchman, reflecting on stars, tides, and the nature of shore and shorelessness, deepens the metaphysical dimension of the chapter, contemplating the mysteries of existence, transition, and the cosmos.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "The real persons were apparently the only persons who were unreal to my mother." Who is real in Catherine's room?
- Cousin Hannah was "dedicated to the overthrow of the dream and of the dreamer." Why does Catherine admire her?
- "Because of the loss of a skirt… her entire life had been perhaps an act of sorrow and redemption." What might that loss have been?

Characters

- Hannah “had never cared for the Spitzer boys” and called both brothers “profligates.” Is she right?
- Hannah rides against the Spanish soldiers, “forgetting that she was a stockholder of American firearms.” What does that detail say about her?
- Catherine asks of one “not likely to respond,” “Have you seen my husband?” What does she refuse to accept?

Connections

- Catherine tried to telephone Cousin Hannah on a number “disconnected long ago” (Chapter 24). How does this chapter answer that call?
- The blackamoor messenger returns from Chapter 24, now “in a fringe-topped surrey.” What do these servants of her dreams have in common?
- Catherine sails “one ship for the living, one for the dead.” Where else has a ship carried the dead in this novel?

Reflection

- Can a life of adventure be its own kind of escape?
- What does it mean to be “an emancipated extension” of someone else?
- “Watchman, where is the shore?” To whom do we put that question?

Research: Characters

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s mother)

- Portrayed as a figure lost between reality and fantasy.
- Engages in conversations with unreal or invisible persons such as “Eustace” who changes forms and identities.
- She seems to live in a dreamlike state, haunted by memories and by the presence of the dead.
- Experiences sudden emotional outbursts and imagines elaborate scenarios involving historical and mythical figures.
- Wishes for company and distraction, often imagining card games with ghostly or imaginary partners.
- Struggles with loss, particularly the absence of her husband, and clings to hope that he might still be found or returned.

Eustace

- An invisible, multi-faceted figure in Catherine's mind.
- Takes on various guises: a mocking bird, an old woman, an old bearded man, a Venetian valet, a murdered gentleman, a blind astronomer, even Wellington.
- Represents the fluidity of identity and the suspension of natural laws in Catherine's opium dreams.

Mr. Spitzer

- A companion to Catherine, often silent and seemingly unable to anchor her in reality.
- His presence is uncertain, described as an abstraction yawning like cosmic ideas.
- Catherine often ignores or addresses him tentatively.
- He "seemed to indulge, often through his silence, her every mood, even her ignoring him."

Cousin Hannah Freemount-Snowden

- In stark contrast to Catherine, she is a robust, adventurous, and mercurial woman.
- Known for her vast, almost mythical experiences across the globe, including deserts, mountains, and ancient cities.
- Has a reputation for prescience, having foreseen many historical assassinations and events.
- Skilled in various martial and survival arts: archery in Persia, dueling in France, mountain climbing, horseback riding, balloon ascensions.
- Has traveled extensively in disguise, infiltrated hostile territories, and defied dangers.
- Represents a force of action, clarity, and determination, dedicated to overthrowing dreams and illusions.
- Symbolizes a bridge between myth and history, reality and fantasy, embodying strength and resilience.
- She rode in Arab disguise against Spanish soldiers to defend a caravan of Riffs, for "her proud heart could not endure injustice of any kind in this world."
- She is buried in a New England churchyard, "her jeweled sword at her side," in "her old grey army coat" worn in "wars for the emancipation of woman."
- Young built her from two true stories: Charles Studin's suffragist "battle-axe," "one of the original bloomer girls," whose sealed trunks held "a complete bridal trousseau" each, and two bloomer girls on an Alpine summit, the younger lost going back for her skirt (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965).
- She "had never cared for the Spitzer boys," predicted they "would come to no good end," and called both brothers "profligates."

- Catherine sees her as “an emancipated extension of herself,” who might “rescue my mother from the opium dreams of her dead loves.”

Jock Cartwheel

- Late husband of Catherine who is described as a philanderer who enjoyed dogs, sailing, and mountain climbing.
- He disappeared while mountain climbing.
- Catherine imagines him “lifting a beautiful lady’s skirts in clouds and winds,” “philandering,” or “racing dogs through snow clouds.”

Research: Themes

Reality versus Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality

- Catherine’s conversations with invisible and shifting figures highlight the tension between what is real and imagined.
- The suspension of natural laws around Eustace suggests the fluidity of identity and reality within opium dreams.
- Cousin Hannah’s practical and adventurous life contrasts with Catherine’s dreamlike existence, yet even Hannah’s life borders on legend.

Memory and the Past

See: Memory and the Past

- The narrative dwells on historical figures and events (e.g., Russian czar’s murder, archdukes’ assassinations, Saladin, Solymon the Magnificent).
- Cousin Hannah’s knowledge spans centuries and cultures, emphasizing the weight of history and memory.
- Catherine’s longing for her lost husband and her imaginary invitations for card games with ancestors suggest an attempt to connect with the past.

Death and Immortality

See: Death and Mortality

- Catherine imagines the dead as still living and interacting.
- Cousin Hannah’s death is ambiguous, with no clear date, emphasizing the elusive nature of mortality.
- Catherine’s hope that her husband still exists somewhere reflects denial of death and the desire for immortality.

Adventure and Escape

See: Freedom and Escape

- Cousin Hannah embodies the spirit of adventure, traveling to forbidden places and surviving countless dangers.
- Her life serves as a counterpoint to Catherine's static, opium-induced dreaming.
- The recurring imagery of ships, deserts, and mountains emphasizes journeys both physical and metaphysical.

The Feminine and the Skirt

See: Women, Gender, and Marriage

- Repeated references to skirts, including the loss of a skirt as symbolic sorrow and redemption.
- Cousin Hannah's life is linked metaphorically to skirts, suggesting themes of femininity, identity, and transformation.
- "Cousin Hannah's entire history, it seemed now, had been a history of skirts."

The Cosmic and the Mystical

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- Frequent cosmic imagery: stars, planets, moons, constellations, and celestial events.
- Catherine's dialogue with cosmic elements (stars, waves, tides) reflects a mystical quest for meaning beyond the earthly.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Eustace

See: Eustace

- Shape-shifting figure symbolizing the mutable nature of identity and reality.

Skirts and Whispers

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Symbolize femininity, mystery, loss, and redemption.

Mountains and Deserts

See: Mountains · Exploration and the Poles

- Represent challenges, isolation, and spiritual journeys.

Ships and Seas

See: The Sea and Water

- Metaphors for passage between life and death, reality and dream.

Stars and Celestial Bodies

See: Moon and Stars

- Symbols of guidance, mystery, and the infinite.

Sword of Ice

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Represents Cousin Hannah's ruthless clarity and decisive action cutting through illusions.

Research: Resources

- "She would rather address her solicitous remarks to Eustace": Eustace is a name of Greek origin that means fruitful or abundant in grain. It can also mean steadfast or stable. (Wikipedia) Eustace may be Saint Eustace since she mentions "golden-antlered stags." St. Eustace converted to Christianity while out hunting after seeing a cross between the deer's antlers and hearing the voice of God. The golden-antlered stags also recall the Ceryneian Hind with golden antlers, Heracles' third labor. See Eustace and Greek Mythology.
- "an old man bearded like the cypress": The cypress is the tree of graveyards. In Ovid, the boy Cyparissus, grieving a pet stag he killed, becomes a cypress, the tree of mourning (Metamorphoses 10). See Grief, Loss, and Mourning.
- "Wellington riding at the head of his troops": Arthur Wellesley, first Duke of Wellington, was a famous military leader and political figure in 19th century England. See Napoleon and Wellington.
- "Sometimes he was a Venetian gentleman's murderous valet": A Venetian gentleman's murderous valet may refer to Lord William Russell who was a British aristocrat and murdered by his valet, Francois Benjamin Courvoisier (1840).
- "He was a blind astronomer": Galileo went blind in 1638. See Astronomy.
- "Eustace, Eustace! Oh, is it you, Eustace dear": At Iowa (1955-57), Young "would pause to greet Henry James at the door" of her classroom (David O. Dowling, "The Guru," in A Delicate Aggression: Savagery and Survival in the Iowa Writers' Workshop, Yale University Press, 2019). She kept portraits of dead writers on her walls. Catherine greets the invisible Eustace the same way. Young also told Studs Terkel of a friend in a New York hospital who overheard "one of the richest ladies in America," dying, greet guests who were not there: "Eustace, turn to the left. Oh, isn't that Mr. Henry James?

How do you do, Mr. James?" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Marguerite Young on Her Craft.

- "a game of whist or loo or poker": Whist, whose rules Edmond Hoyle published in 1742, and loo, the gambling game of Pope's age. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- "a satrap clothed in Saturnian gold or a wild, bearded Cossack": A satrap was a Persian provincial governor. Saturn ruled the golden age.
- "who had gone to join her fathers long ago": "So David slept with his fathers" (1 Kings 2:10). See The Bible.
- "never worn the white plume of cowardice": This is a reference to the White Feather Campaign of World War I, begun in August 1914 by Admiral Charles Fitzgerald, in which women in Britain handed white feathers to men in civilian dress to shame them into enlisting before conscription came in 1916. The symbol came from cockfighting, where a white feather in a gamecock's tail was taken as a sign of poor breeding and a poor fighter. It is the subject of A. E. W. Mason's 1902 novel The Four Feathers, whose hero receives white feathers when he resigns his commission before his regiment goes to war. (Wikipedia) Henry of Navarre's white plume, by contrast, was a sign of courage: "Rally to my white plume" (Ivry, 1590). See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "blowing like Gabriel's skirts": Gabriel, the archangel of the Annunciation (Luke 1:26). The Bible does not name the angel of the last trumpet; the spiritual "Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel," printed in Slave Songs of the United States (1867), gives it to Gabriel. See Angels and Archangels.
- "Cousin Hannah Freemount-Snowden, the jolly old soul": "Old King Cole / Was a merry old soul" (nursery rhyme, in print by 1708). See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- "the suicidal butterfly-chaser chasing himself with his butterfly net": Mr. Spitzer's butterflies of Chapters 28 and 29. See Joachim Spitzer and Butterflies and Moths.
- "She had known of the murder of the Russian czar and royal family": The murder of the Russian czar and royal family may refer to the execution of the Romanov family (1918).
- "the murder of the archduke at Sarajevo": The murder of the archduke at Sarajevo may refer to the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand which started World War I (June 28, 1914).
- "great sultans of the past such as Saladin": Young's list runs from Saladin, "the opposer of the Crusaders," to "Solymon the Magnificent" (Suleiman the Magnificent, 1494-1566, the Ottoman sultan), Sardanapalus, and the Seleucid kings of Syria.
    - Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub or Saladin was the founder of the Ayyubid dynasty. Hailing from a Kurdish family, he was the first sultan of both Egypt and Syria. He was an important figure of the Third Crusade. At the height of his power, the Ayyubid realm spanned Egypt, Syria, Upper Mesopotamia, the Hejaz, Yemen, and Nubia. (Wikipedia) See Ancient Egypt.
    - Suleiman the Magnificent was the Ottoman sultan between 1520 and his death in 1566. Under his administration, the Ottoman Empire ruled over at least 25 million

people.

  - Sardanapalus was, in Greek legend, the last king of Assyria, a decadent who died in a pyre of his own treasures. The name is probably a corruption of Ashurbanipal (reigned 669-c. 631 BC). He is the subject of Byron's play Sardanapalus (1821) and Delacroix's painting The Death of Sardanapalus (1827).
  - Seleucus I Nicator was a Macedonian Greek general, officer and successor of Alexander the Great. He went on to found the Seleucid dynasty.
  - Seleucus II Callinicus was a ruler of the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire. His reign was a time of great turmoil and fragmentation of the Seleucid Empire.
  - Seleucus III Ceraunus was the eldest son of Seleucus II Callinicus and Laodice II and for a few years was king of the Seleucid Empire. He was assassinated in Asia Minor by courtiers during a campaign against Attalus I of Pergamon.
  - Seleucus IV Philopator was a ruler of the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire. He was assassinated by Heliodorus, one of his leading bureaucrats. He is mentioned in 2 Maccabees in the Old Testament.
  - Seleucus V Philometor was the ruler of the Hellenistic Seleucid kingdom. The epithet Philometor means "mother-loving" and in the Hellenistic world usually indicated that the king's mother acted as co-regent; here it was his mother, Cleopatra Thea. He was killed by his mother in order to advance his younger brother, Antiochus VIII, to the throne. (Wikipedia)
- "many Bengal lancers": The Bengal Lancers were cavalry of British India. The phrase is from Francis Yeats-Brown's memoir The Lives of a Bengal Lancer (1930), filmed in 1935.
- "Cousin Hannah had known the politics of all those nations": Most of the main characters recite or list facts, real or imaginary. This may be a critique of school learning or rote memorization or The three Rs. The three Rs are three basic skills taught in schools: reading, writing and arithmetic. The phrase appears to have been coined at the beginning of the 19th century. The skills themselves are alluded to in St. Augustine's Confessions where students learn to read, and write, and do arithmetic. (Wikipedia) See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- "conversations over the telephone which had nearly always rung in an empty house": Catherine's calls to Cousin Hannah in Chapter 24. See the Chapter 24 resources.
- "by a blackamoor in a fringe-topped surrey": See the Chapter 24 blackamoor. The phrase recalls "The Surrey with the Fringe on Top" (Oklahoma!, 1943). See the Chapter 24 resources.
- "She had been a great archer in Persia, a great dueler in France, an expert with sword and gun in Rumania": Cousin Hannah takes up sports and roles reserved for men in her time: archer, dueler, mountain climber, yachtsman, explorer. She is a suffragette and adventurer who defies conventional female roles through her militant activism and boundary-crossing journeys, a contrast to the passive, isolated femininity of other

characters, and her vitality counterbalances the decay and dream states that afflict them. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.

  - Persian women fought and were warriors until the Arab conquest of Persia in 651. A great archer of Persia may have been Banu, wife of Babak who fought alongside her husband against the Arab Caliphate for 23 years until they were betrayed. (Wikipedia) The Shahnameh has its own woman warrior, Gordafarid, who rode out in armor against Sohrab and fought him with bow and sword (Ferdowsi, Shahnameh, c. 1010).
  - A great dueler in France may be Julie d'Aubigny (c. 1670-1707), the opera singer known as Mademoiselle Maupin. Her father taught her academic subjects and also trained her in fencing since the age of 12 where she competed successfully against men. She became an assistant to fencing master Seranne. Because she is said to have had relationships with men and women, some modern-day sources refer to her as bisexual or queer. (Wikipedia)
  - An expert with sword and gun in Romania may be Ecaterina Teodoroiu (1894-1917), who fought on the front and died in World War I and is regarded as a heroine of Romania. She initially worked as a nurse but decided to be a front-line soldier partly influenced by the death of her brother. (Wikipedia)
  - There were famous female sailors: Lagertha, Jeanne de Clisson, Sayyida al Hurra, Lady Mary Killigrew, Grace O'Malley, Mary Read and Anne Bonny, Jeanne Baret, Zheng Yi Sao, Anne Jane Thornton, Mary Lacy, Grace Darling, Mary Patten.
  - Women sailors from New England: Mary Louisa Brewster, Martha Smith Brewer Brown, Mary Chipman Lawrence, Eliza Azelia Williams, Clara Clifford Kingman Wheldon.
  - A great Swiss mountain climber may refer to Lucy Walker (an Englishwoman climbing in the Swiss Alps, who reached the top of the Matterhorn in 1871) and Hettie Dyhrenfurth (who took part in two major expeditions to the Himalayas in 1930 and 1934).
  - Lucille Mulhall (1885-1940), the first woman called a "cowgirl," could rope and tie a steer with the best of the men. There were so many famous cowgirls it is impossible to list them all here.
  - A great Chinese horsewoman may refer to Hua Mulan, a legendary warrior who disguised herself as a man to join the army.
  - A tall Tibetan jockey may refer to Ani Pachen (Nun Big Courage). She was a Tibetan nun who inherited her father's position as clan chieftain and led her people in armed resistance against Chinese rule.

- "a marksman who could shoot with unwavering aim through the ace of hearts at a distance of twelve paces": Annie Oakley (1860-1926) shot through playing cards tossed in the air. A free pass punched with holes came to be called an "Annie Oakley."
- "She had made many balloon ascensions": Famous female balloonists: Sophie Blanchard, Elisabeth Thible, Nellie Thurston, Wilhelmine Reichard, Jeannette Piccard,

who flew to the stratosphere in 1934.

- “Because of the loss of a skirt”: Young told Studs Terkel that this came from an Alpine story in which two bloomer girls shed their skirts at a summit, and the younger, going back for hers, was lost: “the lady lost her life for a skirt” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See the Chapter 31 resources. See Cousin Hannah, Clothing, Hats, and Skirts, and Women’s Suffrage.
- “where slept the white-pronged unicorn”: The unicorn of the tapestries. See the Chapter 24 resources and the Chapter 28 resources.
- “a Captain Derring-Do”: Derring-do is an old-fashioned word meaning boldness or daring, often with a hint of showiness or foolishness. It’s a noun for the quality of a person’s actions, though Young makes it a name, “Captain Derring-Do.” The word began as Chaucer’s “dorring don,” “daring to do,” misread by Spenser and made popular by Scott’s Ivanhoe (1819) (Online Etymology Dictionary).
- “She had collided with many icebergs”: It recalls the Titanic, sunk by an iceberg in 1912. Here, “the iceberg had moved to allow her passage.”
- “chauffeurs blew the horns of old Renaults”: Renault was founded in France in 1899 by the brothers Louis, Marcel, and Fernand Renault, and its cars were prized imports in American cities before the First World War. Renault taxis became famous in 1914, when hundreds of them carried French troops to the front at the First Battle of the Marne. (Wikipedia)
- “the genealogies of Beacon Hill”: Beacon Hill is one of Boston, Massachusetts’s most picturesque areas. It is the home of Boston’s old families, the Lowells and Cabots of Chapter 24. See the Chapter 24 resources.
- “the mountains of the moon”: Ptolemy’s Mountains of the Moon, the fabled source of the Nile.
- “her poor husband, who was lost while walking between two frozen mountain peaks”: Catherine’s husband. See Jock Cartwheel.
- “the elephants crossing the Alps with Hannibal”: Hannibal was a general and statesman of Carthage in what is now Tunisia. He crossed the Alps in 218 BC. See the Chapter 24 resources.
- “where snows had not melted since the death of Charlemagne”: Charlemagne died in 814. See the Chapter 29 resources.
- “where Childe Roland had blown his horn before a dark tower”: Childe Roland is a character in a poem by Robert Browning. The character Roland in the poem makes a journey to the Dark Tower much like the journey of Pilgrim’s Progress and the Divine Comedy. The name Child Roland comes from the Shakespeare play King Lear Act 3 Scene 4 Lines 195-197. Browning’s poem is “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came” (1855), and it ends with the horn: “Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set, / And blew. ‘Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.’” The horn also recalls Roland of The Song of Roland, who blew his horn Oliphant at Roncevaux (778). See Shakespeare and Dante.

- “marked only with the sign of the codfish”: The “codfish aristocracy” was a derisive name for New England families grown rich on the cod trade; in Salem, Colonel Pickman’s house had gilded codfish on its stair ends. Donna Seger writes: “New England cod fed both enslaved Africans and free Europeans and thus created great wealth in New England, but the derisive use of the term ‘Codfish Aristocracy’, in reference to the ostentatious and vulgar display of that wealth, comes later, in the 1840s and 1850s, and most prominently in the debate over slavery” (Donna Seger, “Codfish Aristocracy,” Streets of Salem, April 2, 2019). In 1850 Senator Andrew Pickens Butler of South Carolina, a leading pro-slavery voice, mocked the idea of being kept in order by “a codfish aristocracy” on the Senate floor. Some argued that the codfish aristocracy’s economic interests in the slave trade and the sugar trade were intertwined with their wealth.
    - The Sacred Cod is a four-foot-eleven-inch carved-wood effigy of an Atlantic codfish, painted realistically and hanging in the House of Representatives chamber of Boston’s Massachusetts State House. The one in the House chamber today was installed in 1784.
- “so many foreign and domestic wars for the emancipation of woman”: The white women’s suffrage movement, primarily organized and led by middle-class educated white women, focused on gaining voting rights for white women, culminating in the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920. The movement came out of the abolitionist movement with leaders being: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Alice Paul, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Sojourner Truth (who played a significant role in the movement’s background). Suffragists employed various tactics, including lobbying, organizing marches and parades, and civil disobedience. After decades of activism, the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution was ratified in 1920 granting some women the right to vote. On paper the 19th Amendment covered all women. In practice it did not secure the vote for women of color. Black women in the South were kept from the polls by poll taxes, literacy tests, and terror. Native American women were not citizens until 1924. Asian immigrant women could not become citizens until 1952. It wasn’t until the Voting Rights Act of 1965 until all women’s voting rights were protected. See Women’s Suffrage.
    - A white skirt often symbolizes purity, innocence, mourning (in some cultures), new beginnings, versatility, symbol of femininity. Suffragettes wore white as a symbol of the movement to represent purity and unity. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “disguised as an Arab king”: There were female explorers in the Middle East: Gertrude Bell (a British explorer, archaeologist, and writer) and Freya Stark who was another British explorer and writer. Other explorers: Isabella Bird, Lady Anne Blunt, Lady Hester Stanhope. Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904) rode the Sahara dressed as an Arab man, and Lady Hester Stanhope lived among the Arabs in men’s dress. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “she had been disguised as a lazar ringing his bell”: A lazar is a person afflicted with a repulsive disease like leprosy. The word comes from Lazarus, the beggar “full of sores” (Luke 16:20). Lepers carried bells or clappers to warn others away. See The Bible.

- “the ruins of Persepolis”: Persepolis was the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire. It was burned by Alexander the Great in 330 BC.
  - Darius the Great was the third Persian King of Kings of the Achaemenid Empire.
  - Isfahan is a city in central Iran.
  - Shiraz is in the southwest of Iran.
- “asked her if she had seen Darius the Great but had gotten only a negative reply”: Darius died in 486 BC, so the “negative reply” is a joke. See Comedy in Chapter 30.
- “over the red hills of Moab and over the Dead Sea”: Moab, the biblical kingdom east of the Dead Sea, land of Ruth (Ruth 1:4). See The Bible.
  - The Dead Sea is a salt lake bordering Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank.
- “inside Arabia Deserta”: Travels in Arabia Deserta (1888), by Charles Montagu Doughty, was admired by T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia).
- “where she had heard an archangel blowing a ram’s horn three times”: In Islamic tradition, the archangel Israfil will sound the trumpet of Judgment. The shofar is the ram’s horn of Jewish worship. See Angels and Archangels.
- “and she had slept in Babylon, Nineveh, Crete”: Babylon was the ancient capital city of the Babylonian empire.
  - Nineveh was an ancient Assyrian city of Upper Mesopotamia.
  - Crete is the largest island in Greece.
- “Her white horse was named El-Burraq”: Buraq (Young’s “El-Burraq”) is a creature in Islamic tradition that provides transport for certain prophets. In tradition, Muhammad tethered Buraq at the Western Wall on the Night Journey.
- “a caravan of lonely Riffs”: Riffs are members of a number of Berber tribes around Er Rif. They fought the Rif War (1921-26), in which Abd el-Krim’s Republic of the Rif fought Spanish and French colonial armies.
  - The town of the Third Market Day may refer to the Rif War or one of the Spanish colonial wars in Morocco. Moroccan market towns are named for their market day. Souk el-Tleta is “the market of the third” day.
- “upon the coasts of incense”: The incense coasts of southern Arabia, Arabia Felix, where frankincense and myrrh were traded.
- “pirate ships flying black flags with skulls and bones”: The Jolly Roger.
- “Charon’s empty boat drifting on the midnight tide”: Charon, ferryman of the dead across the Styx. See Greek Mythology.
- “Moroccan pirates returning from raids upon the sleeping coast of Spain with beautiful captive girls”: The Barbary corsairs of Salé and Algiers raided the coasts of Europe and sold captives into slavery. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “sailing in the six months’ darkness”: The polar night, when the sun does not rise for months near the poles. See Exploration and the Poles.

- “Watchman, where is the shore”: “Watchman, what of the night?” (Isaiah 21:11). See The Bible.
- “Arcturus, Andromeda, rainy Hyades”: Job’s “Arcturus, Orion, and Pleiades” (Job 9:9), and Tennyson’s “Ulysses” (1842): “Thro’ scudding drifts the rainy Hyades / Vext the dim sea.” See Astronomy, The Book of Job, and Greek Mythology.
  - Arcturus is the brightest star in the constellation of Bootes.
  - Andromeda is the daughter of King Cepheus and Queen Cassiopeia in Greek Mythology. The constellation is named for her.
  - Hyades is the nearest open star cluster.
- “the argosy of the moving stars”: Argosy is a large merchant ship. The word comes from Ragusa (Dubrovnik), the merchant city.
- “or are they the eyes of a peacock”: After Argus was killed, Hera set his hundred eyes in the peacock’s tail (Ovid, Metamorphoses 1). See Greek Mythology and the Chapter 29 resources.
- “winter-rimed Orion”: Orion is a prominent constellation located on the celestial equator.

Vocabulary

Alpenhorn

A long wooden horn of the Alps.

Ambient

Surrounding.

Apprised

Informed.

Argosy

A large merchant ship, or a fleet of them.

Blackamoor

An old term for a Black African or any dark-skinned person, common in European art and in decorative figures of Black servants. It is now considered offensive.

Blunderbuss

A short gun with a flared muzzle.

Brigand

A bandit of the hills.

Cavalcade

A procession on horseback.

Codfish

A large food fish of cold northern seas.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Deign

To condescend.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Duplicity

Double-dealing.

Emancipated

Set free.

Genealogy

A record of a family’s descent.

Grazier

One who grazes cattle. Here it means the herds.

Imploring

Begging earnestly.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Lazar

A diseased beggar, especially one with leprosy.

Leeward

On the side sheltered from the wind.

Loo

An old card game played for stakes.

Mercurial

Quick and changeable in mood. From the swift Roman messenger god Mercury and the liquid metal named for him.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Muezzin

The man who calls Muslims to prayer.

Nocturnal

Of or happening in the night.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Peaked

Thin and pale, as from illness.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Prescience

Knowledge of events before they happen.

Problematical

Doubtful; hard to settle.

Profligate

A reckless, immoral spendthrift.

Sangfroid

Coolness in danger.

Satrap

A Persian provincial governor.

Solicitous

Anxious and attentive.

Stanchly

Firmly; loyally.

Surrey

A light four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with two seats, often with a fringed canopy on top.

Taloned

Having talons, the sharp claws of a bird of prey.

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Tethered

Tied with a rope or chain.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Whist

A card game for four players in pairs.

Chapter 31

Summary

Catherine and Mr. Spitzer admire Cousin Hannah, whose great deeds made their own lives seem unfulfilled. Her secret grief is circled but never named: the mirrors of her house draped in black, her failed battle to rescue Catherine from opium, her indifference to both Spitzer brothers. She sent not one flower to Peron's grave and ignored Joachim "as if it were he who had died." Mr. Spitzer remembers his long faithfulness to her, knocking at a door that never opened. He struggles to write her epitaph, drafting and discarding version after version.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel · Cousin Hannah · Peron Spitzer · Vera Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Illusion and Reality · Love · Memory and the Past · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Butterflies and Moths · Dogs · Eyes and Blindness · Moon and Stars · Mountains · The House

Philosophy: Existentialism

Allusions: American Writers · Ecclesiastes · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Judaism · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- Mr. Spitzer indulges Catherine's moods as long as they are not of reality, believing reality would kill her as it had killed her canary, which she imagined flying over the waves. This suggests a delicate balance between fantasy and harsh reality in her life.
- Their mutual admiration for Peron (who gambled his life away) and Cousin Hannah, an adventurer whose own life made their adventures seem unfulfilled, hints at the complex relationships and ideals binding these characters.
- Cousin Hannah is described as direct, fierce, and adventurously restless, having fought losing battles with shadows and enduring harsh physical and emotional challenges, including suffrage campaigns and desert treks. She embodies "forlorn romance" and is portrayed as a great captain metaphorically armored by suffrage and armed with swords of ice and fire.

- Her refusal to marry and the whispered secret of her life shadowed by grief add mystery and depth to her character. Her life is marked by dramatic adventures and a stoic endurance of suffering.
- Despite her strength and battles, she could not “rescue herself,” and her death is framed as a “domestic war,” contrasting with the grand battles she fought. This passage suggests a tragic dimension to her life and death.
- She sought to “carry” Vera’s mother away from opium dreams, fighting her losing battle with shadows, showing her as a protective but ultimately tragic figure.
- She ignored Joachim, the lawyer, after Peron’s death, refusing any recognition or mourning, which underscores her complex relations and possibly her disdain for what she considered weak or insubstantial men. Also Mr. Spitzer may not be who he seems to be.
- Mr. Spitzer’s persistent but unanswered visits to Cousin Hannah’s empty house symbolize a futile effort to maintain connection and control over the past. His rituals of knocking, leaving calling cards, and bringing important papers contrast with the silence and absence inside, emphasizing themes of loss and the elusiveness of presence.
- Cousin Hannah’s adventures in deserts and mountains serve as metaphors for her restless spirit and unattainable quests, with imagery of desert storms, Islamic kingdoms, and un-climbable alpine peaks creating a mythical aura around her.
- The desert beauty’s mirror she brought is a symbol of the transience of human life, reinforcing the chapter’s meditation on mortality.
- Mr. Spitzer’s efforts to compose an epitaph for Cousin Hannah, his hesitation and inability to decide on words reflect his sorrow and the difficulty of capturing a complex life and character in simple terms. His proposed epitaphs evoke her warrior spirit, her suffering, and her ultimate solitude and death at home rather than on a battlefield.
- The meditation on death and memory adds philosophical depth to the narrative.
- His own uncertain status between life and death, as suggested by bureaucratic errors listing him dead, parallels the ambiguous boundary between presence and absence that permeates this chapter.
- Cousin Hannah’s scorn for Vera’s mother’s love for a “shadow,” a fleeting and unsubstantial man, contrasts with Catherine’s belief that death is necessary to her love. This conflict highlights different understandings of love, reality, and illusion.
- Cousin Hannah’s rejection of the external man and her suspicion of phantoms as rivals underscore the chapter’s theme of the elusive and often illusory nature of relationships and human connections.
- The repeated imagery of knocking on doors, peering through keyholes, and the sensation of being watched by hidden eyes evokes a haunting atmosphere, symbolizing the barriers between people, the mysteries of identity, and the unseen presences that linger in memory and imagination.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Mr. Spitzer indulges Catherine's moods "so long as they were not of reality." Why would reality kill her?
- Why does Mr. Spitzer knock only when "he knew she was absent"?
- "Here lies one who… could not rescue herself." Which of his epitaphs is truest?

Characters

- Cousin Hannah judged both brothers: "It was Hobson's choice… a choice between death and death." Do you agree?
- Catherine asks "when had she ever seen a man on earth?" What does she love instead?
- Mr. Spitzer chooses "the charity of his inaccuracy," a headstone with no dates. Why?

Connections

- The canary "she thought was flying over the waves" first appeared in Chapter 2. What else in this house dies without Catherine knowing?
- A clerk listed Mr. Spitzer "among the dead" in Chapter 25, and here it happens again. What does the record know that he doesn't?
- Cousin Hannah's secret grief is "a body covered by the snow." How does it mirror Catherine's lost husband in the Alps (Chapter 30)?

Reflection

- Is "each one who lives… shrunken by another's death"?
- Can you mourn someone who ignored you?
- What would your epitaph leave out?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- A legal figure who serves as a connection between the living and the dead.
- Indulges Catherine's moods but is deeply affected by the passing of Cousin Hannah.
- Exhibits profound grief, ritualistically visiting Cousin Hannah's empty house and attempting to maintain legal and emotional ties.
- His character embodies persistence, melancholy, and a struggle to reconcile presence and absence.

- While Cousin Hannah was alive but away on her travels, Mr. Spitzer visited her empty mansion, knocking at the door and slipping his calling card through the slot “so that she would know that he had come during her absence.”
- His visits symbolize the persistence of memory and the difficulty of accepting loss.
- He contemplates an epitaph and memorial for Hannah, reflecting on her life as a warrior and adventurer.
- He was “the only mourner” at her grave, “for the simple reason that most people thought she had died years before she had died.”

Catherine Cartwheel

- A dreamer, living between reality and opium dreams.
- Holds a love for a “shadow,” a dead or unreal man, rather than a concrete person.
- Her relationship with reality is tenuous; she is entwined with mystical and illusory elements.
- She and Mr. Spitzer share mutual admiration for Cousin Hannah and Peron.
- Catherine’s love is for an elusive, intangible presence rather than a real man.
- The metaphor of man as a shadow driven by the wind highlights themes of impermanence and spiritual longing.

Cousin Hannah

- A formidable, adventurous woman, a “great captain” with a suffrage warrior’s spirit.
- Known for her directness, fiery temper, and refusal to accept illusions or evasion.
- Lived a nomadic life filled with symbolic and literal journeys across deserts, mountains, and forbidden cities.
- She opposed Catherine’s love for the shadow, believing in facing harsh realities.
- After death, she remains a spectral presence, her memory both revered and shrouded in secrecy.
- Despite her public life and campaigns, she kept a secret of sorrow, which others hesitate to speak of.
- Cousin Hannah disapproves of Catherine’s dreams and love for the “shadow.” Their conflict is ideological: directness and confrontation versus evasion and mystical longing.
- She is portrayed as a mythic figure battling external foes and internal demons.
- Her life and death symbolize the struggle between illusion and reality, love and loss.
- The chapter describes her as a figure who fought battles greater than those recorded, with imagery of deserts, storms, and crusades.
- She sent not one flower to Peron’s grave, neither a horseshoe of roses nor “two dice cubes in a lucky throw,” and ignored Joachim “as if it were he who had died.”

- She called both brothers “equally insecure, as unsubstantial as flame and water.”

Research: Themes

Reality versus Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality

- The novel contrasts characters’ perceptions of reality with their dreams, delusions, or mystical experiences.

Death and Immortality

See: Death and Mortality

- The chapter explores how death affects memory, love, and legacy, particularly through Cousin Hannah and Vera’s mother.

Love and Shadows

See: Love

- Catherine’s love is portrayed as a love for a shadow, a phantom rather than a living man.

Memory and Legacy

See: Memory and the Past

- Mr. Spitzer’s grief and his attempts to memorialize Cousin Hannah illustrate struggles with remembering and forgetting.
- “She had said that my mother was in love with no man on earth but with a fleeting shadow…” Emphasizes the theme of elusive love and the tension between reality and illusion.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Empty Mansion

See: The House

- The empty house, the broken lanterns, the snow-covered garden, and the silent rooms evoke a ghostly atmosphere of abandonment and mourning.
- The Empty Mansion represents absence, memory, and the passage of time. The desolation and decay of the mansion mirror Cousin Hannah’s death and the fading of her presence.

The Desert and the Alps

See: Mountains · Exploration and the Poles

- The Desert and the Alps symbolize harsh trials, isolation, and spiritual quests. Cousin Hannah's travels through these landscapes symbolize her restless spirit and adventurous life.

Eyes and the Keyhole

See: Eyes and Blindness

- "…he would be overwhelmed by the increasing certainty that there was another great, rounded eye staring at him…" The imagery of eyes symbolizes observation, mystery, and the interplay between seen and unseen forces.

Flame and Water

See: Illusion and Reality

- "…the flame evaporates the water. The water extinguishes the flame." Symbolizes the mutual destruction or futility of opposing forces, reflecting on the men in Catherine's life.

The Butterfly Card

See: Butterflies and Moths

- The "great eye" of the planet, the "butterfly" symbol of resurrection, and references to historical and exotic locations enhance the dreamlike and timeless atmosphere.

Storms, Deserts, Snow, and Stars

See: Moon and Stars

- Storms, deserts, snow, castles, veils, horses, swords, and stars.
- These images underscore the mystical, elusive, and epic qualities of the characters' inner lives.

The Great Water Eye

See: Moon and Stars

- The "Great Water Eye" of the planet is a recurring symbolic image that links the characters' personal dramas to the vastness of the universe.

Research: Resources

- “as it had killed her canary which she thought was flying over the waves”: In Chapter 2 the canary “had died already many times without her knowledge.” Here she still thinks it is “flying over the waves.” See the Chapter 2 resources.
- “her journeys into forbidden Mecca or Medinah or Fez”: Mecca and Medina are forbidden to non-Muslims. Richard Burton entered both in disguise in 1853.
  - Mecca is Islam’s holiest city in Saudi Arabia.
  - Medinah is the second holiest city in Islam.
  - Fez is an important city in Morocco.
- “cutting like a two-edged sword”: “Sharper than any twoedged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). See The Bible.
- “plucked up into the bosom of Abraham”: “The beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom” (Luke 16:22). See The Bible.
- “saying that it should reveal the transience of human life”: The transience of human life is a philosophical concept emphasizing the impermanence and fleeting nature of existence, encourages mindfulness, acceptance of change, and a deeper appreciation for the present moment. In Buddhism, impermanence (anicca) is one of the three marks of existence.
- “bearded human lions in their dens”: Daniel in the lions’ den (Daniel 6), and Scott’s “to beard the lion in his den” (Marmion, 1808). See The Bible.
- “in love with no man on earth but with a fleeting shadow, the mere shadow of a man”: Shadows in scripture and Shakespeare. See The Bible, Ecclesiastes, The Book of Job, Shakespeare, and Love.
  - “Man is like to vanity: his days are as a shadow that passeth away” (Psalm 144:4).
  - Ecclesiastes 6:12 speaks of “all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow.”
  - “He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not” (Job 14:2).
  - “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things” (Hebrews 10:1).
  - “Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ” (Colossians 2:17).
  - “Life’s but a walking shadow” is a line from William Shakespeare’s Macbeth (5.5).
- “girding her loins with suffrage like that iron girdle worn by a great Crusader’s wife”: “Gird up now thy loins like a man” (Job 38:3). The chastity belt of Crusaders’ wives is largely a legend of later centuries. See The Book of Job and Women’s Suffrage.
- “not one horseshoe of the red and white roses… two dice cubes in a lucky throw, seven and eleven”: Floral horseshoes and dice were set on gamblers’ graves. Seven

and eleven are winning throws in craps. See Gambling and Playing Cards and Peron Spitzer.

- “each one who lives is shrunken by another’s death”: “Any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind” (John Donne, Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation 17, 1624).
- “forbidden cities of brides, those who were held in thralldom by a cruel bridegroom”: It recalls Perrault’s “Bluebeard” (1697), whose dead brides hang in the forbidden room. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “those who would never be awakened by the kiss of any living man or love”: The Sleeping Beauty of Chapter 29. See the Chapter 29 resources.
- “the old St. Bernard”: The monks of the Great St. Bernard Hospice bred their dogs to find travelers lost in Alpine snow. Barry (1800-1814) is said to have saved forty lives. The brandy cask was the invention of the painter Edwin Landseer (1820). See Dogs.
- “the latticed shutters in those mysterious Oriental cities where the secret women look out”: The mashrabiya, a carved wooden lattice that lets women see without being seen.
- “Or he might imagine that his veiled wife was beautiful”: Veiling and wearing a veil of clothing or hanging cloth has a long history in many societies across the world. It is intended to cover some part of the head or face, or an object of some significance. The practice has been prominent in different forms in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The practice of veiling is especially associated with women and sacred objects, though in some cultures, it is men, rather than women, who are expected to wear a veil. Besides its enduring religious significance, veiling continues to play a role in some modern secular contexts, such as wedding customs. One view is that as a religious item, it is intended to honor a person, object or space. The actual sociocultural, psychological, and sociosexual functions of veils have not been studied extensively but most likely include the maintenance of social distance and the communication of social status and cultural identity. A veil also has symbolic interpretations, as something partially concealing, disguising, or obscuring. (Wikipedia) In Young’s sentence the veil may conceal “the visage of the naked skull.”
- “draped by veils of black chiffon in memory of some earlier death”: Mirrors were covered in houses of mourning, in Victorian custom and in the Jewish shiva. See Grief, Loss, and Mourning and Judaism.
- “for what were earthly riches, great castles and lonely towers”: Luke 12:16-21, the Parable of the Rich Fool, shows how wealth can be a distraction from the true purpose of life. “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?” (Luke 12:20). Mr. Spitzer’s reflections echo the parable’s warning against greed and misplaced security. See The Bible.
- “Often he had seen the lunar rainbow”: A Lunar rainbow or Moonbow is a rainbow produced by moonlight rather than direct sunlight. See the Chapter 29 resources.

- “his calling card embossed with the butterfly which was his sign of resurrection”: Mr. Spitzer’s calling card. See Butterflies and Moths and the Chapter 26 resources.
- “the old State Street Bank and Trust”: Boston’s State Street Bank, founded in 1792 as the Union Bank.
- “Here lies that great Crusader who rode against the Saracens”: Mr. Spitzer’s epitaphs put Cousin Hannah on both sides of the Crusades: she rode against the Saracens, and “She has gone over to the Islamites.” Women did fight and rule on both sides.
    - Women played significant roles in the Crusades, either by leading armies, influencing political decisions, or promoting the cause: Eleanor of Aquitaine, Matilda of Tuscany, Melisende, Queen of Jerusalem, Margaret of Provence, Queen consort of France, Sibyl, Queen of Jerusalem, and Margaret of Beverly, who fought in the defense of Jerusalem against Saladin (1187). Ida of Austria led her own army in the Crusade of 1101, and the legendary Florine of Burgundy was said to have died fighting beside Sweyn of Denmark in 1097.
    - Women resisted during the Crusades: Shajar al-Durr, who ruled Egypt and organized its defense against the Seventh Crusade (1249-50), Anna Comnena, and the women of the Baltic Crusades. Ismat ad-Din Khatun, regent of Damascus, negotiated the end of the Crusader siege of Banias in 1174, and William of Tyre credited her with “courage beyond that of most women” (A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea, 20.31). At Shaizar, in Syria, when Assassins stormed the citadel in 1114, during the Crusade years though not by Crusaders, Usama ibn Munqidh’s mother armed the women, and an old servant, Funun, “covered herself with her veil, took up a sword and went into battle” (Usama ibn Munqidh, The Book of Contemplation, trans. Paul M. Cobb, 2008). Khawla bint al-Azwar, the most famous Arab woman warrior, fought the Byzantines at Yarmouk (636), five centuries before the Crusades.
- “She raided the Etruscan towns”: Etruscan towns were a collection of independent city-states in central Italy, united by a shared culture and language. They thrived in the regions of Tuscany, Umbria, and Northern Lazio between the 7th and 2nd centuries BC. Important Etruscan cities include Tarquinia, Vulci, Populonia, Cerveteri, Volterra, and Chiusi. Many of these cities still have archaeological sites, necropolises, and museums that showcase their Etruscan heritage. (Wikipedia)
- “Here lies one who searched all her life for her dead love, a body covered by the snow”: Young told Studs Terkel that Cousin Hannah came partly from an Alpine story in which two bloomer girls shed their skirts at a summit, and the younger, going back for hers, was lost: “the lady lost her life for a skirt.” She also drew on Margaret Fuller, who drowned off Fire Island in 1850 within reach of a sandbar (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See the Chapter 30 resources. See Cousin Hannah and Women’s Suffrage.
- “Here lies one who shared our common lot of mortal frailty”: Heidegger’s “being-towards-death,” from Being and Time (1927), is a fundamental aspect of human existence, highlighting the finite nature of our being and the importance of confronting

mortality to live authentically. Heidegger distinguishes between authentic and inauthentic ways of living: authentic living confronts the inevitability of death and makes choices that are meaningful to oneself, while inauthentic living is swept along by what “they” say and do (das Man). Mr. Spitzer’s epitaph names the common condition Heidegger describes: one who “shared our common lot of mortal frailty.” See Existentialism.

- “She was not fallen in a foreign field”: “If I should die, think only this of me: / That there’s some corner of a foreign field / That is for ever England” (Rupert Brooke, “The Soldier,” 1914).
- “She has gone over to the Islamites”: In the Islamic tradition burial is a sacred practice. Cremation is strictly forbidden. The body is buried as soon as possible after death, ideally within 24 hours, in a simple shroud, facing Mecca and without a coffin. There are no elaborate markers; simple flat markers are used instead. There is a ritual washing and prayer, and mourners each place three handfuls of soil. Post-mortem examinations are avoided. The general mourning period is three days; a widow mourns four months and ten days (Qur’an 2:234), and many Muslim communities also mark the fortieth day. (Wikipedia)
- “The rose of Sharon is growing in a desert place”: “I am the rose of Sharon” (Song of Solomon 2:1), and “the desert shall… blossom as the rose” (Isaiah 35:1). See The Bible and the Chapter 28 resources.
- “Death snatched away her beautiful bride”: Young’s other source for Cousin Hannah was a story told by Charles Studin, a founder of the NAACP, about a suffragist “battle-axe” who fought men all her life, “one of the original bloomer girls,” yet for forty years brought home sealed trunks that proved at her death to hold “a complete bridal trousseau” each. “She had a dream too” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). In another telling the lawyer found “fifty wedding gowns,” and Young added that she “had read the histories of mountain climbers, of suffragette captains, of travelers to the Middle East” (Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Marguerite Young,” Review of Contemporary Fiction 23, no. 1, Spring 2003 (1989 original)). See Cousin Hannah and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “he had listed Mr. Spitzer’s name among the dead”: The clerk of Chapter 25. See the Chapter 25 resources.
- “for Joachim, though he pretended to be so true, was weak as water”: “Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel” (Genesis 49:4). See Genesis.
- “It was six of one and half a dozen of the other”: The phrase is in print in Captain Marryat’s The Pirate (1836).
- “It was Hobson’s choice”: Hobson’s choice is a free choice in which only one thing is actually offered and is used to mean an illusion of choice. Thomas Hobson (d. 1631), a Cambridge stable keeper, made each customer take the horse nearest the door.
- “worth a candle’s flame in the headlong wind”: From the French proverb le jeu ne vaut pas la chandelle, “the game is not worth the candle,” from card players who paid for the candles they played by. See Gambling and Playing Cards.

- “her search for the external man”: “Though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Corinthians 4:16). See The Bible.
    - Internalism and externalism are two opposite ways of integration of explaining various subjects in several areas of philosophy. These include human motivation, knowledge, justification, meaning, and truth. The distinction arises in many areas of debate with similar but distinct meanings. Internalism is the thesis that no fact about the world can provide reasons for action independently of desires and beliefs. Externalism is the thesis that reasons are to be identified with objective features of the world. (Wikipedia)
- “The external man, there was no doubt, had been Cousin Hannah’s foe”: Cousin Hannah had scoffed at Catherine’s “search for the external man,” asking “was it flesh which made the man,” his weight, his measure, his girth. Against the outward man stands the inward one (2 Corinthians 4:16).
- “to the sound of muffled drums”: “Our hearts, though stout and brave, / Still, like muffled drums, are beating / Funeral marches to the grave” (Longfellow, “A Psalm of Life,” 1838). See American Writers.

Vocabulary

Acme

The highest point of something; the peak.

Aerie

An eagle’s nest on a height.

Aggrievedly

With a sense of being wronged.

Alpenhorn

A long wooden horn of the Alps.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Artifice

Clever trickery, or the art of making things seem other than they are.

Bedaubed

Smeared with paint or dirt.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Besmeared

Smeared over.

Bivouac

A temporary camp without tents.

Brigand

A bandit of the hills.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chiffon

A sheer, lightweight fabric of silk or nylon.

Chimerical

Imaginary, fanciful, or wildly unrealistic. From the Chimera, the fire-breathing monster of Greek myth made of a lion, a goat, and a serpent.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Cognomen

A surname; in Rome, a third, family name.

Colonnade

A row of columns, usually holding up a roof.

Coup de grâce

The final, merciful blow.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Cuirassed

Armored in a breastplate.

Denizen

An inhabitant of a place.

Detonation

An explosion.

Dissembling

Hiding one’s true feelings.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Elicit

To draw out.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Flagstone

A flat paving stone.

Girded

Encircled or bound tightly, as with a belt or girdle.

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Gratuitous

Uncalled for; without cause.

Indubitably

Beyond doubt.

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Inordinately

Excessively.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Keel and list

To keel over is to capsize, with the keel, the ship’s backbone along the bottom, turning upward. To list is to lean to one side, usually from water taken on.

Lazar

A diseased beggar, especially one with leprosy.

Livery

The uniform worn by a servant, such as a coachman.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mundane

Ordinary; of this world.

Nomadic

Wandering from place to place.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Phantasmal

Ghostly; like a phantom or an illusion.

Portiere

A curtain hung across a doorway.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Ramification

A branching consequence.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Testimonial

A formal statement given as evidence or proof of something.

Thralldom

Bondage; slavery.

Torpor

A sluggish, heavy, half-asleep state.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Vigil

A period of staying awake to keep watch, especially at the bedside of someone sick or dying.

Visage

A person’s face or expression.

Whinny

A horse’s gentle neigh.

Chapter 32

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Catherine remembers Cousin Hannah as a storm of a woman, a suffrage captain with a saber scar and burning eyes who rode through deserts and snowfields. She died not in battle but in bed, after years of frostbite and semi-invalidism, confessing that "the greatest battles were fought in the domestic wars by those who had never left home." Catherine visited her deathbed only in a dream, and she knew the day Hannah died when a riderless white horse came through the window. Rumor said Hannah once left a suitor at the church door. At Catherine's own wedding she beat the bridegroom with her white umbrella and tried to carry the bride away. Catherine had married a phantom whose face she never saw: "For weddings are funerals, and funerals are weddings." She always wanted to die while travelling, for "Death is that which is caused by our partial knowledge."

Characters present

Cousin Hannah · Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Vera Cartwheel · Jock Cartwheel · The Black Coachman

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Illusion and Reality · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Horses and Carriages · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Opium · Pearls and Jewels · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Bus and the Journey · The Umbrella · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Plato and Platonism

Allusions: Astronomy · Ecclesiastes · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- The opening lines immediately establish Cousin Hannah as a dominant, unyielding figure: "Cousin Hannah, a lady who had forcefully expressed herself, a lady who had never drawn in the reins or paused to hear another person's nugatory opinion…" This sets the stage for her powerful presence.

- Her dedication is described in almost mythical terms: she “had fought against vanquished competitors when there were none except those of my mother’s drugged dreams… For this consanguineous relative had been interested in her overwhelming suffrage battles for woman on every front, her conquests which could never have been satisfied by temporary victories or the overthrow of man in this world.” This passage is crucial because it introduces her primary cause (woman’s suffrage) but simultaneously casts doubt on the reality of her battles, linking them to Catherine’s internal, dreamlike state. It also suggests her ambitions were absolute, perhaps even unattainable or self-defeating (“the ultimate victory would have been the ultimate defeat”).
- The novel explicitly contrasts Cousin Hannah with Catherine: “Cousin Hannah, unlike my mother with her superfluity of bewildering pretenses… was not one to drag her standards in the dust… Cousin Hannah had preferred to take the offensive, to advance by open hostilities.” This highlights Cousin Hannah’s directness, unwavering principles, and aggressive approach, standing in stark opposition to the mother’s evasiveness, dissimulation, and passive nature.
- Vera questions if Cousin Hannah could be a “misogynist” or “woman hater” despite describing herself as a “high-souled lover of woman, whom she had come to rescue from slavery to man.” This paradox is explored through her opposition to traditional feminine “frivolities” like elaborate hats, silks, veils, and parasols.
- A significant passage describes her urging women to adopt a more combative stance. She “had urged woman to use her parasol as her sword or her shield, her greatest weapon of offense or defense,” and “to take off her great hoop skirts flounced with ribbons and lace, to show her little bird feet, to fly her skirts as her banners in her war against tyrannical man.” This passage vividly illustrates her radical vision of female empowerment, demanding a rejection of conventional femininity and an adoption of martial imagery and action.
- Catherine’s perception of Cousin Hannah is key: “My mother believed that Cousin Hannah had been the image of that past which never was, that future which might never be realized. She had been extemporal, sudden and abrupt… brief and meteoric, hastening through this life as if it were a journey one should make with the utmost quickness and dispatch.” This portrays Cousin Hannah as existing outside normal time and reality, a fleeting, powerful force that appears and disappears unpredictably, emphasizing her almost mythical status in Catherine’s mind.
- Her association with storms and cold further emphasizes her disruptive power: “She was certainly the greatest courier of every storm… The barometer dropped when she came… colder than a sea of the icebergs.” Her presence is linked to dramatic, chilling environmental changes, underscoring the profound, unsettling impact she had on Catherine’s world.
- The description of Cousin Hannah’s death is perhaps the most important passage, as it drastically re-frames her life. My mother believed “that Cousin Hannah’s should have been a hero’s death.” But “she had died in no foreign war… She had suffered for years from frostbite. She had died after many years of semi-invalidism… The greatest battles

were fought in the domestic wars by those who had never left home… It was always an unequal battle, for woman reigned supreme." This passage subverts the heroic narrative built throughout the chapter. The mighty warrior dies quietly after years of decline, revealing a profound shift in her understanding of life's true conflicts. The declaration that domestic wars are the greatest and that woman reigns supreme within them is a startling conclusion from the champion of public, external battles.

- The possibility that Catherine's visit to the dying Cousin Hannah occurred only in a dream, or even after death, is stated explicitly: "my mother had visited her only in a dream when she was riding in her carriage driven by the dead black coachman… Perhaps a visit was all the reality there was… One was dead, and one was dying… He certainly hoped that my mother's visit had not occurred after she was dead." This passage dissolves the boundary between reality and Catherine's internal landscape, suggesting that the most significant interactions, including the deathbed confession, may have occurred entirely within her mind or dreams, reinforcing the subjective and possibly unreliable nature of the narrative.
- The chaotic wedding scene where Cousin Hannah intervenes is highly symbolic: "Cousin Hannah, beating with her white umbrella upon the bridegroom, screaming like ten thousand demons in the cold midnight air, had tried to cause havoc, a riot… She had tried to intrude, to carry my mother away as the robber bridegroom carries the swooning bride." This passage portrays the wedding as a battleground, where Cousin Hannah attempts to rescue (or abduct) Catherine from a phantom marriage, using her signature white umbrella as a weapon. It encapsulates her lifelong fight against Catherine's entanglement with (or illusion of) men and traditional roles.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "Perhaps, in fact, the ultimate victory would have been the ultimate defeat." What would Cousin Hannah have lost by winning?
- Catherine visited Hannah "only in a dream." Why does Mr. Spitzer hope the visit "had not occurred after she was dead"?
- "For weddings are funerals, and funerals are weddings." What dies at a wedding?

Characters

- Hannah confesses that "the greatest battles were fought in the domestic wars by those who had never left home." Is she renouncing her life or seeing it clearly?
- Catherine says she married "merely in order to proclaim her independence, to defy Cousin Hannah." Can a marriage be an act of independence?
- Hannah left her suitor "at the church door with a white bouquet in his hands," and afterward he "subscribed heavily to the suffrage movement." What did he understand about her?

Connections

- Hannah urges women “to fly her skirts on tallest mountain peaks.” How does this echo the lost skirt of Chapters 30 and 31?
- Catherine’s husband is “that great traveller who never would return,” and Catherine wants “to die while travelling.” How does this connect to Vera’s bus journey in Chapter 1?
- Mr. Spitzer’s epitaph in Chapter 31 says Hannah was “not fallen in a foreign field.” Here she dies “while sleeping, perhaps while dreaming.” How do the two chapters tell her death?

Reflection

- Are the hardest battles fought at home?
- What do you know only in part?
- Can you fight for someone who does not want to be rescued?

Research: Characters

Cousin Hannah

- Cousin Hannah is portrayed as a powerful, uncompromising woman who never concedes or softens her standards, even for strategic reasons. She advances by open hostility and brandishes her symbolic sword like a cane, even when there is no opponent.
- She is deeply committed to the cause of women’s suffrage and liberation from male oppression. Cousin Hannah fights against man as the cruelest oppressor of beauty and womanhood, advocating for women to use their own “weapons” such as parasols and skirts as symbols of resistance.
- She is described as a swift, meteoric figure, always on the move and engaged in battles and journeys that span deserts, mountains, and foreign lands. She is likened to a great courier of storms and a weathervane signaling change.
- Despite her vigor, Cousin Hannah is also seen as ancient, worn by time, and somewhat removed from the natural cycles of life and love. She is described as never having fully experienced youth, romance, or the mating seasons of life.
- She dies not on a distant battlefield but in obscurity after years of frostbite and semi-invalidism. Her deathbed confession reveals a shift in belief that the greatest battles are fought domestically, in the struggles between man and woman at home.
- She left her suitor at the church door with a white bouquet in his hands, and “it was said that after that he had subscribed heavily to the suffrage movement.”
- She had “ravaged, burning eyes, a saber wound upon her cheek, a grizzled chin.”

Catherine (Vera’s mother)

- Catherine is described as bedridden, veiled in white lace and surrounded by an atmosphere of drifting snowflakes, candle flames, and reflections. She is physically confined and vulnerable, a “creature of such fragility” who is easily overwhelmed by the presence of Cousin Hannah and the harshness of reality. Her bed is a “floating swan bed in a dazzling cloud,” which evokes both fragility and an ethereal, almost otherworldly quality.
- Catherine’s essential loneliness and isolation is emphasized. She is abandoned by the “mysterious bridegroom” and all her loves are imaginary: pharaohs, captains, and other ethereal figures who “had left her, and they had never been.” This abandonment extends to emotional desolation, as no one, “not even Cousin Hannah,” has ever truly touched her “cold heart,” which is “cold and hard as the mountain rock.” This coldness suggests an emotional deadness or protective numbness born from pain.
- Catherine lives largely in a world of dreams, illusions, and shifting realities. She imagines weddings to phantoms, sailboats, stars, and icebergs, reflecting a detachment from conventional life and relationships. Her marriage is portrayed as an ambiguous event, possibly symbolic or imaginary, rather than a concrete historical fact. The wedding imagery (“blushing behind her billowing wedding veils,” “married to a phantom”) conveys a sense of being caught between life and death, reality and fantasy.
- Catherine’s mental state is described as “changeful and capricious,” with a wandering attention and vague memories. She is inconsistent in her accounts and perceptions, which may be interpreted as a symptom of her illness, age, or psychological state. This instability contrasts strongly with Cousin Hannah’s forceful and direct manner, highlighting Catherine’s passivity and internal turmoil.
- Catherine’s relationship with Cousin Hannah reveals much about her character. Hannah is vigorous, militant, and confrontational, while Catherine simulates emotions she does not feel and “dissemble her feelings” when Hannah visits. Catherine’s indifference masks inner panic and vulnerability. Whereas Hannah is a symbol of active struggle and outward battle, Catherine is an embodiment of internal retreat and quiet suffering. Yet, Catherine admires Hannah’s energy and persistence, even as she is overshadowed by it.
- Catherine is associated with death-like sleep. The novel suggests that she is “already dead” in a metaphorical sense, living in a “pretense of death.” Her life is marked by a profound stasis, and she may be seen as a “sleeping lady” awaiting awakening or final rest.
- Catherine’s marriage and attitude toward men are ambiguous. She married “that great traveller who never would return,” possibly to defy Cousin Hannah’s militant feminism or to assert independence, but the marriage was doomed. Her symbolic wedding to various natural and mystical entities rather than a man suggests rejection or transcendence of traditional romantic or marital relationships.

- Catherine is depicted with a strong aesthetic sensibility: her fingers wear jewels that “gleaming like northern lights,” and her surroundings are rich in poetic symbolism (flutes, harps, snowflakes, candle flames). She is a “beautiful femme fatale,” but her beauty is cold and distant, more a vision than a presence.

Mr. Spitzer

- Mr. Spitzer serves as the “only go-between” between Cousin Hannah and Catherine, facilitating communication during times when direct contact was difficult or impossible. This intermediary role is underscored by his musical whispering (“musically whispering as he had thought what to say, what not to say”) which suggests a careful, delicate handling of sensitive matters and emotions. His interactions hint at an awareness of the emotional and existential weight carried by these women, especially Cousin Hannah nearing the end of her life.
- Mr. Spitzer appears as a figure who exists somewhat on the threshold between life and death, reality and dream. The chapter notes that Catherine had visited Cousin Hannah only in a dream, riding a carriage driven by a “dead black coachman,” evoking an otherworldly atmosphere.
- There is a tone of respect and perhaps even reverence in Mr. Spitzer’s attitude toward Cousin Hannah. He “certainly hoped that my mother’s visit had not occurred after she was dead,” indicating his sensitivity to timing and propriety in moments of transition between life and death. His role is not intrusive but rather one of discreet support and careful facilitation.
- While Cousin Hannah and Catherine are enmeshed in their struggles (whether political, personal, or metaphysical) Mr. Spitzer’s character represents a connection to the external, practical world. His visits to the mansion, his knocking and waiting in the vestibule, contrast with the dreamlike, shifting realities inhabited by the women.
- He questions the visit “vaguely as if he were not himself” and wonders whether “a visit was all the reality there was.”

Jock Cartwheel

- Catherine “had married that great traveller who never would return.”
- She “had never seen his face.”

The Black Coachman

- On Catherine’s dream visit to Cousin Hannah, he is “the dead black coachman driving the black horses who wore black plumes and knew the way.”

Research: Themes

- The novel explores the feminist theme through Cousin Hannah's militant suffrage activism and her advocacy for women to wield traditional symbols of femininity as weapons in their fight for freedom.
- Catherine's life is marked by dreams, illusions, and a sense of unreality, contrasted with Cousin Hannah's dramatic, tangible battles. The blurred line between dream and reality is emphasized by descriptions of ghostly visits, fading cities, and spectral imagery.
- Both women embody different aspects of solitude: Cousin Hannah through her relentless battles and eventual physical decline, and Catherine through her emotional coldness and unfulfilled romantic desires.
- The imagery that weddings are funerals and funerals are weddings suggests a cyclical transformation between life and death, union and separation. Catherine's ambiguous marriage to a phantom reflects this theme.
- Cousin Hannah is seen as ancient and time-worn, while Catherine's memory of her is vague and fleeting. The passage of time is also symbolically represented by the changing weather, candle flames, and shifting landscapes.
- The confession that the greatest battles are fought at home between man and woman reframes the traditional idea of heroism and war, placing emphasis on personal and domestic struggles rather than grand military conquests.
- Swords, battles, sieges, and military metaphors are used extensively to describe Cousin Hannah's activism and life philosophy.
- Snowflakes, winter winds, desert storms, and mating birds symbolize the passage of time, change, and emotional states.
- Candle flames, reflections in mirrors, and the interplay of light and dark underscore the theme of illusion and the duality of the characters.
- Journeys to foreign lands, the Pony Express metaphor, and references to faraway cities emphasize Cousin Hannah's restless spirit and Catherine's longing for escape or transformation.
- Catherine's wedding veils, billowing skirts, and parasols symbolize both concealment and empowerment, linking femininity with both fragility and strength.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Cousin Hannah as a Warrior and Adventurer

See: Women's Suffrage

- Cousin Hannah is depicted as a forceful, uncompromising woman, a "great captain" who went "brandishing her sword like a cane even when there was no one" and preferred "the strident clash of arms, the pitched battle against man."

- Her sword symbolizes her militant feminism and unyielding fight against patriarchal oppression. The sword, usually a weapon of war and honor, here is also described metaphorically as a cane, suggesting both her authority and perhaps a certain defiance despite solitude. The image of her as a “veteran of so many winter campaigns, desert marches through burning sands” evokes the harshness of her battles, both literal and metaphorical.

Winter, Snow, and Cold Imagery

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- The persistent references to coldness, snow, frostbite, and icicles create a chilling atmosphere that underlines both Cousin Hannah’s harshness and isolation and the emotional coldness surrounding the characters. For example, the barometer dropping “colder than a sea of the icebergs,” and the “great icicles hanging from the ceiling” on the day she died symbolize the emotional frost and the chilling impact she has on Catherine.
- Snow and ice also symbolize purity, whiteness, and unattainable beauty, reflecting Cousin Hannah’s idealized vision of womanhood as “unsullied honor” and beauty “as white as virginal snow.”

The Riderless White Horse and Rider Imagery

See: Horses and Carriages

- The image of a riderless white horse “white as snow” coming through the window, bringing snow and cold with it, is a powerful symbol of death or the passing of Cousin Hannah.
- The white horse traditionally symbolizes a harbinger of death or a psychopomp figure in literature, and here it represents the transition from life to death for this warrior woman.

The Veils, Parasols, and Skirts as Symbols of Femininity and Defense

See: The Umbrella · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- The chapter richly describes feminine accouterments like “great garden hats decked with billowing plumes,” “secretive veils,” “frilled parasols,” and “great hoop skirts flounced with ribbons and lace.” These symbolize traditional femininity, societal expectations, and also the subtle weapons and shields women use in social and gender conflicts.
- Cousin Hannah’s urging for women to wield their parasol “as her sword or her shield” and to “fly her skirts as her banners in her war against tyrannical man” transforms these delicate objects into instruments of rebellion. The parasol becomes a metaphor for female agency in a world dominated by men.

The Journey and the Northwest Passage

See: The Bus and the Journey

- Cousin Hannah's life is described in terms of vast, almost mythical journeys through "desert cities," "impregnable Asiatic fortresses," "the great Wall of China," "Manitoba, Hudson's Bay," and "ten thousand singing islands of snow and ice."
- The reference to the "Northwest Passage" metaphorically represents the ultimate, elusive goal of life or freedom or "that which cannot be found." It connotes a spiritual or existential journey, echoing themes of quest and discovery.

The Contrast Between Cousin Hannah and Catherine

- Catherine is portrayed as fragile, veiled in lace and illusions, "bed-ridden," "cold heart, cold and hard as the mountain rock," and largely passive. In contrast, Cousin Hannah is active, combative, and direct. This contrast is symbolized by Catherine's white umbrella and lace, symbols of delicacy and retreat, versus Cousin Hannah "beating with her white umbrella upon the bridegroom" like a weapon.
- Catherine's world is one of dreams, illusions, and absence, while Cousin Hannah's is one of harsh realities and confrontations.

Death as a Wedding and Wedding as Death

See: Weddings and Funerals

- The narrative blurs the boundaries between life milestones and death: "weddings are funerals, and funerals are weddings." This imagery underscores the theme of transformation and loss inherent in marriage and life.
- Catherine's vague, elusive descriptions of her marriage (to a phantom, a porpoise, a star, an iceberg) symbolize the illusory or absent nature of her union and love. Marriage here is a symbolic death of the self or an eternal separation, while death is the final union.

The Ethereal and Dreamlike Atmosphere

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination

- The chapter often blurs reality and dream: visits occur "only in a dream," and there are "ambient ghosts of all dead loves."
- The use of mirrors, candle flames, flickering stars, and shifting reflections invokes a dreamscape where time and space are fluid. This imagery conveys the fragile mental and emotional state of Catherine and the elusive, almost mythical nature of Cousin Hannah.

The Military and Siege Imagery

- Cousin Hannah's life is described metaphorically as a "long siege" with strategic withdrawals and renewed assaults. This symbolizes her relentless struggle for women's rights and independence, never defeated but always adapting.
- The castle symbolizes societal structures opposed to her, and the sea eroding the shore suggests slow but inevitable change wrought by persistent effort.

The Symbolism of Light and Darkness

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Cousin Hannah is described as "standing in a beam of sudden light," a figure of revelation and defiance.
- Yet the chapter also has Mr. Spitzer's "dark cape," the ladies' "already shadowed snow-white faces," and Catherine's "clouded looks," symbolizing mystery, obscurity, and the unknown. This interplay of light and dark reflects the duality of the characters and the ambiguous outcomes of Cousin Hannah's battles.

Research: Resources

- "to invite her enemy to a banquet, to ease his suspicions with goblets of wine": Judith feasted with Holofernes until he lay drunk, then "smote twice upon his neck with all her might, and she took away his head from him" (Judith 13:8, Apocrypha, King James Version). See The Bible.
- "the misogynist, the woman hater": A misogynist is a person who dislikes, despises, or is strongly prejudiced against women. Female misogynists (internalized sexism/oppression) are characterized by exalting the feminine ideal, favoring traditional gender roles, looking down on women who are not feminine, self-loathing, and a belief that she is superior to other women or in constant competition with them. There is a three-tiered system for patriarchy. Patriarchy is the system of social organization that favors and empowers men. Sexism is the code of conduct or rules that are established for women. Misogyny is the policing or enforcement of these rules on women (Kate Manne, Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny, Oxford University Press, 2017). Thus women can be misogynist if they are helping to police or enforce what women can and cannot do. Looking at all of this it can be determined that no, Cousin Hannah was not misogynist for wanting women to have independence or the right to vote. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "worse than enchantment by an Eastern drug or spiritous liquor or witches' brew": The Eastern drug is opium, Catherine's own enchantment. The witches' brew is the cauldron of Macbeth: "Double, double toil and trouble; / Fire burn and cauldron bubble" (4.1). See Opium and Shakespeare.
- "to fly her skirts on tallest mountain peaks": Young's Alpine story of the two bloomer girls who shed their skirts on a summit, one lost going back for hers. See the Chapter

30 resources, the Chapter 31 resources, and Women's Suffrage.

- "should have been employed by the old Pony Express": Relays of riders carried the mail between St. Joseph, Missouri, and Sacramento, California, from April 1860 until the telegraph replaced them in October 1861. See Horses and Carriages.
- "She should have brought the message to Garcia": A Message to Garcia is an essay by Elbert Hubbard about the value of individual initiative and conscientiousness in work. Published in 1899, it praised Lieutenant Andrew Rowan, who in 1898 carried President McKinley's message to the Cuban general Calixto García.
- "colder than the Weddell Sea": The Weddell Sea is part of the Southern Ocean off Antarctica. It is named for the sealer James Weddell, who sailed into it in 1823, and its pack ice crushed Shackleton's Endurance in 1915. See Exploration and the Poles.
- "colder than the lunar sea": The dark plains of the moon are dry basalt. They were named seas, maria, by Giovanni Riccioli on his map of 1651. See Astronomy.
- "Her face had not been attractive, certainly": Miss MacIntosh and Cousin Hannah are both depicted as not attractive or feminine and virgins.
- "as my mother could have endured no beautiful or potent rival": In this chapter the rivalry mirrors Madge Capehorn at the beginning of the book because she could not tolerate Jacqueline White. See the Chapter 6 resources.
- "be she even a dead bride with her face covered by a veil of snowflakes": It recalls the lost companion of Chapter 31, "a body covered by the snow." See the Chapter 31 resources.
- "challenger of Foreign Legions": The French Foreign Legion was founded in 1831 for foreign volunteers.
- "as she had lived by the sword, should have died by one sharp blow": "All they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matthew 26:52). See The Bible.
- "had slain minotaurs": Theseus killed the Minotaur in the Labyrinth of Crete. Here Death, who "had overthrown great kings," is given the hero's deeds. See Greek Mythology.
- "the black horses who wore black plumes": Victorian hearses were drawn by black horses wearing tall plumes of black ostrich feathers. See The Black Coachman and Horses and Carriages.
- "the walls might crumble at a lonely trumpet's sound": "When the people heard the sound of the trumpet, and the people shouted with a great shout, that the wall fell down flat" (Joshua 6:20). See The Bible.
- "as Boston faded into fog and water from which it came": Much of Boston stands on made land. The Back Bay was filled from tidal flats between 1857 and the 1880s.
- "a riderless horse white as snow came through the window": A riderless horse follows the coffin in state funerals. Lincoln's horse, Old Bob, was led behind his hearse in Springfield in 1865, and Black Jack followed John F. Kennedy's coffin in 1963. See Horses and Carriages.

- “No one had awakened the sleeping lady to life and love”: This characterization of Catherine resembles the folktale of Sleeping Beauty which is a classic fairy tale about a princess who is cursed to sleep for a hundred years by an evil fairy, to be awakened by a handsome prince at the end of that time. The good fairy, realizing that the princess would be frightened if alone when she awakens, uses her wand to put every living person and animal in the palace asleep, to awaken when the princess does. The early versions, Giambattista Basile’s “Sun, Moon, and Talia” (1634) and Charles Perrault’s “The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood” (1697), involve rape, cannibalism, and Sleeping Beauty giving birth to children while she is asleep (similar to noncanonical books, as in the Gnostic Hypostasis of the Archons, in which the rulers of the world rape Eve). No one wakes Catherine. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
    - In Giambattista Basile’s “Sun, Moon, and Talia” (1634), a king rapes the sleeping Talia, she bears twins without waking, and his wife later orders the children cooked.
- “the limelight of publicity which was so very different from the light of a halo”: Limelight, a block of lime heated white-hot in a gas flame, was developed by Thomas Drummond in the 1820s and lit theater stages from 1837.
- “picketing in a cold, sleet rain in front of a skirt factory”: The Silent Sentinels of the National Woman’s Party picketed the White House in all weathers from January 1917, and many were jailed. In the 1912 Lawrence, Massachusetts, “Bread and Roses” strike, women mill workers marched through the New England winter. Charles Studin’s suffragist, Young’s source for Cousin Hannah, “chained herself to a lamppost in front of the White House” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Women’s Suffrage.
- “challenging the conductor to a duel”: Studin’s suffragist “challenged a British prime minister to a duel and the prime minister refused to bear arms against the lady” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Cousin Hannah and Women’s Suffrage.
- “these hollow men, these advocates of lost causes, these men of straw, these things of naught”: “But hollow men, like horses hot at hand, / Make gallant show and promise of their mettle” (Shakespeare, Julius Caesar 4.2). Matthew Arnold called Oxford the “home of lost causes” (Essays in Criticism, 1865), and “a thing of naught” is Flute’s phrase in A Midsummer Night’s Dream (4.2). See Shakespeare.
- “less than poor street Arabs”: “Street Arab” was a Victorian term for homeless street children, likening them to wandering Bedouin.
- “the valleys of dry bones”: “The valley which was full of bones… O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD” (Ezekiel 37:1, 4). See The Bible.
- “the sleepy myrmidons who did my mother’s bidding”: The Myrmidons were the soldiers Achilles led to Troy in Homer’s Iliad. Ovid tells that Zeus made them from ants for King Aeacus (Metamorphoses 7). The word came to mean a follower who obeys without question. See Homer’s Epics and Greek Mythology.
- “the centaurs laying great golden eggs like moons upon the grass”: It recalls Aesop’s fable “The Goose That Laid the Golden Eggs.” See Greek Mythology.

- “Had she come from Outer Mongolia, the great Wall of China, the kingdom of Prester John”: Three of Cousin Hannah’s far places.
  - Outer Mongolia was a territory of the Qing dynasty. It declared independence in 1911 and was the Soviet-backed Mongolian People’s Republic from 1924.
  - The great Wall of China is a series of fortifications built across the northern borders of Imperial China. Most of the wall that stands today was built under the Ming dynasty (1368-1644).
  - Prester John was a legendary Christian patriarch, presbyter, and king. The legend began with a forged letter that circulated around 1165.
- “Had she come from Manitoba, Hudson’s Bay, Cape Reprieve, the Laurentian Shield”: The Canadian Far North. See Exploration and the Poles.
  - Manitoba is a province in Canada.
  - Hudson’s Bay is a large body of saltwater in northeastern Canada. The Hudson’s Bay Company was chartered in 1670 to trade furs there.
  - The Laurentian Shield (Canadian Shield/Laurentian Plateau) is a large area of exposed Precambrian igneous and high-grade metamorphic rocks that forms the ancient geologic core of the North American continent.
- “sapphires which turned to rubies, rubies which turned to sapphires”: Ruby and sapphire are the same mineral, corundum. A trace of chromium turns it red, and that red stone is ruby. See Pearls and Jewels.
- “Had she found the Northwest Passage”: Northwest Passage is the sea route between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans through the Arctic Ocean. Sir John Franklin’s expedition was lost seeking it in 1845, and Roald Amundsen first sailed through it in the Gjøa, 1903-1906. See Exploration and the Poles.
  - Northwest Passage (1937) is a novel by Kenneth Roberts. “On every side of us are men who hunt perpetually for their personal northwest passage, too often sacrificing health, strength, and life itself to the search; and who shall say they are not happier in their vain but hopeful quest than wiser, duller folks who sit at home, venturing nothing and, with sour laughs, deriding the seekers for that fabled thoroughfare?”
- “Did she bring a message from a great king to a great khan”: Kublai Khan sent the Polo brothers to the Pope with a letter asking for a hundred learned men, and they set out back to him in 1271 with the young Marco Polo, reaching his court about 1275.
- “the seed-times and the golden seasons”: “While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease” (Genesis 8:22). See Genesis.
- “the stately mating dance of the whooping cranes”: Whooping cranes court with leaps, bows, and wing-flapping. By 1941 only about fifteen wild birds remained. See Birds.
- “She had left him at the church door with a white bouquet in his hands”: Young told Studs Terkel that when Cousin Hannah “abandons the bridegroom at the church door,” “she goes to a numerologist who advises her as to how she should spell her name in

the future and adds the hyphen just at the time when she dramatically becomes a hyphenated personality" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). The hyphen is the one in Freemount-Snowden. See Cousin Hannah and Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- "She had been the veteran of so many winter campaigns": It recalls the painting Liberty Leading the People (Eugène Delacroix, 1830).
- "like that faint heart which never won fair lady": An old proverb, which Gilbert and Sullivan made a song, "Faint heart never won fair lady," in Iolanthe (1882).
- "she had been married on the tennis court": Tennis and archery were among the first sports open to women. Charlotte Cooper won the first women's Olympic title, in tennis, at Paris in 1900.
- "as the robber bridegroom carries the swooning bride": In the Grimms' "The Robber Bridegroom" (1812), a bride discovers that her bridegroom murders young women. Eudora Welty retold it as a novel, The Robber Bridegroom (1942). See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- "weird huntsmen and barking dogs": The Wild Hunt of European folklore, a ghostly troop of huntsmen and hounds riding the storm at night. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- "her wedding gown had been torn to shreds by brambles": In the Grimms' "Little Briar Rose," a hedge of thorns grows around the sleeping castle, and princes who try to pass die caught in it. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- "For weddings are funerals": In this chapter the idea of weddings and funerals mirrors Madge Capehorn at the beginning of the book because of her situation. In Chapter 6 "she had no bridal trousseau, no negligee ribbons, no clothes to come to child-bed with, no dance programs, no suitors, no husband." See Weddings and Funerals and the Chapter 6 resources.
- "this uninvited wedding guest": In the Grimms' "Little Briar Rose" (1812), the thirteenth wise woman, not invited to the feast, curses the child. Coleridge's Ancient Mariner also stops a Wedding-Guest at the door. See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Romantic Poets.
- "that pale cavalier who, with disheveled locks, with foaming mouth, is driven by the mare": In Plato's Phaedrus the soul is a charioteer with two horses, one noble and one unruly, who must master the wild one with the bit. See Plato and Platonism.
- "Death is that which is caused by our partial knowledge": "For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away" (1 Corinthians 13:9-10). See The Bible, Ecclesiastes, and Death and Mortality.
    - "For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (Ecclesiastes 1:18). The paradox of knowledge challenges the common belief that knowledge is always a positive thing. It acknowledges that wisdom, while valuable, might also bring greater awareness of the problems, and limitations of human existence.

Vocabulary

Abeyance

A state of temporary suspension.

Ambient

Surrounding.

Ambivalence

Mixed or contradictory feelings.

Anvil

The heavy iron block on which a blacksmith hammers hot metal into shape.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Armorer

A maker or repairer of armor and weapons.

Barometer

An instrument that measures air pressure, used to forecast the weather.

Cavalier

A horseman or gallant gentleman; also offhand and disdainful.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Consanguineous

Related by blood, descended from the same ancestor.

Cosmographer

One who maps or describes the universe or the earth.

Denouement

The final outcome of the main complication in a story.

Dissembling

Hiding one’s true feelings.

Ermine

The white winter fur of the stoat, used to trim the robes of kings and nobles.

Escarpment

A long, steep slope or cliff.

Evanescent

Quickly fading or vanishing.

Ewe-necked

Having a thin neck that curves upward like a ewe’s.

Extemporal

Done on the spur of the moment.

Extensible

Able to be extended.

Femme fatale

A seductive woman who leads men to ruin.

Flounced

Trimmed with flounces, wide strips of gathered or pleated fabric sewn to a skirt or dress.

Fluted

Marked with long rounded grooves, like a column.

Frivolities

Silly, trivial, or lighthearted things.

Fusilier

A soldier armed with a light musket.

Grizzled

Streaked with grey.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Imbroglio

A confused or complicated situation.

Impregnable

Unable to be captured or broken into.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Keel and list

To keel over is to capsize, with the keel, the ship’s backbone along the bottom, turning upward. To list is to lean to one side, usually from water taken on.

Khan

A title of rulers in Central Asia.

Libertine

One who lives without moral restraint, especially in love.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Metamorphic

Having to do with a change of form. In geology, rock that heat and pressure have changed.

Mica

A mineral that splits into thin, shiny, nearly transparent sheets and makes rock glitter.

Neuralgia

Sharp nerve pain.

Nugatory

Of no value or importance.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Parasol

A light umbrella carried for shade from the sun.

Pasha

A high Ottoman title for a governor or general.

Patrician

Aristocratic; in Rome, a member of the noble class.

Peruked

Wearing a peruke, a wig popular from the 17th to the 19th century.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Promontory

A high point of land jutting out into the sea.

Propitiate

To win over or appease.

Requiem

A Mass or song for the dead.

Sheik

An Arab chief or elder.

Spiritous

Alcoholic; an old spelling of spirituous.

Stridently

Harshly and loudly.

Supine

Lying face up; also passive.

Temporize

To delay or evade in order to gain time.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Vestibule

An entrance hall.

Voluminous

Large, full, or great in volume.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Chapter 33

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

A Boston newspaper once called Catherine "the late Mrs. Catherine Cartwheel," widow of Jock, and Mr. Spitzer never told her. The same paper reported Peron seen on Benevolent Street, and Mr. Spitzer walked there the next evening. Catherine cannot reconstruct her wedding. Her bridegroom was a white camel, a church steeple, a key, the wind, perhaps Death while she slept. Mr. Spitzer cannot remember the wedding at all. He writes harp music to imitate the wind in a bridge's cables, and day after day he asks the post office to trace a blank letter he mailed to himself years ago. He decides her dreaming is no farther from reality than the lives of those who punch time clocks: "They, too, could live only while they dreamed." When she tells someone to open the door and a human-sized blackbird answers that it is already open, Mr. Spitzer gets up and opens it.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Jock Cartwheel · Peron Spitzer · The Black Coachman · Vera Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Madness and Sanity · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence · Time

Symbols: Birds · Dogs · Horses and Carriages · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Moon and Stars · Music and Instruments · Twins and Doubles · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Marguerite Young on Her Craft

Allusions: American Writers · Astronomy · Edgar Allan Poe · Exploration and the Poles · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Judaism · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, it is revealed that a Boston newspaper mistakenly referred to Vera's mother as deceased, calling her "the late Mrs. Catherine Cartwheel" despite her still being alive. Mr. Spitzer chooses not to correct this error, believing it "unimportant and possibly trivial," as Catherine lives in a realm of "starry illusions" due to her opium addiction.

- Catherine sometimes thinks she was never married, or was married to strangers “as often as an erroneous clock struck,” and she “would swear, of course, that she had never married Mr. Spitzer.” Her preference for imagining multiple, shifting, and fantastical bridegrooms underscores her dissociation from reality and her embrace of poetic, surreal identities.
- Catherine’s fragmented and vague recollection of her wedding, surrounded by “spirits in the air,” “glassy pebbles rolling on the shore,” “swords of fire, swords of ice,” and “wild, ethereal wedding music,” creates a surreal, almost otherworldly atmosphere.
- Mr. Spitzer’s role as the observer and caretaker is critical. He reflects on Catherine’s addiction, her detachment from time, and her illusory world, concluding that she is “probably no more enslaved than others were by their predisposition toward illusion.” His philosophical musings on consciousness, unconsciousness, and the nature of life and death add depth to the narrative, portraying a compassionate understanding of human frailty and the necessity of illusions. His own struggle with reality, his brother’s ruin, and his meticulous attempts to grasp the elusive, mirror Catherine’s own fragmented existence.
- A striking passage describes Catherine talking to invisible or imagined persons, showing her living in a world where the usual distinctions between presence and absence, reality and fantasy, are dissolved. Mr. Spitzer’s rising to open the door, which the blackbird says is already open, demonstrates his gentle indulgence of her illusions and the poignancy of her condition.
- References to the “dead lute-player in the garden,” “formal king penguins,” “melancholy seals,” and “tinkling duchesses” contribute to the surreal and symbolic texture of the chapter. These images reinforce the theme of a world where music, memory, and myth intermingle, and reality is perceived through a kaleidoscope of unusual and poetic visions.
- Mr. Spitzer writes harp music as “the exact imitation of the wind playing through the strings and cables of a bridge,” and day after day he asks the post office to trace a dead letter he mailed to himself, “an envelope containing a piece of blank paper.” His music and his letter are both waiting for something that does not arrive.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Mr. Spitzer leaves the error alone because “some day this Boston newspaper… would probably be right, having merely mistaken the time.” Is an early obituary a lie?
- “She would often say that she was the kind of woman who could love only the man she had never married.” Why?
- Mr. Spitzer mails himself “a piece of blank paper” and asks the post office to trace it. What is he waiting to receive?

Characters

- Mr. Spitzer “could never remember this wedding,” expressing “his seething belligerence by his blank passivity.” Where else does his politeness hide anger?
- He fears his unconsciousness “as he feared death.” Why does Catherine’s unconsciousness seem to him “a greater freedom”?
- The paper reports Peron “walking along Benevolent Street.” Which brother is the newspaper wrong about?

Connections

- In Chapter 32 Catherine married “a phantom.” Here “the bride had been a door. The bridegroom had been a key.” How do the two weddings differ?
- Mr. Spitzer’s music imitates “the wind playing through the strings and cables of a bridge.” How does it echo the harp at Catherine’s wedding?
- In Chapter 14 Catherine said “the coachman was her conscience.” Who drives her carriage here?

Reflection

- Is anyone ever “quite awake”?
- Would you correct a friend’s comforting mistake?
- What would you mail to yourself?

Research: Characters

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s mother)

- A once-famous beauty and socialite who has long been out of public view.
- A complex figure, described as living in illusions and opium-induced dreams.
- Her memories, especially of her wedding(s), are fragmented, poetic, and unreliable.
- She is not told that a newspaper reported her death, and she sometimes thinks she was never married at all, though her husband was Jock, who “had disappeared when the mountains moved like waves.”
- She interacts with imaginary figures and experiences reality as a blend of dream and fact.

Mr. Spitzer

- A close, faithful friend of Catherine.
- He understands her illusions and indulges them, choosing not to correct her perceptions.

- He is practical but also philosophical, contrasting his own conscious precision with Catherine's dreamlike state.
- He is involved in artistic creation like writing harp music inspired by the wind and bridges.
- Carries a burden of familial and financial complications (his brother's debts), "vicarious debts, those he could never hope to pay to creditors he did not know."
- He represents a grounding figure, yet he is also caught in Catherine's world of illusion.
- Mr. Spitzer's thoughts include existential questions about reality, illusion, death, and time.
- He goes to the post office day after day to trace a letter he mailed to himself, "an envelope containing a piece of blank paper."
- Catherine rejected "the altogether different life she might have lived had she accepted his invitation to live in a secluded place and listen to his future music, that which had been as yet unwritten."
- He believes her conscious states "were probably like the unconscious states of other people."

Peron Spitzer

- The Boston newspaper reports him "seen recently walking along Benevolent Street, peering into old doorways."

Jock Cartwheel

- "The fashionable dog fancier, the fabulous yachtsman, the great mountain-climber who had disappeared when the mountains moved like waves."

The Black Coachman

- At the wedding Catherine saw "his silver buttons, his white gloves," and sometimes heard "the coachman's cries to his horses" without seeing him.

Research: Themes

Memory and Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past

- Catherine's memories are described as "beautifully inaccurate," blending fact with fantasy.
- She often confuses time, place, and people, exemplifying the fragility of human memory.

- Memories of her wedding are surreal, involving images like bats, owls, icy landscapes, and ambiguous bridegrooms.
- The narrative suggests memory as a form of dream or illusion that can persist beyond life.

Death and Existence

See: Death and Mortality

- Catherine is reported dead by a Boston newspaper but is alive in her own dream world.
- Death is portrayed ambiguously, sometimes as a wedding to Death itself or as slipping into an eternal unconsciousness.
- The boundary between life and death is blurred, raising questions about what it means truly to live or die.

Time and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Time

- Time is fluid and unreliable in Catherine’s experience; she confuses noon and midnight, beginnings and endings.
- Mr. Spitzer attempts to keep time (symbolized by his brother’s watch) as a measure of reality, but even he is caught between illusion and fact.
- The novel questions the nature of reality itself and how much is defined by perception.

Music and Sound

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Mr. Spitzer’s harp music inspired by wind and bridge cables symbolizes the blending of natural forces and artistic creation.
- Music serves as a metaphor for the ephemeral, invisible forces shaping human experience and memory.

Isolation and Companionship

See: Isolation and Connection

- Despite Catherine’s isolation in her illusions, Mr. Spitzer remains a constant companion, albeit one often rejected by her.
- Their relationship is marked by a tension between reality and fantasy, presence and absence.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Wedding and Bridegroom(s)

See: Weddings and Funerals · Keys, Doors, and Locks

- Catherine's ambiguous wedding(s) symbolize transitions, possibly to death or between states of consciousness.
- The multiple, shifting bridegrooms (white camel, church steeple, wind) reflect the fluidity of identity and reality.

The Black Coachman and Carriage

See: Horses and Carriages

- Symbolize passage, possibly death or transition.
- The carriage on the streets of Boston, after years of absence, signals a disruption of normal order.
- In Chapter 14 Catherine said her body was the carriage and "the coachman was her conscience."

The Blackbird and the Door

See: Birds · Keys, Doors, and Locks

- She tells someone to open the door, and the voice answers that it is already open, though the door is closed. She is talking to a human-sized blackbird.
- These images portray the overlap of the real and the imaginary.

Stars and Celestial Imagery

See: Moon and Stars

- Stars and heavens often represent unreachable or eternal realms.
- Catherine refuses to marry Mr. Spitzer "not while the stars shone in the glassy heavens," linking love and fate to cosmic forces.

The Newspaper Mistake

See: Illusion and Reality

- The misreporting of Catherine's death and Mr. Spitzer's decision not to correct it sets the tone for the chapter's exploration of truth versus illusion.

The Wedding Memories

See: Weddings and Funerals

- Catherine’s hazy, fantastical memories of her wedding illustrate the blurred line between reality and fantasy.

Mr. Spitzer’s Harp Music

See: Music and Instruments

- His artistic endeavor is inspired by natural sounds and symbolizes the attempt to impose order or meaning on chaos.

Catherine’s Conversations with Invisible Figures

See: Madness and Sanity

- Demonstrates her detachment from consensus reality.
- Mr. Spitzer could not hear the answer she heard, “though apparently what the other person said was quite rational.”

Research: Resources

- “the fashionable dog fancier”: A dog fancier breeds and shows pedigree dogs. The Westminster Kennel Club held its first show in New York in 1877. See Dogs.
- “great kings wrapped in canvas shrouds”: In burial at sea, the dead were sewn into canvas weighted with shot, the last stitch by tradition through the nose. See Death and Mortality.
- “she was still entertaining Chinese mandarins”: Weissenbach, the real opium lady, “dreamed about… mandarins and… a human-sized black bird standing in the hallway” (Marguerite Young, interview with Charles Ruas, WBAI radio, New York). See the blackbird at the end of the chapter and Catherine Cartwheel.
- “great balloon ascensionists who long ago had descended to earth, dragging their shrouds and cords”: Salomon Andrée set out by balloon for the North Pole in 1897 and vanished. The bodies and diaries of his party were found on White Island in 1930. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “the mistake of a printer’s devil”: A printer’s devil was a young apprentice in a printing establishment who performed a number of tasks, such as mixing tubs of ink and fetching type. Notable writers including Ambrose Bierce, Benjamin Franklin, Walt Whitman, and Mark Twain served as printer’s devils in their youth.
- “what ghostly hand had guided the great printer’s devil”: “In the same hour came forth fingers of a man’s hand, and wrote over against the candlestick upon the plaister of the wall” (Daniel 5:5), the writing at Belshazzar’s feast. See The Bible.
- “just when the lamp-lighters were lighting the lamps”: Boston’s Beacon Hill is still lit by gas street lamps, once lit each evening by lamplighters.
- “like the sobbing of the rain upon the river Styx”: The Styx is the river of the underworld, and the gods swore their oaths by it. See Greek Mythology.

- “even her funeral, as he remembered his”: Mr. Spitzer remembers his own funeral because he buried his twin. Young said, “Grief was so great that he thought the wrong brother died” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Twins and Doubles and Peron Spitzer.
- “The bride had been a door. The bridegroom had been a key”: Christ says “I am the door” (John 10:9) and holds “the key of David” (Revelation 3:7), and the Church is “the bride, the Lamb’s wife” (Revelation 21:9). See The Bible.
- “though she seemed to remember that he had been at her wedding”: “He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled” (John 3:29). Mr. Spitzer is the friend at the wedding. See The Bible.
- “swords of fire, swords of ice”: At the gate of Eden God placed “a flaming sword which turned every way” (Genesis 3:24). See Genesis.
- “her powers of ratiocination were not good”: Poe called his Dupin detective stories, beginning with “The Murders in the Rue Morgue” (1841), “tales of ratiocination.” See Edgar Allan Poe.
- “that she had been married to Death while she was sleeping”: Death and the Maiden, a theme of Renaissance painting and of Schubert’s song “Der Tod und das Mädchen” (1817), in which Death comes to a girl as a gentle lover: “Thou shalt sleep softly in my arms.” See Death and Mortality.
- “Near-sighted bats flitting by on leathern wings”: “Save where the weak-ey’d bat, / With short shrill shriek flits by on leathern wing” (William Collins, “Ode to Evening,” 1747). Bats are not near-sighted. They see well and also hunt by echolocation. See Romantic Poets.
- “Owls, great horned owls hooting above the lonely church steeples”: “From yonder ivy-mantled tow’r / The moping owl does to the moon complain” (Thomas Gray, “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,” 1751). Young named Gray’s Elegy as a model for Angel in the Forest (Marguerite Young, interview with Charles Ruas and Joan Schwartz, WBAI radio, New York). See Birds.
- “the withered harp strings played upon by nothing but the fingers of the invisible wind”: At Yaddo, Truman Capote occupied Katrina Trask’s tower, where a harp played when the door opened, and Young said, “I used that harp in my description of the Opium Lady” (Charles Ruas, Conversations with American Writers, Knopf, 1985). See Catherine Cartwheel and Music and Instruments.
    - A harp played by the wind is an Aeolian harp, named for Aeolus, keeper of the winds. In Coleridge’s “The Eolian Harp” (1795) it is “that simplest Lute, / Placed length-ways in the clasping casement.” See Romantic Poets.
- “The sere stars shook like autumn leaves”: “My way of life / Is fall’n into the sear, the yellow leaf” (Macbeth 5.3). See Shakespeare.
- “the dead lute-player in the garden, his pear-shaped body, his long, twisted neck”: The lute has a pear-shaped body and a pegbox bent back from its neck. “He was this man

who was this musical instrument.” See Music and Instruments.

- “a great many formal king penguins, a great many melancholy seals”: King penguins live only in the far south, and seals in both polar seas, so “the bipolar illusion” means of both poles. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “these dream fugues, these polyphonic compositions”: A fugue is a composition in which voices enter one after another on the same theme, as in Bach’s The Art of Fugue. In psychiatry a fugue is also a flight from one’s own identity. See Music and Composers.
- “differentiate between black and white, green and yellow and red”: Colors are the brain’s interpretation of different wavelengths of light. Human eyes have three kinds of color receptors, most sensitive to red, green, and blue, as Thomas Young proposed in 1802.
- “Suppose there was no escort from here to there”: The damsel in distress is a romance trope dating from ancient times. It is a recurring narrative device in which one or more men must rescue a woman who has either been kidnapped or placed in general peril. Kinship, love, lust or a combination of those gives the male protagonist the motivation or compulsion to initiate the narrative. The female character herself may be competent, but still finds herself in this type of situation. The helplessness of these fictional females, according to some critics, is linked to views outside of fiction that women as a group need to be taken care of by men. The evolution of the trope throughout history has been described as: what changes through the decades isn’t the woman since she is always the weak victim in need of the male savior, it’s the attacker. The faces of the attacker in popular media are legion, whichever group best meets the collective fears of a culture is used (Wikipedia). Whether it’s Joachim Spitzer whom Catherine rejected or Cousin Hannah to remove men altogether as a savior figure, Catherine is not going to be saved by anyone.
- “the tonnage of wind pressure against cables”: The Tacoma Narrows Bridge, “Galloping Gertie,” twisted in the wind and fell into Puget Sound on November 7, 1940.
- “to inquire for a dead letter”: The Dead Letter Office received mail that could not be delivered. In Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scrivener” (1853), Bartleby had been a clerk there: “Dead letters! does it not sound like dead men?” See American Writers.
- “Perhaps it was in the lunar Apennines”: The Apennines are a mountain chain in Italy. The lunar Apennines, the Montes Apenninus, were named by Johannes Hevelius in 1647 after the Italian range. See Astronomy.
- “those who must punch time-clocks in great factories, those who must turn great wheels”: Willard Bundy patented the time clock in 1888. Chaplin’s Modern Times (1936) opens on workers at the time clock and swallows Charlie in the great wheels. Young said, “Charlie Chaplin has influenced every book I’ve ever written” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). See Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “never to join in the chorus of this dumb-show”: A dumb-show, also known as a pantomime or mime, is a dramatic performance using gestures and body movements

without words, often used to summarize, supplement, or comment on the main action of a play. Hamlet's players perform a dumb-show before The Murder of Gonzago (3.2). (Wikipedia) See Shakespeare.

- "none for this web of causality": Causality is an influence by which one event, process, state, or object (a cause) contributes to the production of another event, process, state, or object (an effect) where the cause is partly responsible for the effect, and the effect is partly dependent on the cause. In general, a process has many causes, which are also said to be causal factors for it, and all lie in its past. An effect can in turn be a cause of, or causal factor for, many other effects, which all lie in its future. Some writers have held that causality is metaphysically prior to notions of time and space. Causality is an abstraction that indicates how the world progresses, so basic a concept that it is more apt as an explanation of other concepts of progression than as something to be explained by others more basic. The concept is like those of agency and efficacy. For this reason, a leap of intuition may be needed to grasp it. Accordingly, causality is implicit in the logic and structure of ordinary language. The topic of causality remains a staple in contemporary philosophy (Wikipedia).
- "none for the place, none for the person": Doctors test whether a patient is "oriented to person, place, and time." See Madness and Sanity.
- "except that the door was closed": The Parable of the Ten Virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). It symbolizes spiritual readiness, and those that are able to enter the wedding feast. This imagery is rooted in Jewish wedding customs, where the bridegroom's arrival was a central event, and the bride and her attendants would go out to meet him. The bridegroom came, "and the door was shut" (Matthew 25:10). "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matthew 25:13). See The Bible and Judaism.
- "she was talking to a human-sized blackbird": This was Weissenbach's: "a human-sized black bird standing in the hallway" (Marguerite Young, interview with Charles Ruas, WBAI radio, New York). See the entry on Chinese mandarins and Catherine Cartwheel.

Vocabulary

Aloof

Distant; not friendly or involved.

Ascensionist

One who goes up in a balloon.

Belligerence

Hostility; eagerness to fight.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Chagrin

Distress or annoyance at having failed or been humiliated.

Coexistent

Existing at the same time.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Fallible

Capable of error.

Finis

The end.

Furtive

Secretive; sly.

Incredulity

Disbelief.

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Leathern

Made of or like leather.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Mercurially

Changeably, unpredictably.

Née

Born; used before a woman’s maiden name. Young writes “nee.”

Omnivorous

Eating everything; taking in everything.

Ponderous

Heavy; slow and labored.

Ratiocination

Exact, logical reasoning.

Sere

Dry and withered.

Stovepipe

A tall silk hat; also the metal pipe that carries smoke from a stove.

Tonnage

The size or carrying capacity of a ship.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Velocity

Speed in a given direction.

Vicariously

Experienced through another person.

Chapter 34

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Catherine remembers her wedding many ways: in white and in black, in a cathedral during a royal funeral, at home with only the black coachman as witness, as an elopement with the robber bridegroom pursued by Cossack horsemen. Most often she was married by a St. Bernard dog who spoke church Latin, gave her the Viaticum, and foretold that her husband would be lost between two frozen peaks. Cousin Hannah told her that marriage was "the death of a woman's soul" and that no man had ever loved her. Catherine remembers Hannah's visits: the iron keys jangling at her belt, her wit and metallic energy, her weird dance whenever a cock crowed, her contempt for Joachim. In her company Catherine felt "both very flirtatious and very guilty, trying to resist this man who was no man." She longs to learn arithmetic and geometry so that she might know whether the great geometer of the universe "was sane or insane." Hannah always predicted that Joachim would fail Catherine at the crucial moment, as Peron had by his apparent suicide.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Cousin Hannah · Vera Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · The Black Coachman · Jock Cartwheel · Mr. Chandelier

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Fear and Courage · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Dogs · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Mirrors and Reflections · Mountains · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Marguerite Young on Her Craft

Allusions: Astronomy · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Judaism · Milton · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a surreal and haunting depiction of Catherine's marriage, described as both a wedding and a funeral, veiled in white and black, with multiple

conflicting versions of what happened.

- Cousin Hannah is portrayed as a powerful, almost otherworldly woman. She challenges Catherine's fantasies and illusions about love and men, urging her to face the harsh realities of life without illusions. This passage contrasts Cousin Hannah's stark realism with Catherine's dreamy, romantic visions and introduces the theme of female independence and existential struggle.
- The crowing of a cock, which causes Cousin Hannah to dance and emit "showers of metallic sparks," is a striking symbol associated with awakening and revelation. The cock's crowing also connects to cultural and geographical references, such as Moroccan courtyards and veiled women, adding layers of meaning about visibility, secrecy, and awakening.
- Catherine's desire to learn arithmetic and geometry so she can understand who "the geometer" is (whether sane or insane) symbolizes her quest for order, meaning, and clarity in a chaotic and mysterious world.
- The chapter contains a profound meditation on human existence, describing man as "a nine days' wonder," "a falling star," "the broken sea shell," emphasizing transience, fragility, and the illusory nature of life. This philosophical reflection deepens the chapter's existential themes and Catherine's skepticism about men, love, and reality.
- Throughout the chapter, Catherine both resists and admires Cousin Hannah, who tries to provoke her and break down her defenses. Catherine's flirtation, guilt, and fascination highlight the interplay of imagination, memory, and identity. Cousin Hannah's relentless energy and refusal to submit contrast with Catherine's vulnerability and dreams, illustrating different responses to life's hardships.
- The final passages consider Cousin Hannah's distrust of men, her "perpendicular" strength compared to Catherine's "horizontal" invalidity, and Catherine's wavering faith both in men and women. The chapter ends on Cousin Hannah's belief that Joachim "would cruelly disappoint my mother at the last, crucial moment," as Peron had.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- The dog gave her the Viaticum, "though whether the provisions for a journey or the last rites given to one when dying, she could not say." Why might they be the same?
- "Nothing had happened at all… or everything had happened simultaneously like one image repeated in many mirrors." Which is stranger?
- Hannah cried the loudest "perhaps because she knew the silence of the unanswering heart." What is she besieging?

Characters

- Hannah asks what man “was worth a woman’s secret life.” How would Catherine answer?
- Catherine felt “both very flirtatious and very guilty, trying to resist this man who was no man.” Who is she resisting?
- Hannah believes Joachim “would cruelly disappoint my mother at the last, crucial moment.” Is she fair to him?

Connections

- The St. Bernard foretells that her husband “would fall between two frozen mountain peaks.” How does this echo Jock’s disappearance in Chapter 33 and the St. Bernard of Chapter 31?
- The cock that makes Hannah dance is also “the golden cock crowing in the twilight of my mother’s opium dreams,” the golden cock that perched at the foot of Catherine’s bed in Chapter 14. What does each announce?
- Catherine “eloped with the robber bridegroom,” just as Hannah tried to carry her away in Chapter 32. Who is the robber?

Reflection

- Can a wedding and a funeral fall on the same day of a life?
- “Nothing lived except through imagination, and nothing died except through imagination.” Do you agree?
- What would you need to learn to know whether the world’s designer is sane?

Research: Characters

Catherine

- A complex character caught between dreams and reality, longing for love but resigned to solitude.
- Her memories and fantasies reveal her inner turmoil and sense of loss.
- She is reflective, romantic, and somewhat nostalgic, haunted by unanswered questions about love and life.
- She was married most often by “a St. Bernard dog, an Alpine retriever who had come to her in a prophetic dream.”
- She yearns for “a teacher of arithmetic” so that she might know “who the geometer was.”

- When Cousin Hannah came, she would say that she “had gone to Pisa to see the Leaning Tower.”

Cousin Hannah

- A formidable, almost mythical figure symbolizing strength and independence.
- She challenges Catherine’s illusions and urges her to face reality.
- Known for her fiery spirit, sharp wit, and relentless energy, she is both a source of inspiration and tension.
- Her distrust of men and disdain for conventional womanhood provide a counterpoint to Catherine’s experiences.
- She “had always worn around her belt numerous iron keys which had jangled, giving off dissonant music.”
- At the sound of a cock crowing she danced “a weird dance, giving off showers of metallic sparks.”
- “Her contempt for old Joachim had remained necessarily boundless, like her indifference.”
- “It was said that she was jealous of Mt. Blanc.”

Joachim Spitzer

- He is “the elephant with the angelic wings, the failing memory.”
- Cousin Hannah believed he “would cruelly disappoint my mother at the last, crucial moment.”

Peron Spitzer

- He “apparently committed suicide, taking a coward’s way out.”

The Black Coachman

- At one of her weddings there was “no eye witness but the black coachman, now dead.”

Jock Cartwheel

- “It was my unknown father who had died.”

Mr. Chandelier

- Cousin Hannah seemed as strange “as Mr. Chandelier or a seven-branched crystal candelabra glittering in a far heaven.”

Research: Themes

Marriage and Loss

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Women, Gender, and Marriage

- Catherine's reflections on her marriage are fragmented and surreal. She imagines multiple versions of her wedding (married in white, black, at a funeral, by a dog, or not at all) signifying confusion, loss, and the elusive nature of commitment and love.
- Marriage is portrayed as a metaphorical death of the soul, supported by Cousin Hannah's cynical view that marriage leads to sacrifice and the wasting of a woman's talents.

Illusion versus Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- Catherine struggles to distinguish between dreams, memories, and reality. Her imagination creates a world where events happen simultaneously or not at all, where identities and places blur into one another.
- The mirrors, illusions, and dreams symbolize the instability of perception and the human desire for clarity and understanding.

Identity and Loneliness

See: Identity and the Self · Isolation and Connection

- Catherine feels isolated, spouseless, and robbed of love, reflecting a deep sense of loneliness and alienation.
- Cousin Hannah represents a contrasting figure of strength and defiance, yet also one marked by solitude and an almost otherworldly existence.

Death and Time

See: Death and Mortality · Time

- Death is a recurring motif, intertwined with marriage, dreams, and memory. Catherine contemplates the inevitability of death and the fading of beauty and life's passions.
- Time is fluid and fragmented, with references to sleep, awakening, and timelessness, emphasizing Catherine's disoriented state.

Female Strength and Defiance

See: Women, Gender, and Marriage · Fear and Courage

- Cousin Hannah embodies resilience, independence, and courage. She is portrayed as a warrior-like figure, unyielding and untamed, contrasting with Catherine's vulnerability.

- Cousin Hannah’s disdain for men and her distrust of Catherine’s whimsical nature highlight different approaches to womanhood and survival.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

White and Black in Marriage

See: Weddings and Funerals

- White symbolizes innocence and first marriage; black, “as befitted one who should be married twice,” signifies death, mourning, and a second marriage.

The Funeral and the King of France

See: Weddings and Funerals

- Represents grandeur, loss, and the blending of significant life events into one confusing memory.

The St. Bernard Dog

See: Dogs

- A prophetic figure in Catherine’s dreams, symbolizing guidance, loss, and perhaps spiritual rites.

Mirrors and Reflections

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- Symbolize self-perception, illusion, and the fragmented nature of identity.

Mountains and Avalanches

See: Mountains

- Represent obstacles, permanence, and sudden destruction in life and relationships.

The Cock Crowing

See: Birds

- Symbolizes awakening, sovereignty, and perhaps the harsh reality that disrupts illusions.

Iron Keys

See: Keys, Doors, and Locks

- Worn by Cousin Hannah, they symbolize access, control, and the discordant music of life’s complexities.

Research: Resources

- “cherubim riding on the backs of bottle-nosed dolphins”: Cupids riding dolphins are a favorite of Renaissance art, as in Raphael’s Triumph of Galatea (1512).
- “it was the king of France who had died”: At the death of a French king the herald cried, “Le roi est mort, vive le roi!” (“The king is dead, long live the king!”), first in 1422.
- “that the king was a dog, that it was a dog who had worn the crown and diamond cross”: The story of King Halga’s death and the dog’s succession is a tale from medieval Scandinavian history, specifically the Chronicon Lethrense and Annales Lundenses, where after Halga’s death, the Swedish King Eadgils forced the Danes to accept a dog as their king before the rightful heir, Rolf Krage, could take the throne. This was a symbolic act of power and control. (Wikipedia)
- “gilded Louis Quatorze chairs”: Louis Quatorze is the architectural and decorative style of Louis XIV or French Classicism. Louis XIV reigned 1643-1715.
- “she had been married by a St. Bernard dog, an Alpine retriever”: The hospice dogs of the Great St. Bernard Pass. See the Chapter 31 resources and Dogs.
- “or a glacier would move over him during the long night”: The guides lost in the Hamel party’s avalanche on Mont Blanc in 1820 came out at the foot of the Bossons Glacier in 1861, forty-one years later. See Mountains.
- “This dog had given her the Viaticum”: Viaticum is used in the Catholic Church for the Eucharist (Holy Communion) for a person who is dying as part of the Last Rites. Viaticum is Latin for provisions for a journey, as the text says.
- “Caesar’s message to the Gauls”: Commentaries on the Gallic War were written by Julius Caesar as his account of the war. It was used in Latin instruction because of its simple and direct prose. It opens, “All Gaul is divided into three parts.”
- “Pyrenees or at a ski resort covered by an avalanche of stars”: The Pyrenees are a mountain range bordering France and Spain.
- “Besides, Mr. Alexander Pope was holding her hand”: Alexander Pope was a poet and satirist in 18th century England. “Nothing so true as what you once let fall, / ‘Most Women have no Characters at all’” (Epistle to a Lady, 1735).
- “She had worn her archery veil. Many golden arrows had sought her heart”: In Ovid, Cupid’s golden arrow kindles love and his leaden arrow puts it to flight (Metamorphoses 1). See Greek Mythology.
- “had eloped with the robber bridegroom”: The Robber Bridegroom is a novella by Eudora Welty which used the Cupid and Psyche myth. See the Chapter 32 resources and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “with horse-head clouds racing along the wind”: The “luminous mares’-tails” before it are high cirrus clouds. The weather proverb runs, “Mackerel sky and mares’ tails make

tall ships carry low sails."

- "it had been a Gretna Green wedding": Gretna Green is known for "runaway marriages" since it was the first village over the Scottish border. England had strict marriage laws in the 1700s, under Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, for couples under twenty-one years old whereas Scotland did not. Scottish law allowed for irregular marriages and almost anyone had the authority to conduct a marriage. Blacksmiths were known as "anvil priests." (Wikipedia)
- "furies unnameable": The Furies, or Erinyes, pursued wrongdoers. The Greeks feared to name them and called them the Eumenides, "the Kindly Ones." See Greek Mythology.
- "screeching harpies, half woman and half bird": The Harpies, "snatchers," carried off the souls of the dead, and in the Aeneid they foul the Trojans' feast (3). See Greek Mythology.
- "Was Cousin Hannah the first horseman? Was she the second": The Four Horsemen of Revelation 6. See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- "Was not marriage, as that great suffrage captain had always said, the death of a woman's soul": Psychology has researched the ways marriage changes husband and wives. In previous chapters, the differences for women in marriage have been discussed. See the Chapter 23 resources and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
    - When Lucy Stone married Henry Blackwell in 1855, they read a protest against laws that gave the husband "custody of the wife's person."
- "My mother's beauty was already fading": In 2017 the Pew Research Center found that, among those who see differences, 61 percent of men said it was biology that determined what things men and women excel at in the workplace, while 65 percent of women said it was due to societal expectations (Pew Research Center, "Americans are divided on whether differences between men and women are rooted in biology or societal expectations," December 5, 2017). One of those expectations is that women are valued for their physical beauty and nurturing. In July 2022, at the Turning Point USA Student Action Summit in Tampa, Representative Matt Gaetz asked why "the women with the least likelihood of getting pregnant" were "the ones most worried about having abortions" and said, "Nobody wants to impregnate you if you look like a thumb." That May he had called abortion-rights protesters "over-educated, under-loved millennials" (Matt Gaetz, Twitter, May 4, 2022). See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- "It had left its little claw foot": "Til crowes feet be growe under youre yë" (Chaucer, Troilus and Criseyde 2.403).
- "Men die of many reasons before they die of love": "Men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, but not for love" (Rosalind, As You Like It 4.1). See Shakespeare.
- "this cynical suffrage captain": Through Cousin Hannah, Marguerite Young is not speaking about the futility of suffrage even though it was a long fought battle that has

not been fully documented. In The Dialectic of Sex, Firestone quotes Carrie Chapman Catt: “To get the word ‘male’ in effect out of the Constitution cost the women of the country fifty-two years of pauseless campaign… During that time they were forced to conduct 56 campaigns of referenda to male voters, 480 campaigns to get legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to voters, 47 campaigns to get state constitutional conventions to write woman suffrage into state constitutions, 277 campaigns to get state party conventions to include woman suffrage planks, 30 campaigns to get presidential party conventions to adopt woman suffrage planks in party platforms and 19 successive campaigns with 19 successive Congresses” (Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler, Woman Suffrage and Politics, 1923, as quoted in Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex, 1970). Firestone adds, “Thus defeat was so frequent, and victory so rare—and then achieved by such bare margins—that even to read about the struggle for suffrage is exhausting, let alone to have lived through it and fought for it.” In light of this Cousin Hannah’s relentless energy is seen as not disproportionate to the women’s suffrage movement. Cousin Hannah’s attitude to marriage and men (at least the outward appearance) would reflect the fundamental struggle. Again from The Dialectic of Sex, “To make both women and children totally independent would be to eliminate not just the patriarchal nuclear family, but the biological family itself” (Shulamith Firestone, The Dialectic of Sex, 1970). See Women’s Suffrage.

- “seas of fire, seas of ice, seas of glass”: “A sea of glass mingled with fire” (Revelation 15:2). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “beetling cliffs”: “The dreadful summit of the cliff / That beetles o’er his base into the sea” (Hamlet 1.4). See Shakespeare.
- “never a charivari for a lonely bride”: Charivari is a mock parade where the object was for the crowd to make as much noise as possible. It was a mock serenade of pots, pans, and horns for newlyweds, especially a mismatched couple or a remarried widow.
- “land where no bird sang”: “The sedge has withered from the lake, / And no birds sing” (Keats, “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” 1819). See Romantic Poets.
- “as ineffectual as the poorest gallows birds with their chains gibbering”: “The sheeted dead / Did squeak and gibber in the Roman streets” (Hamlet 1.1). See Shakespeare.
- “she had gone to Pisa to see the Leaning Tower”: The bell tower of Pisa Cathedral began to lean on its soft ground in 1178, while it was being built.
- “Who was worth the candle’s end”: The candle proverb. See the Chapter 31 resources.
- “that great Crusader was not a man’s woman”: There is an uncomfortable trope about women/feminists that Young uses against Cousin Hannah. She was so vehement against men when she was so ugly that men didn’t find her attractive and so there was nothing for her to defend against. It keeps coming up even to the present day. Young admitted that “there was a tendency to be satirical about her,” but she used the Alpine story of the lost skirt to explain Hannah, and in the trousseau trunks of her real source found that “she had a dream too” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel,

WFMT radio, 1965). See the Chapter 30 resources, the Chapter 31 resources, and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.

- “this mortal stage, my mother’s bedroom”: “All the world’s a stage” (As You Like It 2.7). See Shakespeare.
- “a parable in unknown tongues”: “He that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God” (1 Corinthians 14:2). See The Bible.
- “lord of the morning, lord of all he surveys”: “I am monarch of all I survey” (William Cowper, “Verses Supposed to Be Written by Alexander Selkirk,” 1782).
- “numerous iron keys which had jangled”: The chatelaine, a chain of keys at the belt, was the badge of the mistress of a house and of the housekeeper.
- “By her splendid elan vital”: Henri Bergson’s élan vital, the vital impulse driving life and evolution (Creative Evolution, 1907).
- “she was jealous of Mt. Blanc”: The named mountain ranges are not mere settings but profound symbols of the human condition’s difficult but necessary journey through adversity, change, and the pursuit of higher understanding in the novel. See Mountains.
  - Mont Blanc is the highest mountain in the Alps and Western Europe.
  - The Jungfrau is one of the main summits of the Bernese Alps. Together with the Eiger and Mönch, which Young spells “Moentsch,” as she writes “Eigar” for Eiger, the Jungfrau forms a massive wall of mountains overlooking the Bernese Oberland and the Swiss Plateau, one of the most distinctive sights of the Swiss Alps.
  - The Matterhorn is a mountain of the Alps, straddling the main watershed and border between Switzerland and Italy. Edward Whymper’s party made the first ascent in 1865, and four of the seven died on the way down.
  - Monte Rosa is a mountain massif in the eastern part of the Pennine Alps. It is between Italy and Switzerland.
- “a seven-branched crystal candelabra”: The menorah of the Tabernacle had seven branches (Exodus 25:31-37). See Judaism.
- “the golden cock crowing in the twilight of my mother’s opium dreams”: Weissenbach’s golden cockerel. See the Chapter 14 resources.
- “That cock which… an Irish housemaid swore had also awakened her”: Subplot of the Irish housemaid who went mad polishing a mirror. Irish women were the largest group of domestic servants in American cities in the late 1800s, and “the servant question” filled the magazines.
- “Cousin Hannah had exceeded these human dimensions by many dazzling cubits”: “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” (Matthew 6:27). See The Bible.
- “What was man, this poor amalgam crumbling at a touch”: The chapter’s thoughts about man fly in the face of the patrilineal succession where men serve as heads of almost every important social, cultural, and political institution and their name is

passed down through children. These things are thought to pass on a legacy of power for men and their male heirs. In Genesis God creates divisions between light and dark, water and earth, male and female and he puts man to oversee it all and keep it in order. See Genesis.

- “a nine days’ wonder”: A nine days’ wonder means something or someone that creates a short-lived sensation. See the Chapter 29 resources.
- “a teacher of arithmetic who would teach her to add”: Galileo wrote that the book of nature “is written in the language of mathematics” (The Assayer, 1623).
- “with his golden-footed compass moving across a clouded sky”: “He took the golden compasses, prepared / In God’s eternal store, to circumscribe / This universe” (Milton, Paradise Lost 7.225-227). Blake drew it as The Ancient of Days (1794), and Plutarch reports Plato’s saying that “God always geometrizes.” See Milton.
- “these great concentric circles and eccentric circles and half moons and elliptical paths”: Ptolemy explained the planets with circles, eccentrics, and epicycles. Kepler showed in 1609 that their orbits are ellipses. See Astronomy.
- “like a Houdini fooled by his own tricks”: Harry Houdini was a Hungarian-born American escape artist, illusionist, stunt performer noted for his escape acts. In the 1920s he spent his last years exposing fraudulent spiritualist mediums, and he died in 1926.
- “the inner light and the outer darkness”: “Cast out into outer darkness” (Matthew 8:12). George Fox’s Quakers spoke of the Inner Light, God’s light in every soul. See The Bible.
- “like the other side of the moon, was never turned toward this world”: The Moon keeps one face toward the Earth. Its far side was first photographed by the Soviet Luna 3 in 1959. See Astronomy.

Vocabulary

Adamantine

Unbreakable; hard as diamond.

Alarum

An old word for alarm, a call to arms.

Amalgam

A mixture or blend.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Aquiline

Hooked like an eagle’s beak.

Beetling

Jutting out and overhanging, as beetling brows or cliffs.

Campanile

A bell tower.

Candelabra

A branched candlestick.

Centrifugal

Moving or pulling outward from a center.

Chamois

A goat-antelope of the Alps.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Chasseur

A huntsman; a light infantryman.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Circumvent

To find a way around.

Congealed

Thickened or stiffened, as with cold.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Cubit

An ancient measure of length, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, about eighteen inches.

Debacle

A sudden collapse or disaster.

Deciduous

Falling off at a season, as leaves do.

Declivity

A downward slope.

Eclat

Brilliance; showy success.

Elephantine

Huge and heavy.

Ephemeral

Lasting a very short time.

Evanescent

Quickly fading or vanishing.

Foolhardy

Recklessly bold.

Fop

A man vain of his clothes.

Galvanized

Shocked into action, as by electricity.

Halberdier

A soldier armed with a halberd, a spear and axe on a long pole.

Halcyon

Calm and peaceful. From the halcyon, a mythical bird said to calm the sea while it nested on the waves in winter.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Harpy

In Greek myth, a monster with a woman’s face and a bird’s body.

Imperceptibly

So slowly or slightly as to go unnoticed.

Imperious

Proud and commanding.

Inanition

Exhaustion caused by lack of nourishment, or lack of mental or spiritual vigor and enthusiasm.

Incisive

Sharp and clear in thought.

Integer

A whole number.

Invulnerable

Unable to be wounded or harmed.

Lounge lizard

A man who idles in fashionable places seeking rich women.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Macabre

Grim and concerned with death.

Maelstrom

A powerful whirlpool; any violent, confused situation.

Parable

A short story that teaches a lesson.

Paradox

A statement or situation that seems to contradict itself and yet may be true.

Peaked

Thin and pale, as from illness.

Perpendicular

Upright; at a right angle to the horizon.

Phantasmagoric

Like a phantasmagoria, a shifting series of dreamlike or nightmarish images. A phantasmagoria was an eighteenth-century magic-lantern ghost show.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Promontory

A high point of land jutting out into the sea.

Protracted

Drawn out.

Puissance

Power, might.

Purdah

The seclusion of women from public sight.

Scintilla

A spark; a tiny trace.

Sepulchral

Of the tomb; gloomy and deathly.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Soporific

Causing sleep; dulling the senses.

Spinster

An unmarried woman, especially an older one. The word first meant a woman who spun thread.

Spurious

False.

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Timorous

Timid.

Titubation

Staggering; unsteadiness.

Transcended

Went beyond.

Ululation

Howling or wailing.

Untenable

Impossible to defend, hold, or live in.

Vicariously

Experienced through another person.

Vivacious

Lively, animated.

Voluminous

Large, full, or great in volume.

Wainscoting

Wooden paneling on the lower part of a wall.

Wraith

A ghost; a faint, pale shape.

Chapter 35

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Catherine imagines Cousin Hannah returning from the dead for a long winter of cards in the empty house, with Mr. Spitzer banished so that he cannot remind her that he outlived her. Mr. Spitzer, who cannot tell a heart from a spade, has always believed Hannah a card cheat and death "itself a great deceiver." Catherine reviews Hannah's suffrage campaigns through deserts, emirates, and harems, the bribes she refused, the stained glass window she declined, and her lack of time for courtly graces, small talk, or the dance. Hannah could never have been made to confess that "she had yearned for marriage, or she had loved a man," for the suffrage movement was "her awesome husband." Catherine admires in Hannah the "splendid unity of character" she lacks in her own fragmented selves, and wonders who brought the faded rose Hannah clutched when she died in bed. Hannah once told of a eunuch who became a father and was strangled for love. The chapter ends on Catherine's distrust of anything predictable and her habit, as Mr. Spitzer says, of taking the opposite view.

Characters present

Cousin Hannah · Joachim Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel · Vera Cartwheel · Peron Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Duality and Doubles · Fear and Courage · Freedom and Escape · Identity and the Self · Isolation and Connection · Light and Darkness · Memory and the Past · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Cards, Games, and Chance · Dogs · Fireflies · Horses and Carriages · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · Mountains · Music and Instruments · Snow, Ice, and Winter

Allusions: Astronomy · Ecclesiastes · Exploration and the Poles · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Music and Composers · Napoleon and Wellington · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job · The Civil War · The History of Opium · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, the narrative contrasts Cousin Hannah's fiery spirit and audacity with Mr. Spitzer's cautious, prideful, and somewhat pitiable nature. Mr. Spitzer is

portrayed as ignorant of cards, jealous, embittered by failures and losses, and unable to compete or engage fully in life's "games." Cousin Hannah, in contrast, is described as a lively, dashing, and indomitable player who "had out-witted every mistaken strategy" of Catherine's and had "played a mean game of cards," which metaphorically represents her boldness in life and politics.

- The chapter extensively praises Cousin Hannah's life and character. She is portrayed as a "great pioneer" and "great captain" in the suffrage movement, a woman who had no time for trivialities or passive existence. Her life was devoted to overthrowing male domination and advocating for women's rights on every front, domestic and foreign, and even in unknown territories. The metaphorical imagery of her riding horseback through vast deserts, confronting dragons and minotaurs, and facing physical dangers portrays her as an almost mythic figure whose courage and commitment transcended ordinary limitations.
- Cousin Hannah's rejection of typical feminine roles and sentiments, as Catherine sees it, is a key passage. She had no time for "feminine wiles," "the halo of self-pity," or a "moment of intimate and unexpected revelation." Unlike the romantic or domestic aspirations often associated with women of her era, she was married to the suffrage movement itself.
- Catherine imagines Cousin Hannah returning as a ghost or spirit, invited to stay in the large, empty house with its many vacant rooms and servants. The passage contrasts Cousin Hannah's vivid, active presence with Mr. Spitzer's "vacant face" and absence, underscoring the symbolic displacement of vitality by inertia and jealousy.
- The chapter reflects on the idea that Cousin Hannah is "more vivid in death than she had been in life," having "escaped this wide-meshed net of years." The chapter contrasts the enduring flame of her character with the fading presence of others, including Mr. Spitzer.
- Vera's mother, Catherine, sees herself as fragmented with multiple partial selves and vague thoughts, compared to Cousin Hannah's remarkable unity of character and steadfastness. This passage offers insight into the psychological complexity and self-reflection of Vera's mother, emphasizing themes of identity, coherence, and internal conflict.
- The chapter describes Cousin Hannah's "hardy temper," her unflinching courage in the face of threats, dangers, and opposition, and her refusal to compromise or surrender. Her willingness to face "greater dangers than most men know" and to cross forbidden boundaries symbolizes her heroic stature and her commitment to her cause.
- Towards the end, Catherine is portrayed as "beautifully obtuse," often taking contrary views, bewildered by familiar surroundings, and suffering from claustrophobia even when thinking of vast cosmic spaces. This reflects her emotional and mental state as conflicted and detached, yet proud of Cousin Hannah. The mention of their "day" being her "night" and their "winter" her "summer" encapsulates the theme of opposites and contrasts running through the chapter.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Mr. Spitzer believes that death “was itself a great deceiver.” Is he speaking of Hannah or of himself?
- Hannah was “unforgettable even when she was forgotten.” How can both be true?
- Catherine “would forget that it was she who might have been the dream visitor bearing the rose in her hand.” Why might she forget?

Characters

- Hannah could never have been made to confess that “she had yearned for marriage, or she had loved a man.” What does Catherine need Hannah to be?
- Mr. Spitzer was “an excellent dancer” and Catherine “the most marvelous dancer.” Why can Hannah not dance?
- Catherine admires Hannah’s “splendid unity of character which she herself had never achieved.” Is Hannah as whole as Catherine believes?

Connections

- In Chapter 34 Hannah called marriage “the death of a woman’s soul.” Here the suffrage movement is “her awesome husband.” Has she escaped marriage?
- The old maid with “ivory-boned knitting needles” recalls Miss MacIntosh. Is Hannah her opposite or her double?
- King Canute “could not command the waves to stand still.” How does he fit the sea that invades this house?

Reflection

- “If a thing was predictable, my mother at that moment ceased to believe in it.” Do you trust what you can predict?
- Can a cause become a marriage?
- “The extremities of faith in anything might always beget… its opposite.” Have you seen this happen?

Research: Characters

Cousin Hannah

- A formidable, spirited woman and a leader in the suffrage movement.

- Described as a “great captain,” “old New England suffragette,” “stone horseman,” and a pioneer who had traveled extensively and fearlessly.
- Known for her strength, courage, and refusal to conform to traditional feminine roles.
- She is remembered as someone who never sought pity or protection and who had no time for courtly graces or domestic bliss.
- Her life was devoted to overthrowing man’s dominance, both socially and domestically.
- She represents emancipation, freedom, and unyielding resolve.
- Even in death, she remains vivid and influential, symbolized by images of snowy mountains and celestial journeys.
- Refused memorial tributes like stained glass windows, showing her disdain for conventional commemoration.
- “She had believed in no image, neither the living nor the dead.”
- She died in bed, “clutching in her withered hand like a claw a faded rose.”
- She told Catherine “there was nothing so cold as the heart of a woman who had never been awakened.”
- Domestic couples “had whispered their secrets to her—usually the reasons for their separations.”
- She is “this proud cousin on the male side, not on the distaff side,” with “the glittering eye, the pointed silver beard, the lifted sword.”
- She once told Catherine of “a eunuch who had become a father.”

Mr. Spitzer

- Portrayed as cautious, timid, and jealous; he lacks the boldness and dynamism of Cousin Hannah.
- He is ignorant of cards, suspicious of Cousin Hannah, and bears grudges linked to personal failures and family misfortunes.
- His presence is seen as an obstacle to Cousin Hannah’s legacy and spirit.
- Mr. Spitzer is described as “corporeal, fat, soft-jowled, many-valved, sleepy-eyed,” symbolizing inertia and lack of willpower.
- He is contrasted sharply with the fiery and active Cousin Hannah.
- He “had always believed that Cousin Hannah was a card cheat.”
- “Death, he had no doubt, was itself a great deceiver.”
- In his youth he had been “an excellent dancer, taking every step with mincing precision.”
- Catherine believes Mr. Spitzer should no longer linger in the house or in memory, making room for Cousin Hannah’s continued influence. “From every sphere, Mr. Spitzer should be missing.”
- Catherine thought him “embittered by his own sense of failure in music.”

- He thought Hannah “quite gloomy with her project to organize all ladies to rebel.”

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s mother)

- Catherine holds a complicated view of both Cousin Hannah and Mr. Spitzer.
- She is reflective, sometimes “unreasonably proud” of Cousin Hannah and often alone, conversing with shadows and memories.
- Her own life is described as fragmented, filled with multiple selves and illusions.
- She contrasts with Cousin Hannah’s unity of character and decisiveness.
- Catherine blends admiration, doubt, and longing.
- Before she went to bed she had been “the most marvelous dancer.”
- “She had always seemed to give her attention to those who were not there.”
- “If a thing was predictable, my mother at that moment ceased to believe in it.”
- She is “always in her swan boat,” talking to “grotesque shadows on a wall.”
- She carries on “long conversations with triple-crowned, heron-footed King Canute.”
- “She suffered from claustrophobia even when she thought of the moon, the sun, the stars, the pathless places.”

Peron Spitzer

- Unlike Joachim, he “had always had an ace in the hole.”
- His “astronomical gambling losses” kept Joachim “in a state of colossal bankruptcy for years.”
- “Peron would never have lingered here.”

Research: Themes

Freedom and Emancipation

See: Freedom and Escape · Women, Gender, and Marriage · Women’s Suffrage

- Cousin Hannah embodies the fight for women’s rights and freedom from traditional roles.
- Her life is a metaphor for breaking boundaries: social, geographic, and existential.
- The suffrage movement is portrayed as her husband, her master, and her true love.

Memory and Legacy

See: Memory and the Past

- The chapter meditates on how people are remembered after death.
- Cousin Hannah remains vivid in memory, more alive in death than in life.

- Mr. Spitzer’s legacy is one of bitterness and inertia, suggesting that memory favors the bold.

Conflict and Opposition

See: Fear and Courage

- The tension between Cousin Hannah and Mr. Spitzer symbolizes broader conflicts: between courage and timidity, action and passivity, truth and deception.
- Mr. Spitzer’s jealousy and bitterness contrast with Cousin Hannah’s fearless spirit.

Isolation versus Connection

See: Isolation and Connection

- Catherine’s isolation contrasts with Cousin Hannah’s active engagement with the world.
- Despite physical distance and death, Cousin Hannah communicates and influences across time and space.

Death and Immortality

See: Death and Mortality

- For Catherine, death is not an end but a transformation.
- Cousin Hannah’s death elevates her to a symbolic, almost mythic status.
- Mr. Spitzer’s survival past her death is seen as a burden.
- Mr. Spitzer “looked for no improvement on the other side,” and Hannah “had had no faith… in any after-life.”

Unity and the Fragmented Self

See: Identity and the Self · Duality and Doubles

- Catherine is “this fragmented ego, these fragmentations of partial selves, of splintered mirrors and partial images.”
- Her selves include “the look-out in the crow’s-nest… the lady in the phaeton, the figurehead in the foam.”
- Hannah seemed never to have “divided herself… into opposing factions, warring camps, the battle raging in her own breasts.”
- “Yet the extremities of faith in anything might always beget, my mother knew, its opposite.”
- Mr. Spitzer acknowledges “at all times, two truths, neither of which should be true.”

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Cards and Games

See: Cards, Games, and Chance · Gambling and Playing Cards

- The metaphor of cards and poker reflects strategy, risk, and deception.
- Cousin Hannah is a “mean game” player; Mr. Spitzer distrusts her, believing she cheats.
- This imagery symbolizes life’s gambits and the characters’ differing approaches to fate and challenge.

Nature and the Elements

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Frequent references to snow, stars, deserts, mountains, and storms symbolize the harshness and grandeur of Cousin Hannah’s life.
- Snow and ice often signify coldness, isolation, and purity.
- The natural imagery links Cousin Hannah to timeless, elemental forces.

Music and Dance

See: Music and Instruments

- Music is associated with Mr. Spitzer. It represents internal worlds and subtle emotional states.
- His “quavering harp strings” reach “through clouds to catch the wind music where there was no wind.”
- Cousin Hannah rejects courtly graces and formal dances, symbolizing her rejection of conventional femininity and societal constraints.
- She “could never have taken her place in the pattern of a minuet,” and “she had escorted, it had seemed, no lady to the dance.”

Light and Darkness

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light · Light and Darkness · Moon and Stars

- Light (stars, jewel reflections, candles) contrasts with darkness (shadows, fog, cosmic darkness).
- Cousin Hannah is connected with shining stars and blazing eyes, symbolizing her enduring spirit.
- Darkness often surrounds Mr. Spitzer and Catherine’s fragmented self.
- “Like a shooting star which probably knows not its destination when it starts… she would have overshot her mark.”

Horses and Riders

See: Horses and Carriages

- “She would have ridden naked through the gale. She would have ridden through the storm of years.”
- She “had ridden horseback through many distant capitals already evacuated and was like a great stone horseman with a stone helmet.”
- Mr. Spitzer thought “the fearful captain of the horse quite gloomy.”

Mirrors

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- Catherine’s selves are “these many, beautiful, waxen ladies parading in a room of mirrors and phantoms, each but the partial portrait of the other.”
- Hannah’s life “had seemingly included no such multiple mirror images and imaginary loves.”
- Catherine asked “that the ice-breakers should go ahead of her and clear a way, break the mirrors, break the ice.”

Research: Resources

- “unlike his brother, who had always had an ace in the hole”: In stud poker the hole card is dealt face down. An ace in the hole is a hidden winning card, and by the early 1900s the phrase meant any hidden advantage. See Cards, Games, and Chance and Peron Spitzer.
- “he had not entered the lists”: The lists were the fenced field of a medieval tournament. To enter the lists is to accept a challenge.
- “swifter in the race”: “The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong… but time and chance happeneth to them all” (Ecclesiastes 9:11). See Ecclesiastes.
- “even a British prime minister to quail”: Young’s source for Cousin Hannah, a suffragist “battle-axe” described by Charles Studin, a founder of the NAACP, “challenged a British prime minister to a duel and the prime minister refused to bear arms against the lady” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Cousin Hannah and Women’s Suffrage.
- “room for one who had crossed dark waters”: Charon ferried the souls of the dead across the river Styx into Hades, for a coin placed with the corpse. Later Hannah is one who “would have ridden to the sable shores of Hades or even farther.” See Greek Mythology.
- “with troops of singing stars”: “When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). See The Book of Job.

- “the blind moth fluttered with jewels upon its wings”: “The desire of the moth for the star, / Of the night for the morrow” (Percy Bysshe Shelley, “One word is too often profaned,” 1821). See Butterflies and Moths and Romantic Poets.
- “and no Western Union messengers”: Western Union, an American company established in 1851, was the leader of the telegraphy industry.
    - Its uniformed messengers, many of them boys on bicycles, delivered telegrams by hand.
- “She would have ridden naked through the gale”: By the legend in Roger of Wendover’s thirteenth-century chronicle, Lady Godiva rode naked through Coventry, covered only by her hair, so that her husband Leofric would lift a heavy tax.
- “in no drugged moments outside of time such as the opium lady might indulge in”: The opium lady is Catherine herself. Young drew her from Minna K. Weissenbach, “the opium lady of Hyde Park” (David O. Dowling, “The Guru,” in A Delicate Aggression: Savagery and Survival in the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, Yale University Press, 2019). See the Chapter 2 resources and The History of Opium.
- “that dark captain of the light-footed brigade”: The phrase may echo Tennyson’s “The Charge of the Light Brigade” (1854): “Into the valley of Death / Rode the six hundred.”
- “the Crusader whose cap was covered with shells of mother-of-pearl”: The scallop shell was the badge of pilgrims to the shrine of St. James at Santiago de Compostela. Pilgrims home from Jerusalem carried palm fronds and were called palmers.
- “the triumph of woman over man, even of beauty over strength”: Joan Smith’s Misogynies discusses the pervasive nature of hatred and discrimination against women in society, exploring cultural, social, and psychological roots of misogyny (Joan Smith, Misogynies: Reflections on Myths and Malice, Faber and Faber, 1989). The novel vividly portrays the suffering, marginalization, and complex interior lives of women like Catherine, Esther Longtree, and Mrs. Hogden, who each embody different facets of women’s oppression and resilience. The presence of misogyny is implicit in their isolation, the betrayals they endure, and their struggles to assert identity and selfhood. Miss MacIntosh’s pragmatic, no-nonsense character challenges the illusions and fantasies that trap women like Catherine, reflecting resistance to the roles imposed by a misogynistic society. Her disdain for frivolity and self-pity contrasts with the more vulnerable or victimized female figures, highlighting the varied responses to misogyny. Smith emphasizes how misogyny permeates both public and private spheres, a theme echoed in the novel’s blending of intimate psychological struggles with broader social critiques, such as the suffrage movement represented by Cousin Hannah and the economic hardships faced by characters like Esther Longtree. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “She had not been merely another old maid dreaming with her ivory-boned knitting needles”: Cousin Hannah is contrasted with Miss MacIntosh, whose “knitting needles of ivory bone” click in Chapter 1. Young’s old maid, with her balls of grey yarn and her looks at the alarm clock, lives in “empty servitude.” Cousin Hannah is the opposite: she journeyed to far and dangerous places and fought for women’s rights and freedom.

- “one who had seen the burning bush”: “And he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed” (Exodus 3:2). See The Bible.
- “pitched her tents in strange lands from which no living man returns”: “The undiscover’d country from whose bourn / No traveller returns” (Shakespeare, Hamlet 3.1). See Shakespeare.
- “this old hunter with the glittering eye”: “He holds him with his glittering eye” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,” 1798). The eye returns later, when Hannah is “this old New England suffragette with the glittering eye.” See Romantic Poets.
- “She had wished to overthrow man, both as to the marital state”: The suffrage movement did not oppose marriage. The anti-suffrage movement opposed suffrage because it feared that women would be “masculinized” and that this in turn would “feminize” men. Under coverture, after marriage the man and woman became one legal unit that the man controlled. Women in many cases were not allowed to own property, sign contracts, earn a salary, or enter education without their husbands’ permission. See Women’s Suffrage and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “paternal domination, the regnancy of the past and of the future”: Kate Millett’s Sexual Politics is a foundational feminist text analyzing the ways patriarchal power operates through sexual and social relationships, emphasizing how gender roles and power imbalances shape personal and political dynamics (Kate Millett, Sexual Politics, Doubleday, 1970). The novel portrays complex gender dynamics, especially through Vera’s mother Catherine and Miss MacIntosh. Catherine inhabits a world of illusion and decay, surrounded by hallucinations and dominated by male absences and betrayals. Miss MacIntosh, by contrast, embodies a practical, no-nonsense counterpoint to Catherine’s dreamlike passivity, and she strongly critiques illusions and instability. This tension reflects the gendered power struggles Millett describes, though in a symbolic and psychological mode. Cousin Hannah, the suffragette figure in the novel, represents a militant, radical feminist presence, dedicated to overthrowing patriarchal domination, which aligns with Millett’s critique of male control over women’s bodies and lives. Cousin Hannah’s battles for women’s freedom and her rejection of traditional feminine roles resonate with Millett’s political feminism. The novel’s exploration of pregnancies, stillbirths, and female suffering (notably through Esther Longtree’s story) touches on the control of women’s sexuality and reproduction, key concerns in Sexual Politics. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “a dream retreating at cockcrow”: Hamlet’s father’s ghost “faded on the crowing of the cock” (Shakespeare, Hamlet 1.1). See Shakespeare.
- “why so many great Antarctic explorers had left home”: Richard E. Byrd named Marie Byrd Land in Antarctica for his wife, Marie, in 1929. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “riding in a desert place with her Mahound”: Mahound, a medieval European corruption of the name Muhammad, was used by Christians to depict him as a god worshipped by pagans or a demon who inspired a false religion.

- “the memorial art which Mr. Spitzer practiced”: Memorial art has evolved from ancient civilizations’ elaborate tributes to the deceased to modern expressions of remembrance and commemoration, reflecting cultural beliefs and societal values across different eras.
    - Mr. Spitzer’s own memorial art is music, the “memorial music sobbing as he sobbed” of Chapter 54. See Joachim Spitzer.
- “a stained glass window in memory of her”: Memorial windows were a fashion of American churches from the 1880s into the 1930s, many of them made by the studios of Louis Comfort Tiffany.
- “the emperor and the unicorn”: The emperor and the unicorn may refer to The Unicorn Tapestries (about 1495-1505) at The Cloisters, part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City. The imagery is thought to represent “the beloved tamed,” with fertility imagery.
    - The Lady and the Unicorn, six tapestries of about 1500, hang in the Musée de Cluny in Paris.
- “the lady and the blackamoor”: The pairing may recall a seventeenth-century broadside, “A Lamentable Ballad of the Tragical End of a Gallant Lord and a Virtuous Lady, with the Untimely End of Their Two Children, Wickedly Performed by a Heathenish Blackamoor Their Servant” (printed by A. Milbourn, London, about 1686-1693). The ballad casts its Black servant as a monster, a racist stock figure of the period.
- “great gold-eyed white ptarmigans”: Ptarmigans are medium-sized game birds in the grouse family. See Birds.
    - They turn white in winter, all but the black of the tail.
- “even like Queen Maud Mountains”: Roald Amundsen named the range for Queen Maud of Norway in November 1911, as his party climbed the Axel Heiberg Glacier toward the South Pole. See Exploration and the Poles and Mountains.
- “expecting Madame DuBarry with her Persian hound”: Madame du Barry, the last royal mistress of Louis XV of France, was guillotined in 1793 during the French Revolution.
    - The Persian hound is likely the saluki, also called the Persian greyhound. See Dogs.
- “a plague of fiery locusts, those who have no king”: “The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands” (Proverbs 30:27). The locusts of Revelation do have one: “they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit” (Revelation 9:11). See The Bible and Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “he never stepped on terra firma without assuming that it was terra incognita”: Terra incognita means unknown or unexplored territory. Terra firma means firm land or solid earth.
- “the dance of the hours”: In Greek myth the Horae, the Hours, were goddesses of the seasons and of order. Ponchielli’s ballet “Dance of the Hours,” from his opera La

Gioconda (1876), shows the hours of dawn, day, evening, and night. See Greek Mythology and Music and Composers.

- “the pattern of a minuet”: The minuet, a slow French court dance in triple time, was the fashion at the court of Louis XIV.
- “as Sherman marching to the sea”: Sherman marching to the sea was a military campaign of the American Civil War through Georgia. See The Civil War.
  - It ran from Atlanta to Savannah, November 15 to December 21, 1864.
- “Napoleon at the gates of Moscow”: Napoleon at the gates of Moscow may refer to Moscow being occupied in 1812 by French Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte’s army during the Napoleonic Wars. See Napoleon and Wellington.
  - The city burned, and the retreat through the Russian winter destroyed his army.
- “heron-footed King Canute”: King Canute or Cnut the Great was the king of England, Denmark, and Norway.
  - Henry of Huntingdon tells that he set his chair on the shore and commanded the tide not to rise. When it wet his feet, he said, “Let all men know how empty and worthless is the power of kings” (Henry of Huntingdon, Historia Anglorum, about 1130, trans. Thomas Forester, 1853).
  - Three kingdoms made him “triple-crowned.”
- “she had yearned for marriage, or she had loved a man”: Young’s source for Cousin Hannah, Charles Studin’s suffragist “battle-axe,” fought men all her life, yet for forty years brought home sealed trunks that proved at her death to hold “a complete bridal trousseau” each. “She had a dream too” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Cousin Hannah and the Chapter 31 resources.
- “Or she had yearned for a homunculus”: A homunculus is the tiny man the alchemists claimed they could grow in a flask, as in De natura rerum (1537), attributed to Paracelsus. The “dwarf” symbolizes a small, subservient male figure, a “gentleman’s gentleman,” who would serve her but not stand as an equal or partner. It contrasts with her grandeur and strength. Catherine believes Hannah could never have been made to confess such a wish, but Young’s source for Hannah kept a secret dream of marriage. See the entry above. The house later offers its own gentleman’s gentleman, “his head a steaming silver teapot, to wait on her.”
  - A gentleman’s gentleman is a valet, a phrase made famous by P. G. Wodehouse’s Jeeves, who first appeared in 1915.
- “For hers was, indeed, this buried life”: “But often, in the world’s most crowded streets, / But often, in the din of strife, / There rises an unspeakable desire / After the knowledge of our buried life” (Matthew Arnold, “The Buried Life,” 1852).
- “the infinite steeplechase stretching between two leaning steeples”: The first recorded steeplechase was run in County Cork in 1752, when Cornelius O’Callaghan and Edmund Blake raced from the church at Buttevant to the steeple of St. Leger church at Doneraile, about four and a half miles.

- “the great battle of the white eunuchs with the black eunuchs”: In the Ottoman palace, white eunuchs, mostly from the Balkans and the Caucasus, served the inner palace under the Chief White Eunuch, while black eunuchs, enslaved in Africa, guarded the harem. From the late sixteenth century the Chief Black Eunuch outranked him (Jane Hathaway, The Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Harem: From African Slave to Power-Broker, Cambridge University Press, 2018). A eunuch is a man who has been castrated. Throughout history, castration often served a specific social function. The earliest records for intentional castration to produce eunuchs are from the Sumerian city of Lagash in the 2nd millennium BCE. Over the millennia since, they have performed a wide variety of functions in many different cultures: courtiers or equivalent domestics, for espionage or clandestine operations, castrato singers, concubines, or sexual partners, religious specialists, soldiers, royal guards, government officials, and guardians of women or harem servants. Eunuchs would usually be servants or slaves who had been castrated to make them less threatening servants of a royal court where physical access to the ruler could wield great influence. In control of both the Harem and a net of spies among the black eunuchs, the Chief Eunuch was involved in almost every palace intrigue and thereby could gain power over either the sultan or one of his viziers, ministers, or other court officials. One of the most powerful Chief Eunuchs was Beshir Agha in the 1730s, who played a crucial role in establishing the Ottoman version of Hanafi Islam throughout the Empire by founding libraries and schools (Wikipedia). Cousin Hannah’s eunuch “had become a father,” though a great sheik had used him to guard, “in supposedly perfect safety,” his “black veiled love.” This eunuch, “dying for love,” was strangled and left in a desert courtyard.
- “gates guarded by minotaurs and dragons and speaking birds”: The Minotaur, half man and half bull, was kept at the center of the Cretan labyrinth until Theseus killed it. See Greek Mythology.
- “Had she not crossed into Mesopotamia”: Mesopotamia is a historical region of Western Asia within the Tigris-Euphrates river system.
    - Young said she “had read the histories of mountain climbers, of suffragette captains, of travelers to the Middle East” (Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Marguerite Young,” Review of Contemporary Fiction 23, no. 1, Spring 2003 (1989 original)).
    - Gertrude Bell crossed these deserts and helped draw the borders of Iraq in 1921, yet by 1909 she was honorary secretary of the Women’s National Anti-Suffrage League. See Women’s Suffrage.
- “Had she not crossed over into Transjordania”: Transjordania, the Emirate of Transjordan, was a British protectorate established in 1921.
- “Did she not know Felix Arabia”: Felix Arabia, properly Arabia Felix, “fortunate Arabia,” was the Roman name for the fertile southwest of the Arabian Peninsula, roughly today’s Yemen.
- “She had wished to rescue the slave, not only the economic slave but also the slave of love”: Cousin Hannah’s struggle is presented in terms of gender emancipation and

suffrage activism. The economic slavery she aims to end is linked to the patriarchal and marital structures. Her battle is against male dominance and the social and domestic oppression of women. See Women's Suffrage.

- "She had caused many a flutter in many a dovecote": "Like an eagle in a dove-cote, I / Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioli" (Shakespeare, Coriolanus 5.6). See Shakespeare.
- "until he heard the angelus": The Angelus is a Catholic devotion commemorating the Incarnation or the Annunciation.
    - It is announced by the Angelus bell, rung morning, noon, and evening. Jean-François Millet painted two peasants pausing in a field at its sound in The Angelus (1857-1859).
- "great wentletraps reaching to mother-of-pearl clouds": Wentletraps are small, often white, very high-spired sea snails.
    - The name comes from the Dutch wenteltrap, a winding staircase, which is why they stand beside the "intricate mother-of-pearl circular stairways."
- "thin as the deceptive Pleiades": The Pleiades, the Seven Sisters, also Messier 45, is an open star cluster. See Astronomy and Greek Mythology.
    - Most eyes see only six stars, and the myth of a lost Pleiad grew to explain the missing seventh.
- "fireflies like fragments of dead souls": In Japan, "Any firefly may be a ghost— who can tell?" Two kinds are "popularly named Genji-botaru and Heike-botaru," and "a legend avers that these fireflies are the ghosts of the old Minamoto and Taira warriors" (Lafcadio Hearn, "Fireflies," in Kottō, Macmillan, 1902). See Fireflies.
- "an organizer of chaos": Amanda Vajskop reads the Babylonian Enuma Elish and the Genesis creation story, in which male creators take over woman's part in bringing forth life and women are cast as destabilizing and dangerous, a fear that patriarchy uses to keep women subordinate (Amanda Vajskop, "Finding Patterns in the Chaos: Woman as Chaos Agent in Creation Myths," Denison Journal of Religion 5, article 7, 2005). Vera's narrative continuously navigates between dreamlike confusion and the search for meaning or "ultimate harmony." Miss MacIntosh represents order and common sense amid the chaos of Catherine's opium-induced visions and the fragmented lives of other characters. The novel portrays characters with fragmented selves: Vera's own complex consciousness, Miss MacIntosh's evolving physical and psychological state (including her baldness and amputated breast), and the multiple personae like Cousin Hannah and Mrs. Hogden. The novel's intense focus on female embodiment, sexuality, motherhood, loss, and survival complements critical perspectives on misogyny and sexual politics. Cousin Hannah, "an organizer of chaos," takes up the part these myths assign to woman and turns it against the order men have made. See Genesis and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "of Stygian night which knew no time": Stygian refers to the River Styx in the underworld of Greek mythology. See Greek Mythology.

- “toppling cloud-topped towers”: “The cloud-capp’d towers, the gorgeous palaces, / The solemn temples, the great globe itself, / Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve” (Shakespeare, The Tempest 4.1). See Shakespeare.

Vocabulary

Affrighted

Frightened.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Amulet

A charm worn against evil.

Arroyo

A steep-sided gully cut by water in dry country.

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Astringently

Sharply, severely.

Barometer

An instrument that measures air pressure, used to forecast the weather.

Beetling

Jutting out and overhanging, as beetling brows or cliffs.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Belfry

A bell tower, or the room in a tower where the bells hang.

Blackamoor

An old term for a Black African or any dark-skinned person, common in European art and in decorative figures of Black servants. It is now considered offensive.

Brocade

A rich fabric woven with a raised pattern.

Caliph

The title of the chief Muslim ruler, understood as a successor to the Prophet Muhammad.

Casehardened

Hardened on the surface; made callous by experience.

Cavalier

A horseman or gallant gentleman; also offhand and disdainful.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Chimera

A monster of Greek myth, part lion, part goat, part serpent; any wild, impossible fancy.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Coexistent

Existing at the same time.

Corporeal

Having a body; physical.

Counterpane

A bedspread.

Crow’s-nest

A lookout platform high on a ship’s mast.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Cupola

A small dome on a roof.

Declivity

A downward slope.

Deign

To condescend.

Demoniac

Wild and frenzied, as if possessed by a demon.

Devious

Winding; straying from the direct way.

Diffident

Shy; lacking confidence.

Discarnate

Without a body.

Distaff side

The female side of a family. A distaff is the staff that holds wool for spinning, long women’s work.

Distilled

Purified or concentrated, as by boiling and condensing.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Dovecote

A house for doves or pigeons.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Emancipated

Set free.

Emblazoned

Decorated conspicuously, as with a coat of arms.

Emirate

The realm of an emir.

Eunuch

A man who has been castrated. Eunuchs were employed for centuries to guard harems and to serve as officials in royal courts in the Middle East, China, and Byzantium. See The eunuch (Ch 35).

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Fortitude

Courage in bearing pain or trouble.

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Homunculus

A tiny man.

Immemorial

Older than memory.

Impoverished

Made poor.

Incorruptible

Not subject to decay or to bribery.

Inverness

A man’s overcoat with a detachable cape.

Khan

A title of rulers in Central Asia.

Liveried

Dressed in the uniform of a household servant.

Mannikin

A little man; a dwarf.

Mettlesome

Spirited, high-mettled.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Minuscular

Tiny. Young’s form of minuscule.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Muezzin

The man who calls Muslims to prayer.

Myopic

Nearsighted.

Nocturnal

Of or happening in the night.

Obtuse

Slow to understand.

Oscillate

To swing back and forth.

Peaked

Thin and pale, as from illness.

Petrified

Turned to stone; also, paralyzed with fear.

Phaeton

A light, open, four-wheeled carriage; also a name for some seashells.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Plumed

Decorated with feathers.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Purling

Knitting in purl, the reverse of a plain stitch.

Quail

A small, plump ground bird hunted as game.

Regnancy

The state of reigning; rule.

Sheik

An Arab chief or elder.

Spectre

A ghost.

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Steeplechase

A horse race over fences, ditches, and water jumps, first run cross-country from one church steeple to another.

Stygian

Of the river Styx in the Greek underworld; dark and gloomy.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women's right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women's Suffrage.

Supine

Lying face up; also passive.

Terra firma

Solid ground.

Tumultuous

Loud, wild, and disorderly.

Unconscionable

Unreasonable, excessive; without conscience.

Untrammeled

Not restricted or hampered.

Vivacious

Lively, animated.

Widow walk

A railed platform on a coastal roof, from which to watch for ships.

Chapter 36

Summary

Mr. Spitzer, roused for once from his lethargy, accuses Catherine of never having loved any living being. He lives “at this second remove from reality,” hearing every sound a minute late, a counterfeit of himself who fears that any change of habit would bring the skies down. He is conservative where she is radical, and she has never distinguished imagination from memory. Catherine’s mind is on Cousin Hannah, whom she would woo back from death for a winter’s visit, though Hannah never answers her invitations, which Catherine has probably not yet sent. She blames Mr. Spitzer, the last to see Hannah alive, for refusing to say where Hannah has gone, and suspects he is jealous of a returning spirit. She imagines Hannah’s travels from Moscow to Babylon and across Al Sirat into a Moslem paradise without women, and wonders whether Hannah has become a man or a woman. If a woman should be in heaven, she thinks, it would not be heaven long.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel · Cousin Hannah · Vera Cartwheel · Peron Spitzer · The Black Coachman · Mr. Chandelier

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Identity and the Self · Madness and Sanity · Memory and the Past · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Clocks and Watches · Clouds and Storms · Horses and Carriages · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · The Sea and Water · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Nietzsche · Phenomenology · Plato and Platonism · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres · Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory

Allusions: American Writers · Angels and Archangels · Astronomy · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer’s Epics · Judaism · Music and Composers · Napoleon and Wellington · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · Women’s Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- Mr. Spitzer, despite his usual politeness, briefly animates to accuse Catherine of never having loved any living being, not even him when, as it seemed, he was dead and in his grave. This accusation is significant as it frames the emotional and existential void

experienced by the characters. Mr. Spitzer's condition, his lethargy and feeling of being a counterfeit of himself, symbolizes a life that is a mere imitation, a repetition without meaning, reflecting a profound alienation from reality.

- The passage describing how Mr. Spitzer's eyes and ears are out of sync, how he perceives events late, and how every singer is off-key, poignantly illustrates the theme of disconnection from reality. This "second remove from life" emphasizes the difficulty of grasping truth or coherence in a fractured existence.
- This passage contrasts Catherine's radical blending of imagination and memory with Mr. Spitzer's conservative, precise judgments. It highlights the fragile boundary between memory and imagination, suggesting that Catherine lives in a dreamlike state, unable or unwilling to distinguish reality from illusion, thereby sustaining her connection to lost loved ones and past events.
- Cousin Hannah, that "fearlessly adventuresome cousin," symbolizes a restless spirit whose life and death continue to haunt Catherine. Her failure to return, Catherine's own evasiveness (the invitations she has probably not yet sent), and her futile attempts to communicate with Hannah underscore the theme of unresolved grief and the impossibility of reclaiming the past. The descriptions of Hannah's travels and battles, and her transformation after death, suggest a transcendent yet ambiguous existence beyond mortal constraints.
- The chapter uses powerful cosmic and natural imagery to evoke the vastness and mystery surrounding death and memory. Catherine's longing to reach Cousin Hannah, the discussion of burial rites, and the question of where Hannah now resides (heaven, another world, or oblivion) deepen the meditation on mortality and the persistence of the dead in memory.
- Mr. Spitzer's role as the last living person to see Cousin Hannah alive, yet his refusal or inability to reveal her whereabouts, symbolizes both the barrier between the living and the dead and the limits of human knowledge about death. His competitive, jealous nature also represents a human obstacle to mourning and remembrance.
- The richly detailed recounting of Hannah's exploits across various cities and landscapes (Moscow, St. Petersburg, Siberia, Babylon) paints her as a mythic figure, a "great traveller" and warrior who transcended earthly bounds. This passage emphasizes her larger-than-life character and the enduring impact of her legacy, even as the physical world forgets her.
- The chapter explores the blurring of identities, the shifting nature of time and place, and the instability of Catherine's perception. The discussion of whether Hannah is now a man or woman, queen of the dead or invader of heaven, reflects the theme of transformation and the failure of fixed definitions. The metaphor of the house growing larger or smaller symbolizes the mutable nature of memory and existence.
- Catherine's belief that a woman should not remain long in heaven, that heaven will soon become a chaotic hell, speaks to a subversive view of cosmic order and gender roles. It suggests a world where traditional hierarchies and realities are unsettled,

echoing Catherine's own unsettled mind and the disruptive legacy of the suffrage captain.

- The final lines, mentioning that "one should not know one's mother's face, one's father's face," and that "the infant should be an old man crying in the storm," encapsulate the pervasive sense of dislocation, confusion, and the inversion of natural order that permeates the chapter.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Mr. Spitzer lives "at this second remove from reality." What would the first remove be?
- "He had led a single life— knowing he was dead." What does Catherine's charge of "a double life" miss?
- Catherine never opened "those letters she had inscrutably written to herself." What is she afraid they say?

Characters

- Is Mr. Spitzer's silence about Hannah's whereabouts ignorance, jealousy, or kindness?
- Mr. Spitzer accuses Catherine of never having "loved any living being." Is he right?
- Hannah was "in grey New England a warring old maid" and "in Araby a great desert king." Which is she?

Connections

- In Chapter 35 Hannah was to come "with dancing nymphs." Here she crosses Al Sirat into a heaven without women. What has changed?
- Here "the golden cock crowing at dawn" rules the heaven Hannah enters, as the crowing cock made her dance in Chapter 34. What does it announce each time?
- Mr. Spitzer fears that "all the skies might fall upon his head." At the end heaven itself turns to chaos. Who brings the sky down?

Reflection

- Can memory and imagination be told apart?
- "Total ignorance was total knowledge." Is there wisdom in not knowing?
- Why might a person grow larger in death, "aggrandized by the pathos of distance"?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- Portrayed as a man deeply affected by loss and memory, embodying lethargy and a near-death consciousness.
- He experiences time and reality with delay and distortion, e.g., hearing sounds a minute late.
- His identity is fractured; he is a “counterfeit” of himself, haunted by the death of his twin brother.
- He is conservative, cautious, and fearful of change, symbolizing a resistance to the fluidity of memory and identity. “Thus he was conservative where she was radical.”
- He has worn “the sombre black” of “these funeral clothes” ever since his brother’s death.
- “He had led a single life— knowing he was dead.”
- He was the last to see Hannah alive: “He had sat by her bedside and murmured diffident, distant remarks not calculated to disturb her peace.”
- “He wished to have no rival in life or death.”
- He walks Boston “noting always that an old landmark had disappeared,” “so that he was really afraid to turn his back upon the world.”
- “He was envious of one who had escaped the purlieus of mortality long ago.”

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s mother)

- A figure consumed by memory and imagination, struggling to distinguish between them.
- She is radical, imaginative, and deeply invested in the past and in the memory of Cousin Hannah.
- Her mind wanders between reality and dream, reflecting on loss and the elusive nature of death.
- She is “an incorrigible lover of the dead.”
- “She had always been afraid of the sad news she might read—the news that she herself was dead.”
- “Often, she wept over the deaths of persons she had never known.”
- Sometimes she thinks the house has grown “large enough to include almost the entire population of the dead.”
- “Perhaps it was only yesterday that she had lain down for a moment on her pale-blue silk divan with its golden lion hooves… And many years, some which had left no trace, had passed since then.”

- She is “talkative as a magpie in a dark forest,” and “proud of her omnipotence, her ghostly powers.”

Cousin Hannah

- A “fearlessly adventuresome” suffrage captain, dynamic and rebellious in life.
- She embodies passion and the struggle against societal constraints. Catherine is now concerned with her “many problems of personal unity.”
- Post-death, she becomes an ambiguous, almost mythical figure, transcending time and space.
- Her death and disappearance symbolize the fragmentation and mystery surrounding memory and legacy.
- She had been “in grey New England a warring old maid urging ladies to arise and rebel” and “in Araby a great desert king.”
- “Cousin Hannah, unlike himself, was aggrandized by the pathos of distance. Death had not diminished her.”
- She “had been an apparition even in this life.” “She remained ambiguous as that which never was.”
- She was “the queen of the strong-minded.” “She had driven a breach in the walls of Moscow.”

Peron Spitzer

- “His brother would never have had such patience.”
- He is the “superficial brother who had had no powers of memory or whose memory had been only in his own behalf.”

The Black Coachman

- He is buried in “the leapings of long-roaring ebony waves,” “though he was bodiless now and though at times she saw his lantern eyes where fireflies glittered.”
- “There were now no hitching posts—certainly none for an old coachman wandering through this forever fading or faded world, driving imaginary horses.”

Mr. Chandelier

- “Had not her way been lighted by Mr. Chandelier, the rock crystal branches lighting a dark sky, moving as she moved?”

Research: Themes

Death and the Afterlife

See: Death and Mortality

- For Catherine, death is not an end but a transformation and extension of existence into unknown realms. “Death had only extended her travels.”
- The boundary between life and death is blurred; characters experience a “second remove” from life, living in a liminal space.
- Death brings changes that alter identity and reality, sometimes enlarging horizons (as with Cousin Hannah) or shrinking and isolating (as with Mr. Spitzer).

Memory versus Imagination

See: Dreams and Imagination · Memory and the Past · Madness and Sanity

- The chapter explores the fragile line between memory and imagination.
- “It seemed to him that she had never distinguished between imagination and memory, the thinnest line sometimes dividing them.”
- Catherine struggles to separate what is remembered from what is imagined or dreamed.
- This blurring reflects the human difficulty in holding onto a fixed identity or past, especially after loss.
- “Hers was undoubtedly the logic of madness, as he had many times pointed out.”

Identity and Fragmentation

See: Identity and the Self

- Characters experience fragmented selves, double lives, or counterfeit identities.
- The death of a twin brother creates a split in Mr. Spitzer’s identity.
- Cousin Hannah’s identity transcends death and conventional existence, becoming fluid and ambiguous.

Time and Perception

See: Time · Phenomenology

- Time is experienced non-linearly; sounds arrive late, events are recalled out of sequence.
- The narrative reflects a consciousness that is “always in danger” of missing or misinterpreting life’s moments.
- This theme underscores the instability of human experience and the elusive nature of reality.

- “Each sound reached his dead ear always a minute late.” “His eyes were separated from his ears.”

The Role of Women and Feminine Power

See: Women, Gender, and Marriage

- Cousin Hannah represents a powerful, rebellious feminine figure who challenges societal and cosmic orders.
- There is tension between masculine and feminine realms, e.g., Catherine’s picture of a Moslem Paradise where women are absent.
- Catherine’s contemplation of womanhood and power in death questions traditional gender roles and metaphysical status.
- “For if a woman should be in heaven, it should not be heaven long, my mother thought.”

Rivalry and Envy

See: Twins and Doubles

- “His envy had never died, having outlived its subject or its object.”
- Without a dead brother “with his identical face,” he “would have been a rival to himself and still unsatisfied.”
- “He was this obstacle, this darkness between my mother and her love, her dead love, it little mattering who that dead love might be.”

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Water and the Sea

See: The Sea and Water

- Recurring images of water, surf, tides, and waves symbolize fluidity, change, and the unconscious.
- Water is associated with identity shifts and the impermanence of life.
- The ground under Mr. Spitzer’s feet is “the nightmare ocean where all must change identities.”
- Hannah has crossed “the shoreless sea of which there was no end.” “There was no sea.”

Stars and the Sky

See: Moon and Stars

- Stars symbolize distant memories, lost souls, or unreachable ideals.

- The motif of stars falling or being connected across time suggests cosmic continuity despite human fragmentation.
- “Our star’s light did not reach out far, did not illumine the entirety of space, was feeble as one firefly in the heavens of the universe.”

Mirrors and Reflections

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- Mirrors signify distorted or partial reflections of identity and reality.
- Hannah’s face “in an inaccurate mirror of consciousness” hints at the elusive self and the failure of memory.
- If he changed a habit, “all the skies might fall upon his head, break like mirrors into a thousand splintered fragments.”

Animals and Nature

See: Birds · Horses and Carriages

- Birds (blackbirds, seagulls), horses, and natural phenomena (fog, wind, fireflies) evoke transformation, freedom, and the boundary between worlds.
- The black coachman lies where “the white manes of the running horses” streak the waves.

Architectural and Geographic References

See: Keys, Doors, and Locks

- Bridges, doors, and roads symbolize transitions, passages between life and death, memory and oblivion.
- “That door of death which, though very narrow, is wide enough to admit the skies and the stars.” “Or was it the door of life?”
- Specific references to Boston, Araby, Moscow, and other places create a sense of vast, multi-locational experience transcending physical geography.

Clocks and Watches

See: Clocks and Watches

- Mr. Spitzer would “consult his broken watch.”
- Hannah “could not have been persuaded to stay beyond her hour or half hour or quarter hour, the strikings of distraught, fantastic cuckoo clocks.”

Research: Resources

- “But who knew the hidden man, that man he might never be, neither himself nor his twin brother”: In her first draft “Mr. Spitzer knew that he was really Peyron the gambler,” which “seemed so tricky to me” that she rewrote it so that he does not know (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). See Joachim Spitzer and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “He had thought he was listening to the music of the spheres”: The music of the spheres, or musica universalis, is the metaphysical principle that mathematical relationships express qualities or “tones” of energy. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres.
    - “There’s not the smallest orb which thou behold’st / But in his motion like an angel sings… But whilst this muddy vesture of decay / Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it” (Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice 5.1). See Shakespeare.
- “heard the musician only when the music had ceased”: Edmund Husserl took a melody as his example of time-consciousness: each note, as it passes, is held in “retention” while the next sounds, so that a melody is never heard all at once (Edmund Husserl, The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness, 1928). See Phenomenology.
- “So he lived at this second remove from reality”: Plato’s imitator is “thrice removed from the king and from the truth,” an imitation of an imitation (Plato, Republic 10, trans. Benjamin Jowett). See Plato and Platonism.
- “if he should forget to wear his wrist watch or carry his cane”: Mr. Spitzer has some symptoms of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). Wilhelm Griesinger described compulsive brooding, “Grübelsucht,” in 1868.
- “then all the skies might fall upon his head”: Celtic envoys told Alexander the Great that they feared nothing except that the sky should fall on them (Arrian, Anabasis 1.4). In the folktale of Henny Penny, or Chicken Little, an acorn on the head convinces a hen that the sky is falling. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “It seemed to him that she had never distinguished between imagination and memory”: Julia Shaw is a psychologist and an expert in complex autobiographical false memory (Julia Shaw, The Memory Illusion, Random House, 2016). She asserts that all memories are illusions which are similar to how quantum physicists describe reality, much as Einstein wrote that “the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion” (Albert Einstein, letter to the family of Michele Besso, March 21, 1955). It’s the same way Plato talked about prisoners in a cave confusing shadows on the wall with the reality outside the cave. A 2000 study found a robust false memory effect. However, participants were able to differentiate false memories and actual memories when using specific phenomenological tasks (Jeffrey S. Anastasi, Matthew G. Rhodes, and Marcy C. Burns, “Distinguishing between Memory Illusions and Actual Memories Using Phenomenological Measurements and Explicit Warnings,” American Journal of Psychology 113, no. 1, 2000, 1-26). See Plato and Platonism and Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory.

- “as if the last rooster had not already crowed over her”: The cock crowing represents the transition from life to death, the inevitability of change, and the sober acknowledgment of human mortality.
- “Our star’s light did not reach out far”: In 1823 Heinrich Olbers asked why, if the stars are endless, the night sky is dark. One answer is that the universe has a finite age, and the light of the farthest stars has not yet reached us. See Astronomy.
- “Hers was undoubtedly the logic of madness”: “Though this be madness, yet there is method in’t” (Shakespeare, Hamlet 2.2). See Shakespeare and Madness and Sanity.
- “aggrandized by the pathos of distance”: Nietzsche’s phrase, the “pathos of distance,” is the feeling of rank that sets the noble apart from those below (Friedrich Nietzsche, Beyond Good and Evil, 1886, section 257). See Nietzsche.
- “despotic, one-eyed ogres in darkened rooms”: The one-eyed ogre recalls Polyphemus, the Cyclops who penned Odysseus and his men in his dark cave (Homer, Odyssey 9). See Homer’s Epics and Greek Mythology.
- “by winged Mercury”: Mercury, the Roman form of the Greek Hermes, is the god of financial gain, commerce, eloquence, messages, communication, etc.
    - He wears winged sandals and a winged hat as messenger of the gods. See Greek Mythology.
- “those letters she had inscrutably written to herself”: According to the Greek historian Hellanicus, the Persian queen Atossa (about 550-475 BC) was the first to write letters. Writing a letter to yourself is thought of as therapeutic or a type of time capsule of telling your future self how you were doing in the past. Mr. Spitzer writes letters that never arrive. Catherine writes letters to herself that are illegible, and never opens them.
- “hailstones as big as cannon balls”: “And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent” (Revelation 16:21). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “Had not the heavens divided, splitting apart”: “And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together” (Revelation 6:14) marks the destruction of the old world order, as the heavens are seen as being destroyed and replaced with a new creation. Surah Ar-Rahman (55:37) describes the heavens splitting apart and becoming rose-red like burnt oil. At Jesus’s baptism by John the Baptist, “he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him” (Mark 1:10). See Revelation and the Apocalypse and The Bible.
- “Should she send a slow messenger to overtake the swift”: In Aesop’s fable the slow tortoise overtakes the swift hare, who stops to sleep. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “beyond the pearly gates”: “And the twelve gates were twelve pearls” (Revelation 21:21). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “if there had been no dead brother with his identical face”: The chapter portrays a triangular relationship between Peron, Joachim, and Catherine, marked by unfulfilled love, contrasting lives, and the tragic consequences of loss. Catherine’s preference for

Peron and her rejection of Joachim create a dynamic of longing and sorrow that defines the emotional core of the narrative. Joachim embodies steadfastness and grief, while Peron represents passion and escape, and Catherine is caught between these polarities, her own existence fragile and dreamlike. See Peron Spitzer and Twins and Doubles.

- “for total ignorance was total knowledge”: Nicholas of Cusa called it learned ignorance, De docta ignorantia (1440): the wise man knows that he does not know. Socrates said much the same in Plato’s Apology. See Plato and Platonism.
- “the queen of the strong-minded”: “Strong-minded women” was a common nineteenth-century name, often a sneer, for advocates of women’s rights. See Women’s Suffrage.
- “she who had objected to the song of even a male cicada”: Only male cicadas sing, by vibrating drumlike tymbals on the abdomen.
- “Had she not gone over from the cross to the crescent”: To go over from the cross to the crescent is to convert from Christianity to Islam. Isabelle Eberhardt (1877-1904) did so, dressed as a man, rode the Sahara as “Si Mahmoud,” and drowned in a flash flood at Aïn Sefra.
    - Islam’s presence in the territory of modern-day Russia dates back to the 7th century with the Caucasus region coming into contact with the faith through the Muslim conquest of Persia. Volga Bulgaria is the first Muslim state from 922. From here Islam spread through trade and economic relationships and also through the Golden Horde Khanate in 1242. Muslim communities spread throughout the Volga region, the Urals, North Caucasus and Siberia. Many ethnic groups including Tatars, Bashkirs, Chechens, Ingush and Avars have historically practiced Islam in Russia. Sunni Islam is the majority from the Hanafi school and Sufism has a strong presence in the North Caucasus. Before the 10th century, Russians practiced Slavic religion, and Orthodox Christianity became the state religion of Kievan Rus in 987. (Wikipedia)
    - It is implied that Cousin Hannah may have converted from Christianity to Islam during her extensive travels, and subsequently rejected religious faith altogether, potentially becoming an atheist or embracing a form of radical skepticism. See the Chapter 40 resources.
- “Had he not seen the dying body in the enclosed air”: “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19).
- “that door of death which, though very narrow”: “Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it” (Matthew 7:14). See The Bible.
- “Was it the old Boston Post Road”: Boston Post Road was a system of mail delivery routes between New York City and Boston, Massachusetts which became one of the first major highways in the US.
    - In January 1673 the first post rider set out on it from New York for Boston.

- “should not Boston have remembered this great horseman by an equestrian statue”: Boston’s equestrian statues were of men: Thomas Ball’s George Washington in the Public Garden (1869), and Augustus Saint-Gaudens’s Shaw Memorial (1897) on the Common, Robert Gould Shaw on horseback leading the Black soldiers of the 54th Massachusetts.
- “Had she not ridden from Minsk to Pinsk”: “From Minsk to Pinsk” is a common trope in classic Jewish humor, used to evoke a long, arduous, or circular journey within the Russian Empire. It is less a single specific joke between two businessmen than a setting for numerous different stories, often featuring Jewish peddlers or paupers and other travelers. Minsk and Pinsk are cities in Belarus. (Wikipedia) See Judaism.
- “Had she not wintered in Archangel”: Archangel, or Arkhangelsk, is the Russian port on the White Sea, named for its Monastery of the Archangel Michael. An Archangel is an angel of high rank usually associated with the Abrahamic religions. It was Russia’s chief seaport until St. Petersburg was founded in 1703, and its harbor is icebound for about half the year. See Angels and Archangels.
- “She had come in through the Grand Central Station”: Grand Central Terminal, often called Grand Central Station, opened in 1913 and is located in Midtown Manhattan, New York City.
- “She had crossed Brooklyn Bridge, Waterloo Bridge, the Bridge of Sighs, the Bridge of Lies”: Brooklyn Bridge opened in 1883 and Waterloo Bridge in London in 1817. The Bridge of Sighs in Venice (about 1600) led prisoners to the cells, their last sight of the lagoon: “I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs; / A palace and a prison on each hand” (Byron, Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, Canto 4, 1818). The Bridge of Lies (Podul Minciunilor, Lügenbrücke) in Sibiu, Transylvania, Romania, built 1859-1860, was the first cast iron bridge in Romania; legend says it collapses when someone lies on it, though the name likely came from the German Liegenbrücke, a “lying bridge” in the sense of lying down. (Wikipedia)
  - Brooklyn Bridge: See the Chapter 2 resources.
  - Waterloo Bridge is a road and foot traffic bridge crossing the River Thames in London. It opened in 1817 and was named for Wellington’s victory at Waterloo. See Napoleon and Wellington.
  - The Bridge of Sighs is a bridge in Venice, Italy. It joins the Doge’s Palace to the prisons. “I stood in Venice, on the Bridge of Sighs; / A palace and a prison on each hand” (Lord Byron, Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage 4, 1818). See Romantic Poets.
  - The Bridge of Lies is a legendary pedestrian bridge located in the center of the Transylvanian city of Sibiu in central Romania. The cast-iron bridge dates from 1859, and legend says it will collapse if anyone tells a lie upon it.
- “She had visited many hanging gardens”: The Hanging Gardens of Babylon were one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World listed by Hellenic writers.
- “Had she not climbed the seventh crystal stairway”: The seventh crystal stairway may refer to Jacob’s Ladder. “Behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached

to heaven" (Genesis 28:12). See Genesis.
    - Seven heavens are named in the Talmud (Chagigah 12b), and in Islamic tradition Muhammad climbed through the seven heavens on the Night Journey, the Mi'raj, a word that means ladder. See Judaism.
- "visited the inner courts of many seraglios": A seraglio, or serail, is the sequestered living quarters used by wives and concubines in an Ottoman household.
- "There was no sea": "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea" (Revelation 21:1). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- "The sky was pearl grey streaked by mare's-tails": Mares' tails are high cirrus clouds. See the Chapter 34 resources and Clouds and Storms.
- "she had lain down for a moment on her pale-blue silk divan": Like Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle (1819), who lay down for a nap in the Catskills and woke twenty years later. See American Writers.
- "Had she not crossed Al Sirat, delicate as a human hair": As-Sirat is the bridge over hell to paradise in Islamic tradition, said in a hadith to be "thinner than a hair and sharper than a sword" (Sahih Muslim 183).
- "the dance of the black-eyed houris": The houris of the Qur'an are "fair ones with wide, lovely eyes, like unto hidden pearls" (Qur'an 56:22-23, trans. Marmaduke Pickthall, 1930). Catherine's heaven with "no woman" is not the Qur'an's, which promises paradise to believers "whether of male or female" (4:124, Pickthall).
- "the golden cock crowing at dawn": In the Chinese zodiac, a person born in the Year of the Rooster is said to be determined and brave enough to face all difficulties. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.
    - A hadith says that roosters crow because they have seen an angel (Sahih al-Bukhari 3303).
    - Weissenbach's golden cockerel. See the Chapter 14 resources.
- "Was she king of the living or queen of the dead": Persephone, carried off by Hades, became queen of the dead. See Greek Mythology.
- "Not every lost chord could be resolved": "Seated one day at the organ, / I was weary and ill at ease… But I struck one chord of music, / Like the sound of a great Amen" (Adelaide Anne Procter, "A Lost Chord," 1858). Arthur Sullivan set it as "The Lost Chord" in 1877. See Music and Composers.
- "this anatomy of sorrow": Robert Burton's The Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) gathers everything known of sorrow, and includes his own "Digression of Air," a cosmography of the heavens.
- "Was she become a man": In Virginia Woolf's Orlando (1928), the hero wakes as a woman: "Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it." See Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- “One should not know one’s mother’s face, one’s father’s face”: “Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents” (Mark 13:12), among the signs of the end. See The Bible.
- “The infant should be an old man crying in the storm”: “Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!” (Shakespeare, King Lear 3.2), the old king crying in the storm. See Shakespeare.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Acrid

Sharp and bitter to taste or smell.

Aggrandized

Made greater.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Auroral

Of the dawn, or like the dawn; named for Aurora, Roman goddess of the dawn.

Barque

A sailing ship.

Bulrush

A tall rush of marshes.

Cannonade

A long bombardment by cannon.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Cockleshell

The shell of a cockle; a small, frail boat.

Cosmography

A description or map of the whole universe, both heavens and earth.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Despotic

Tyrannical.

Diffident

Shy; lacking confidence.

Distraught

Deeply upset.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Duplicity

Double-dealing.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Emaciated

Wasted away, very thin.

Equestrian

On horseback.

Equine

A horse; of horses.

Erratically

Unpredictably; irregularly.

Eunuch

A man who has been castrated. Eunuchs were employed for centuries to guard harems and to serve as officials in royal courts in the Middle East, China, and Byzantium. See The eunuch (Ch 35).

Fallacy

A mistaken belief, or a flaw in reasoning that makes an argument unsound.

Fitful

Starting and stopping; irregular.

Flaccid

Soft and limp.

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Forelock

A lock of hair over the forehead.

Frenetic

Frantic.

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Hanging gardens

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: terraced gardens said to have been built by King Nebuchadnezzar II. No trace of them has ever been found.

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Houri

A beautiful maiden of the Muslim paradise.

Imperious

Proud and commanding.

Imponderable

Something that cannot be measured, weighed, or judged.

Incorporeal

Without a body; not physical.

Incorrigible

Beyond correction.

Inscrutably

In a way that cannot be understood.

Invulnerable

Unable to be wounded or harmed.

Irrevocably

In a way that cannot be undone.

Lagoon

A stretch of shallow water separated from the sea by a reef or sandbar.

Lethargy

Sluggishness, drowsiness, a lack of energy.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Mailed

Armored in chain mail.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Mercurial

Quick and changeable in mood. From the swift Roman messenger god Mercury and the liquid metal named for him.

Mesa

A flat-topped hill with steep sides. Young writes of a “mesa of snow.”

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Oblique

Indirect; slanting.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Obtuse

Slow to understand.

Ogre

A man-eating giant of folktale.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Pasha

A high Ottoman title for a governor or general.

Peregrine

A wanderer or pilgrim; also a falcon.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Purlieus

Outskirts; haunts.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Rushlight

A cheap candle of rush pith dipped in fat.

Salutary

Beneficial; healthful.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Sequester

To set apart or hold in safekeeping.

Sombre

Dark and grave.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women’s right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women’s Suffrage.

Sulphurous

Of sulphur; hellish.

Swooned

Fainted.

Tactician

One skilled in tactics.

Taloned

Having talons, the sharp claws of a bird of prey.

Thoroughfare

A main road.

Tinderbox

A box holding tinder, flint, and steel for kindling fire.

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists' dream of turning base metal into gold.

Travesty

A grotesque imitation.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Unassuming

Modest.

Voluble

Talkative.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Weltering

Rolling and tossing, as waves.

Whaler

A whaling ship or a man who hunts whales.

Wherry

A light rowboat.

Wraith

A ghost; a faint, pale shape.

Chapter 37

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Vera describes the heaven Catherine expects, as disordered as this world: drifting mirrors, ceilings that become floors, clocks striking inept hours. Catherine has always said that order is "a mad man's dream," and that Mr. Spitzer, "wishing to be agreeable, had made a false report as to what might be upon the other side." Drugged and nearly inert, she cannot tell life from death, and asks who the dreamer is. She sees the reversals of dream: man becoming woman, God become dog, trees with their roots in the sky. Mr. Spitzer insists that Hannah is dead and buried, gone where there is no consciousness and no memory, but Catherine cannot admit her extinction. What she fears is a grey land where none makes reply, and she stays horizontal on her mother-of-pearl boat bed so as not to take that step. She recalls Hannah's adventures in the harems, unveiling her bearded face to a sheik who went mad, and bowing to a sheik who proved to be a beautiful woman. The riderless horse has already come, and Hannah will not return.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Cousin Hannah · Vera Cartwheel · Peron Spitzer · The Black Coachman

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Fate and Chance · Fear and Courage · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Clouds and Storms · Eyes and Blindness · Fog and Mist · Horses and Carriages · Mirrors and Reflections · Roses and Flowers · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Aristotle · Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Descartes and Dualism · Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) · Epicureanism · Existentialism · Freud and Jung · Hinduism · Nietzsche · Plato and Platonism · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres · Schopenhauer · Stoicism · Taoism and Zhuangzi · Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory · Wittgenstein

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · American Writers · Astronomy · Dante · Don Quixote · Edgar Allan Poe · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Book of Job · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a surreal vision of a world where mirrors drift, the ceiling becomes a fluid floor, clocks strike inept hours, and dolphins bark unusually. This sets up the motif of a “mistaken dream” with no clear boundaries between heaven and hell, life and death. The question “But who was the dreamer?” introduces the existential uncertainty that pervades the chapter.
- Vera recounts a discussion with her mother, Catherine, and Mr. Spitzer about the nature of order and chaos. Her mother insists that “Order… was a mad man’s dream,” a “suicidal plan omitting the irrational elements,” emphasizing the complexity and irrationality of life and the universe. This passage challenges the human desire for simple, orderly explanations.
- Catherine is portrayed as someone living under the “pervasive influence of opium,” caught in a half-conscious dream state where time is an illusion. For Catherine, death is not an end but an “immeasurable extension” of this dream, blending life and death indistinguishably. Catherine’s inability or refusal to awaken to this knowledge symbolizes human denial of mortality and oblivion.
- The chapter describes numerous surreal reversals highlighting the instability of identity and perception. This underscores the theme that nothing is fixed or certain, not even one’s own self or reality.
- Cousin Hannah, a strong suffrage figure, is presented as having passed beyond death in a way Catherine cannot accept. Her adventures contrast with Catherine’s passive existence. Hannah’s death is final and unescapable, symbolizing the inevitability of mortality despite human pride and strength.
- Catherine fears complete extinction, that “land of infinite greyness,” without memory, ego, or voice. This fear keeps her “horizontal,” an invalid clinging to life’s illusions rather than facing the void. This passage poignantly captures human dread of nothingness and the unknown beyond death.
- The chapter closes with the recognition that no matter Catherine’s plotting or longing, Cousin Hannah will not return. Death has “throttled her,” and the echoes of life and struggle fade into silence. Mr. Spitzer’s metaphor of hearing silence after the last requiem symbolizes acceptance of death’s ultimate finality.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Catherine asks who the dreamer is, “astonished that she was not the dreamer.” Who dreams her?

- “In every lie was a grain of horrible truth—and in every truth was a beautiful lie.” Which kind does Mr. Spitzer tell?
- Catherine stays “horizontal” to avoid one step. What step is it?

Characters

- Mr. Spitzer was “that mourner who had felt no grief, no grief but his lack of grief.” Is that a kind of grief?
- Why does Catherine plan “a future card game” with the dead?
- One sheik went mad at Hannah’s bearded face, and another proved to be “a beautiful lady.” What do the two stories say about disguise?

Connections

- In Chapter 34 Catherine was married by a St. Bernard who spoke church Latin. Here “God was dog,” and birds speak “ecclesiastical Latin.” What links them?
- The riderless horse first came through the window on the day Hannah died, in Chapter 32. Why does it return here?
- In Chapter 35 Mr. Spitzer called Hannah a card cheat. Here she is “one whose last card long ago was played.” Who won the game?

Reflection

- Is order “a mad man’s dream”?
- If life was always a dream, “how should death be different from life”?
- Can a person be “her own dark lover”?

Research: Characters

Catherine Cartwheel

- Central figure whose fragmented consciousness and philosophical musings drive much of the chapter.
- She is an invalid, sedated with opium, caught between life and death, dreaming yet partially aware.
- She embodies the existential struggle with meaning, identity, and the fear of oblivion.
- She is “this horizontal invalid upon her mother-of-pearl boat bed.”
- Her opinions, “even as to the simplest matters such as whether it was night or day,” “were always divided.”
- “How many years since she had seen the sea which she could have seen at any time if she had ever allowed the shutters to be opened?”

- “She would be crazed by dreams she had not dreamed.”

Mr. Spitzer

- A morose figure who provides a skeptical or pessimistic counterpoint.
- He lies and deceives but also embodies an anguished search for truth.
- His reflections on death and memory contribute to the chapter’s philosophical depth.
- “Mr. Spitzer, wishing to be agreeable, had made a false report as to what might be upon the other side.”
- He longs for “some single point of view which would be at all times constant and unchanging.”
- At Hannah’s burial he was “that mourner who had felt no grief, no grief but his lack of grief.”
- He plucks “at his dead ear,” and “heard the silence.”

Cousin Hannah

- A symbol of strength and defiance in the face of mortality.
- Her story is a narrative of resistance, a woman who cannot be possessed or ruled.
- Her death and burial represent the finality Catherine tries to avoid accepting.
- She is “this daughter of the codfish aristocracy, her silver helmet gleaming, her scimitar uplifted like a new moon.”
- “Death had been, at last, her bridegroom.”
- Mr. Spitzer thought “she had been her own dark lover.”
- She unveiled her “great, gaunt, bearded face” to a sheik who “had gone stark, staring mad,” and bowed to another sheik who was “a beautiful lady with large liquid eyes.”

Peron Spitzer

- “Peron had been right—and Joachim had been wrong.”
- Hannah is “gone where poker-faced Peron was.”

The Black Coachman

- Catherine sees “perhaps the black coachman, the diffused radiance of the carriage lamps in the fog.”
- No one should see Hannah again, “not even when the black coachman came, and he was dead.”

Research: Themes

Reality versus Dream, Illusion versus Truth

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination

- The chapter questions what is real and what is dream, emphasizing the fluidity and uncertainty between the two.
- Catherine and others seem trapped in an ongoing dream where time and space lose meaning.
- The idea that life itself may be a mistake or dream without end is prominent, and Catherine sees death as an immeasurable extension of this dream.

Death and Life: Blurred Boundaries

See: Death and Mortality

- The chapter repeatedly blurs the line between living and dead; the living are those who have already died, and the dead are still living in some form.
- For Catherine, death is not a clear-cut event but an ongoing state or transformation, sometimes portrayed as madness or a mountebank (a deceiver). “Death was madness. Madness ruled supreme.”
- Catherine fears oblivion, the total extinction of self, and clings to life despite its illusions.

Identity and Transformation

See: Identity and the Self

- Identity is unstable and mutable, with images of people changing genders, faces, or even species. “One saw that God was dog.”
- This theme questions the essence of self, suggesting that we might be composites of many selves or none at all.
- The recurring motif of masks, doubles, and shifting forms highlights the fracturing or multiplicity of identity.

Memory and Oblivion

See: Memory and the Past

- Catherine fears the loss of memory and self-awareness.
- There is a contemplation of a “land of infinite greyness” where nothing remains: no memory, image, or ego.
- This fear underlies her refusal to fully surrender to death or oblivion.

Order and Chance

See: Order, Chaos, and Discipline · Fate and Chance

- “Order, had she not always said, was a mad man’s dream, the maddest dream of all.”
- She asks “how should we live except by accident, for were we not already dead.”
- The music shakes “the enamelled heavens and the earth like a dice box,” and she sees “stars marked like dice.”

Feminine Power and Resistance

See: Women, Gender, and Marriage · Fear and Courage

- Cousin Hannah, a suffrage captain, symbolizes strength, resistance, and an indomitable spirit.
- Her death and burial contrast with her bold life, and her story reflects the struggle for identity and agency beyond traditional roles.
- Cousin Hannah’s adventures in exotic lands and her defiance of powerful men underscore themes of female empowerment and autonomy.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Mirrors and Reversals

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- The recurring image of mirrored realities (ceiling as floor, trees growing upside down) suggests the instability of perception and reality.

Sea and Waves

See: The Sea and Water

- The sea is a motif for transformation, fluidity, and the unconscious.

Eyes and Faces

See: Eyes and Blindness

- Eyes symbolize perception and identity; the theme of masks and hidden skulls suggests mortality beneath appearances.

Fog and Clouds

See: Fog and Mist · Clouds and Storms

- These represent uncertainty, the unknown, and the boundary between states of being.

Black Snow / Sable Snow

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Symbolizes corruption, darkness, and the inversion of purity.

The Cross and Rose

See: Roses and Flowers · Angels, Devils, and Myth

- Symbolize transformation and the intertwining of suffering and beauty, life and death.

The Hawk and Birds

See: Birds

- Represent death, predation, and perhaps the inevitability of mortality. “Her head was eaten by great birds. Great birds had plucked out her eyes.”

The Black Coachman

See: Horses and Carriages

- A symbol of death or transition. In Chapter 14 Catherine likens the coachman to “her dead consciousness fantastically dreaming.”

The Riderless Horse and Conch Trumpet

See: Horses and Carriages

- Symbolize death’s arrival and the end of an era or life. The horse comes “to signify that the great postilion was dead.”

Cards and Dice

See: Gambling and Playing Cards

- The snow falls “black as the ace of spades.”
- The dead dice-throwers rattle “old bones under dimmed street lamps, and their skulls were their dice cups.”
- Hannah is “one whose last card long ago was played.”

Research: Resources

- “or there should be these reversals”: Aristotle names reversal (peripeteia) and recognition as the turning points of tragedy (Poetics 11). Baudrillard’s Principle of Reversal examines how oppositions and differences can be overturned, leading to new forms of understanding and meaning (Jean Baudrillard, Symbolic Exchange and Death, 1976). Vera’s “his night was his day” passage is in Chapter 61. See the Chapter

61 resources. Young's reversals include "there should be these somersaultings as when the ceiling was the mirroring floor, trees of enormous crystal growing with their roots in the clouded sky, their branches under the earth," and "Love might wear the face of death, the grinning skull, as death might wear the face of love." See Aristotle.
    - Aristotle calls the reversal peripeteia and the recognition anagnorisis, and finds them together in Oedipus (Poetics 11).
- "this mistaken earth which was perhaps its counter-earth": The Pythagorean Philolaus set a counter-earth, the Antichthon, beyond the Earth, always hidden from it, to bring the heavenly bodies to ten (Aristotle, On the Heavens 2.13). See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres and Aristotle.
- "But who was the dreamer": "You're only a sort of thing in his dream!" Tweedledee tells Alice of the sleeping Red King (Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking-Glass, 1871). See Alice in Wonderland.
    - Zhuangzi dreamed he was a butterfly and woke not knowing "whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man" (Chuang Tzŭ, trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889). See Taoism and Zhuangzi.
- "Was he a domino or a man": A domino is a masquerade cloak worn with a half mask.
- "no silent music like the music of the spheres": See the Chapter 36 resources and Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres.
- "For each face hid the grinning skull": In Hans Holbein's The Ambassadors (1533) a stretched skull lies across the floor, seen whole only from the side, a memento mori hidden in the picture. See Death and Mortality.
- "How should she know when she had crossed the invisible line of demarcation": Descartes' dream argument: He used the experience of dreaming to question the certainty of our perceptions and beliefs. He argued that if we cannot definitively distinguish between waking and dreaming, then our sensory experiences, which are the foundation of our knowledge, might be illusions. There is philosophical skepticism because the possibility of dreams may be genuine or a fabrication. It leads one to question the validity of knowledge of the external world. Freud believed dreams are a symbolic representation of unconscious thoughts and desires. Jung expanded on Freud's ideas that dreams can also reveal universal, archetypal patterns in the human psyche. Some theories suggest dreams are a natural byproduct of the brain's activity during sleep, possibly involving memory consolidation, emotional processing, or the clearing out of mental clutter. Zhuangzi asked the same question when he woke from dreaming he was a butterfly; see the Chapter 8 resources. See Descartes and Dualism and Freud and Jung.
    - "There are no certain indications by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep" (René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy 1, 1641, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane, 1911).
- "for there was no time. There was the illusion of time": Time, perception versus reality, distorted time perception, and time as a mental construct is described as an emergent

property in physics. Einstein wrote that “the distinction between past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion” (Albert Einstein, letter to the family of Michele Besso, March 21, 1955). Carlo Rovelli proposes that time is not a fundamental aspect of reality, but rather an emergent phenomenon (Carlo Rovelli, The Order of Time, Riverhead Books, 2018). He suggests that time may be a complex network of events, and our perception of its flow is a projection onto this network. See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory.

- “There would be suddenly a whirling windmill”: The whirling windmill may recall the windmills that Don Quixote takes for giants (Cervantes, Don Quixote 1.8, 1605). See Don Quixote.
- “How should death be different from life, my mother asked”: Life as a state of experience and potential: Socrates thought death might be a dreamless sleep or passage to another realm where one can converse with the dead. Existentialism believes death is an inevitable aspect of human existence and that it can lead to a heightened sense of self-awareness and responsibility. Epicureanism argues death cannot harm a person, as it’s either not yet experienced (while alive) or not experienced at all (once dead). Death is defined as the loss of the capacity to engage in vital activities and the cessation of consciousness. Wittgenstein wrote that death is not an event in life, for we do not live to experience it (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus 6.4311). Schopenhauer believed that understanding death as the ultimate end of life can provide a perspective on the meaning of life itself. Freud thought the life instinct (Eros) and the death instinct (Thanatos) are fundamental forces in human behavior. See Plato and Platonism, Existentialism, Epicureanism, Wittgenstein, Schopenhauer, and Freud and Jung.
  - “Death, therefore, the most awful of evils, is nothing to us, seeing that, when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not” (Epicurus, Letter to Menoeceus, trans. Robert Drew Hicks, 1925).
  - “Death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through” (Ludwig Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus 6.4311, trans. C. K. Ogden, 1922).
  - Freud wrote of the death drive in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920). The name Thanatos came from his followers.
- “Death was this dream’s immeasurable extension”: The meaning of life in relation to death: Stoicism emphasized that facing death can lead to a deeper understanding of life’s meaning and the ephemeral nature of earthly possessions. Nietzsche used the thought experiment of eternal return (recurrence) to encourage individuals to examine the meaning and value of their lives, given the possibility of living them again and again. See Stoicism and Nietzsche.
  - Nietzsche’s demon asks, “This life as thou livest it at present, and hast lived it, thou must live it once more, and also innumerable times” (Friedrich Nietzsche, The Joyful Wisdom 341, 1882, trans. Thomas Common, 1910).
- “One had laughed one’s self to death”: The Stoic Chrysippus is said to have died laughing at a donkey eating his figs (Diogenes Laertius, Lives of the Eminent

Philosophers 7.185). See Stoicism.

- “Death was a mountebank”: Mountebank is a person who deceives others, especially in order to trick them out of their money.
  - The word comes from the Italian montimbanco, one who mounts a bench to sell quack remedies.
- “her face darkening and contorted like the face of a drowning woman”: Opium slows breathing. Signs of an overdose include slow or stopped breathing, blue or purple lips and face, and pinpoint pupils. See The History of Opium.
- “aware of the earth which, viewed from another celestial body, would seem like a dead moon”: Seen from the Moon, the Earth goes through phases, full when the Moon is new. See Astronomy.
- “to death’s-head moths”: The death’s-head hawkmoth, Acherontia atropos, bears a skull on its thorax and is named for the Fate who cuts the thread of life. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “which shook the enamelled heavens and the earth like a dice box”: Einstein wrote to Max Born on December 4, 1926, that he was convinced God does not throw dice. See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory.
- “the dream which had dreamed the dreamer”: “With relief, with humiliation, with terror, he understood that he too was a mere appearance, dreamt by another” (Jorge Luis Borges, “The Circular Ruins,” 1940, trans. James E. Irby, in Labyrinths, 1962).
- “as man became woman with her heaving breasts”: Gender as a social construct refers to the socially created roles, behaviors, expressions, and identities associated with being a woman, man, boy, or girl. It’s not inherently determined by biology, but rather shaped by cultural norms, societal expectations, and historical contexts. This means gender is not fixed and can vary across cultures and time. In short, it is not a biological reality: it is socially created, varies across cultures, is dynamic and fluid, and is distinct from biological sex. Philosophical thought on gender goes back to ancient Greece, where Pythagoras’s table of opposites set male against female (Aristotle, Metaphysics 1.5) and Plato argued that women could be guardians (Republic 5). Later came John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Judith Sargent Murray (“On the Equality of the Sexes,” 1790), and Mary Wollstonecraft (A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 1792). The chapter and novel present gender as a fluid and changeable construct rather than a rigid, innate fact, using metaphorical and dreamlike language to question fixed dichotomies between male and female, self and other, life and death. See Women, Gender, and Marriage, Plato and Platonism, Aristotle, and Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume).
  - “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex, 1949, trans. H. M. Parshley, 1953).
- “one’s father who gave birth to the dead child”: Zeus bore Athena from his head and Dionysus from his thigh. See Greek Mythology.

- “seeing that he was a stag”: Actaeon, who saw Diana bathing, was turned into a stag and torn apart by his own hounds (Ovid, Metamorphoses 3). See Greek Mythology.
- “trees of enormous crystal growing with their roots in the clouded sky”: The Bhagavad Gita (15.1) speaks of an eternal fig tree, the ashvattha, with its roots above and its branches below. See Hinduism.
- “For the living were those who had already died, and the dead were the living”: Heraclitus: “Mortals are immortals and immortals are mortals, the one living the others’ death and dying the others’ life.” See Heraclitus and Flux.
- “this daughter of the codfish aristocracy”: The codfish aristocracy were New England families grown rich on the cod fishery. The Sacred Cod, a carved wooden fish, has hung in the Massachusetts State House since the eighteenth century.
- “the footless messengers”: Birds of paradise were believed to have no feet and never to land, because their skins reached Europe with the feet cut off. Linnaeus named the greater bird of paradise Paradisaea apoda, “footless,” in 1758. See Birds.
- “birds who could speak ecclesiastical Latin”: Ecclesiastical Latin was developed to discuss Christian thought.
    - In Chapter 34 Catherine was married by a St. Bernard who spoke church Latin. See the Chapter 34 resources.
- “the floor of the Lost Atlantis”: Atlantis can be a metaphor for something that is no longer attainable. It is a fictional island used as an allegory for the hubris of nations in Plato’s Timaeus and Critias (about 360 BC). It has had a large influence on literature, arts, and culture. See Plato and Platonism.
    - Plato tells the story in the Timaeus and the Critias.
- “The cross had turned into the immortal rose”: The rose upon the cross is the emblem of the Rosicrucians, announced in the Fama Fraternitatis (1614). Yeats wrote “To the Rose upon the Rood of Time” (1892). See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.
- “a cross upon a crossroad”: In England suicides were buried at crossroads, sometimes with a stake through the body, until the Burial of Suicide Act of 1823 ended the practice. See Suicide in History and Literature.
- “Her head was eaten by great birds”: “The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, and the young eagles shall eat it” (Proverbs 30:17). See The Bible.
- “that which was void and without form”: “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep” (Genesis 1:2). See Genesis.
- “that eternal point where all lines converge”: Nicholas of Cusa taught that in the infinite all opposites coincide, so that an infinite circle would be a straight line (De docta ignorantia 1.13, 1440). See the Chapter 36 resources.
- “land of infinite greyness”: “A land of darkness, as darkness itself; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness” (Job 10:22). See The Book of Job.

- “Death had been, at last, her bridegroom”: “Because I could not stop for Death – / He kindly stopped for me –” (Emily Dickinson, 1890). Death comes as a suitor in his carriage. See American Writers.
- “Had she not gone to the court of the emperor worm”: Poe’s “The Conqueror Worm” (1843) ends, “And its hero, the Conqueror Worm.” Wallace Stevens wrote, “The only emperor is the emperor of ice-cream” (1922). See Edgar Allan Poe and American Writers.
- “the tormented whirlwinds turning upon spindles”: “The infernal hurricane that never rests / Hurtles the spirits onward in its rapine” (Dante, Inferno 5, trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1867), the circle of the lovers. See Dante.
- “evolving from pearls in the womb of time”: “There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered” (Shakespeare, Othello 1.3). See Shakespeare.
- “She had crept into a seraglio among a great shiek’s wives”: Seraglios: See the Chapter 36 resources.
- “she had lifted her veil”: In Thomas Moore’s “The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan,” from Lalla Rookh (1817), the prophet Mokanna hides his face behind a silver veil, and when he lifts it, it is hideous. See Romantic Poets.
- “not even, as Mr. Spitzer sometimes remarked, a Chinaman’s chance”: A “Chinaman’s chance,” no chance at all, is a racist American phrase of the late nineteenth century. California’s Supreme Court had ruled in People v. Hall (1854) that Chinese people could not testify against whites, and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 barred them from the country. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “Had not the riderless horse already come”: A riderless horse with boots reversed in the stirrups follows the coffin in a military funeral, as Black Jack did at John F. Kennedy’s funeral in November 1963. In Chapter 32 a riderless horse “white as snow came through the window” the day Hannah died. See Horses and Carriages.
- “The last conch trumpet had already blown”: Triton blew his conch to call back the waters of the flood (Ovid, Metamorphoses 1). “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible” (1 Corinthians 15:52). See Greek Mythology and The Bible.

Vocabulary

Abject

Wretched; downcast.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Assuage

To ease or soothe.

Bisect

To cut or divide into two parts.

Blear

Dim and watery, as eyes are with age or weeping.

Brigand

A bandit of the hills.

Burnoose

A hooded Arab cloak.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Codfish

A large food fish of cold northern seas.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Cosmography

A description or map of the whole universe, both heavens and earth.

Demarcation

A boundary line.

Demented

Out of one’s mind.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Dominoes

A game played with small oblong tiles marked with spots.

Enigma

A mystery or puzzle; a person or thing that is hard to understand.

Exhume

To dig up from the grave.

Fetters

Chains for the feet.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Gibbet

A gallows on which a body was hung in chains.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Hoar-frost

White frost formed as feathery ice crystals.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Incipient

Just beginning.

Intricacy

Complexity; many interwoven parts.

Involuted

Intricate; curled inward.

Lodestar

A guiding star, especially the polestar.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Moldering

Slowly crumbling into decay.

Morosely

Gloomily, sullenly.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mountebank

A swindling showman.

Nocturnal

Of or happening in the night.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Pasha

A high Ottoman title for a governor or general.

Perpendicular

Upright; at a right angle to the horizon.

Postilion

One who rides the near horse of a carriage team.

Refraction

The bending of light as it passes from one medium to another.

Requiem

A Mass or song for the dead.

Sable

Black.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Scimitar

A curved Eastern sword.

Sheik

An Arab chief or elder.

Specious

Seeming true but false.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Supine

Lying face up; also passive.

Throttled

Strangled.

Transience

The state of passing away quickly.

Treble

The highest part in music.

Usurping

Seizing without right.

Velocity

Speed in a given direction.

Volatile

Changeable; quick to evaporate.

Wall-eyed

With eyes that turn outward, staring.

Chapter 38

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Catherine's memories of Cousin Hannah are clouded by opium and by her dream of an immortal love, and Mr. Spitzer, being as one dead, must be prodded to remember anything at all. Catherine thought the lonely cause of suffrage unworthy of Hannah's adventurous spirit and a waste of time. She would have been happy, she insists, if only Peron had lived, and she explains his neglect as a love too great to express: "This dead love which never was and never would be real was the one undying love." Hannah had invited her to Egypt to show that a woman could be both beautiful and independent of man, and Catherine imagines the life she might have had, picketing Buckingham Palace, sleeping in silken tents, escaping from moated castles. She remembers Hannah's sharp, masculine virtues with envy and guilt, wonders whom Hannah had loved, and is sorry that Hannah was not a knight or a Prince Charming come to wake her. Mr. Spitzer observes that most people are disoriented as to time, place, and person, and Vera calls the house what it has become, "this loony bin."

Characters present

Cousin Hannah · Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Vera Cartwheel · Peron Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Illusion and Reality · Love · Madness and Sanity · Memory and the Past

Symbols: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Clouds and Storms · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Moon and Stars · Mountains · Music and Instruments · Pearls and Jewels · Snow, Ice, and Winter

Philosophy: Aristotle · Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Augustine and Christian Theology · Heraclitus and Flux · Hinduism · Plato and Platonism · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres · Schopenhauer · Spiritualism and the Occult · Taoism and Zhuangzi

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · Astronomy · Dante · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · Judaism · Music and Composers · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The History of Opium · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens by portraying Cousin Hannah as a formidable, almost mythic figure who never reconciled with life and whose identity remains blurred in memory. This passage sets the tone for the chapter's exploration of memory, identity, and legacy. It emphasizes Hannah's singularity and the elusive nature of her life and spirit, framing her as a person who lived on the outermost edges of experience.
- Catherine is described as indefinite, clouded by dreams of immortal love and escape, living in a world of opium-induced fantasies and unawakened romance, in contrast to Cousin Hannah's stark reality and fiery spirit. This contrast highlights two modes of existence: one engaged with harsh realities and causes (Hannah), and the other retreating into beautiful but unreal dreams (Catherine).
- The chapter repeatedly emphasizes Cousin Hannah's adventurous spirit and her sacrifices for the suffrage movement, portraying these efforts as both heroic and, from Catherine's perspective, somewhat futile or unworthy of Hannah's potential. This passage reveals Catherine's ambivalence (envy mixed with guilt) as she reflects on Hannah's committed activism versus her own life of dreams and withdrawal.
- Catherine's reflections on love are poignant and laden with sorrow. She imagines a love greater than any realized affection, a "dead love which never was and never would be real," expressed in silence and absence rather than presence. She interprets Peron's neglect as a form of love out of fear of her power, suggesting a profound but unspoken emotional tension. This theme of unattainable love permeates the chapter.
- There are vivid passages describing Catherine's dreams of travel and escape to exotic places (Egypt, Italy, the land of the Kurds) and her missed opportunities for a different life. These passages symbolize longing, regret, and the tension between the dream of freedom and the reality of confinement, both physical and psychological.
- Catherine's mind is portrayed as wandering and unreliable, filled with illusions and shifting memories. The narrative suggests that her dreams, though inaccurate, might hold a deeper truth than conventional reality. This raises philosophical questions about the nature of truth, memory, and perception.
- Cousin Hannah is depicted as "sharp-witted, dashing and wild and reckless," a figure of masculine virtues and relentless energy, "like a finely tempered blade" who never stopped despite adversity. This passage celebrates her fortitude and contrasts it with Catherine's frailty and passivity.
- The chapter discusses mysterious, mystical elements: the whisperings of the dead, the music of the spheres, and spectral visions, suggesting a world where life and death intermingle and where memory and existence are fluid. Cousin Hannah's belief that the dead are silent and that her battles were with the living underscores the existential tension between life's visible struggles and the ineffable beyond.

- Despite her admiration for Cousin Hannah's strength and purpose, Catherine is disappointed that Hannah is not the romantic hero she imagined, a knight or prince who could awaken her from her dreams. This passage reflects Catherine's deep yearning for connection and meaning, mingled with a sense of loss.
- The chapter closes with reflections on the instability of time and identity, suggesting that even the most certain facts of time, place, person may be illusions or dreams. Mr. Spitzer's observations about disorientation and the blurring of reality and illusion reinforce the chapter's overarching meditation on perception.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Catherine believes "this dead love which never was and never would be real was the one undying love." Why would an unreal love outlast a real one?
- "Whichever one had lived, she would have missed the absent one." What does Catherine need absence for?
- "Perhaps it was that great captain who was weak, my mother who was strong." Could Vera be right?

Characters

- Hannah invited Catherine to Egypt to show "that one could be both beautiful and independent of man." Why does Catherine refuse?
- Hannah "had wept if she heard a skirt whirling, rustling in the wind." What is she mourning?
- Mr. Spitzer must be "prodded and forced to remember." What does he gain by forgetting?

Connections

- In Chapter 34 Hannah wore "iron keys" at her belt. Here she rattles them while "fighting a mirror with her jeweled sword." What is she fighting?
- Catherine wished Hannah were "the Prince Charming to awaken this Sleeping Beauty." Who else in the novel waits to be awakened?
- Mr. Spitzer asks whether he is "a man or a butterfly." How does this echo the dreamer of Chapter 37?

Reflection

- Is action "no necessary criterion or measure of life"?
- Can a life lived for a cause be lived "in only one dimension"?

- Who in the story is the sane one in “this loony bin”?

Research: Characters

Cousin Hannah

- Described as a “great captain of extremes,” a resolute and brave suffragette who sacrificed much for her cause.
- Adventurous and daring, having traveled “to the outermost reaches of space,” symbolizing exploration beyond physical and societal boundaries.
- Exhibits masculine virtues: sharp, shrewd, incisive, relentless and compared to a “finely tempered blade.”
- Seen as singularly devoted to her cause, seemingly indifferent to love or personal attachments.
- Her presence is associated with powerful imagery: whistling sounds, iron keys, jeweled swords, and snow storms.
- A figure of mystery and paradox; she weeps for subtle reasons (e.g., a snowflake touching her hand), showing a hidden emotional depth.
- Her life is characterized by perpetual motion and battle, never fully reconciled with peace or rest.
- Represents strength, fortitude, and the harsh realities of activism and sacrifice.
- Catherine remembers her greeting, “Babylon is fallen,” but Vera says “it was not to be believed”: her mother “undoubtedly misunderstood as to time, place, person.”
- She invited Catherine to Egypt “to show… that one could join her movement for reasons other than being ugly and old, that one could be both beautiful and independent of man.”
- “She had burned like a live coal. Snow buried many cities but did not bury her.”
- She wept “if she heard a skirt whirling, rustling in the wind.”

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s mother)

- Portrayed as dreamy, opium-addicted, lost in illusions and fantasies of an “immortal love” and lost romances.
- She envies Cousin Hannah’s adventures but remains passive, bound to memories and dreams rather than action.
- Her mind is clouded, veiled by dreams that are as much about escape as about longing.
- She imagines herself as a great courtesan with many imaginary lovers, embodying a spectral beauty trapped in time.

- Her love life is described as unfulfilled, marked by silence and absence, especially with Peron.
- She greeted Hannah, “Hello, traveller! And where do you come from now?”
- “Oh, how happy, happy, happy my mother would have been… if only the great gambler had lived.”
- She dreamed “she had found a stairway to heaven,” by which she could “over-hear the decrees and whisperings of the dead.”
- Her eyes were “blurred, cobwebbed by her predisposed illusions, by nightshade and bella donna.”
- She distorts reality, unable to fully grasp or engage with the present moment.
- She has a sense of guilt about her withdrawal and dreams, contrasted with Cousin Hannah’s active life.
- Her life is marked by isolation and a yearning for an “unearthly romance” free from mortal change.
- Represents passivity, longing, and the desire for transcendence.

Mr. Spitzer

- His mind is clouded and dwells on abstract, cosmic music and metaphysical concepts.
- Symbolizes a detached intellectual or mystical observer, contrasting with the passionate activism of Cousin Hannah and the dreamy passivity of Catherine.
- His perspective reflects on the limitations of human understanding and the ineffability of life’s mysteries.
- “Being as one dead,” he “must be prodded and forced to remember.”
- He is “writing now his nocturne in memory of her.”
- Most people, he observes, “were at some level disoriented, unaware of the existing situation with reference to such apparently clear matters as time, place, identity of persons.”

Peron Spitzer

- He was “this man of great wit but little brain—no legal knowledge in his head, no intellectual pretensions whatever.”
- Catherine believes “he had expressed his love by his silence, his distance.”
- “Sometimes she thought that only he lived.”

Research: Themes

Memory and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past

- The chapter blurs the lines between memory, dream, and reality.
- Catherine's recollections are described as "inaccurate," "clouded," and "untrustworthy," reflecting the elusive nature of truth.
- The narrative questions the reliability of memory and whether dreams may contain a deeper accuracy than factual truth.
- Time is fluid, with events and identities slipping and merging, e.g., Catherine confusing visitors or historical periods.

Love and Absence

See: Love · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Love is portrayed as an unfulfilled, silent, and distant force.
- Catherine loves an absent, dead man whose love, she believes, was expressed through silence and neglect rather than conventional gestures.
- Peron's love is described as "his love greater than his hatred" but unexpressed, a "dead love which never was and never would be real," paradoxically eternal.
- Cousin Hannah is described as never having loved, or only loving the "image of the dead," though she weeps at a snowflake or a rustling skirt.

Sacrifice and Activism

See: Women's Suffrage

- Cousin Hannah embodies sacrifice for a cause, dedicating her life to suffrage and battling societal "ogres."
- Her life is one of relentless struggle and fortitude, marked by physical and emotional trials.
- Catherine contrasts this with her own withdrawal and guilt for not engaging in such struggles.

Escapism and Fantasy

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination

- Catherine lives largely in fantasy, opium dreams, and romanticized illusions.
- Catherine imagines exotic travels, lost loves, and mystical experiences that contrast sharply with her sedentary reality.
- Cousin Hannah's life, though real and harsh, also contains elements of myth and legend, as perceived by Catherine.

Death and Immortality

See: Death and Mortality

- Death is omnipresent but paradoxically intertwined with immortality in the narrative.
- Catherine and Cousin Hannah seem caught between life and death, reality and dream.
- The chapter references the “perennial dead” and the idea that death does not end mystery or existence.
- The dead’s silence contrasts with the living’s whisperings, with Cousin Hannah focusing on the living and Catherine on the dead.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Whistling Sound and Snow

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Cousin Hannah’s entrances marked by whistling and snowstorms symbolize her power and otherworldly nature.

Iron Keys and Jeweled Sword

See: Pearls and Jewels · Keys, Doors, and Locks

- Represent authority, battle, and mystery. Hannah walked back and forth, “rattling great iron keys, striking against a stone wall, striking against the empty air, or fighting a mirror with her jeweled sword.”

Clouds, Whirlwinds, and Stars

See: Moon and Stars · Clouds and Storms

- Reflect the fluidity of time, memory, and identity; also Catherine’s dreamlike mental state.

Frozen Beauty and Marble

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Catherine is “this beautiful and unawakened corpse, the cold and frigid beauty of the past,” symbolizing her emotional and physical stasis. Mr. Spitzer prefers “the cold and marble face, the unremembered face of an ideal love.”

Music of the Spheres

See: Moon and Stars · Music and Instruments · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres

- Mr. Spitzer’s cosmic music imagery symbolizes the ineffable and eternal aspects of existence beyond human comprehension.

Centaur and Stone Huntsmen

See: Angels, Devils, and Myth

- Mythical figures representing the intersection of past and present, reality and dream.

Church Bells and Tolling

See: Music and Instruments

- Represent time's passage, memory, and the inescapable presence of death.

Labyrinthine Streets and Changing Signs

See: Madness and Sanity

- Symbolize confusion about identity and reality.

Research: Resources

- "the beautiful music of the spheres": Musica Universalis (music of the spheres) concept incorporates the metaphysical principle that mathematical relationships express qualities or "tones" of energy that manifests in numbers, visual angles, shapes and sounds which are all connected within a pattern of proportion. This has been explored by Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle (he rejected the idea), Boethius developed three categories of music (musica mundana, musica humana, and musica quae in quibusdam constituta est instrumentis), Kepler expounded the idea in Harmonices Mundi (1619). Boethius's writings were later illustrated, and Young may have taken inspiration from these illustrations for the novel. See the Character Hubs. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres, Plato and Platonism, and Aristotle.
- "its sound as of the human will": Human Will or Free Will is the capacity of humans to make choices and decisions independently of external forces. Philosophy has debated the existence and nature of free will with arguments for and against. Determinism is the opposite of free will. Religions grapple with the concept of free will and attempt to reconcile it with divine sovereignty and predestination. Free will is closely linked with moral responsibility which is used to hold individuals accountable for their actions. Miss MacIntosh's view of the human will is in the Chapter 3 resources.
  - Schopenhauer made music the direct image of the will: it "is as immediate an objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself" (Arthur Schopenhauer, The World as Will and Idea 1.52, 1819, trans. R. B. Haldane and J. Kemp, 1883). See Schopenhauer.
  - Augustine defended the freedom of the will against predestination's critics in On Free Choice of the Will (388-395). See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- "seven deathless eternities": "Seven deathless eternities" may recall Dante's Divine Comedy, where the seven terraces of Purgatory purge the seven deadly sins. Seven heavens are found in Judaism and Islam, and Hindu cosmology has seven upper

worlds, the lokas. The seven virtues join the four cardinal virtues of Greek philosophy to the three theological virtues of Paul (1 Corinthians 13:13). See Dante, Judaism, and Hinduism.

- “the seven-stringed harp”: The seven-stringed harp is the lyre, which the poet Terpander was said to have given seven strings. See Greek Mythology.
  - The seven strings bearing “soul and spirit and astral body” recall Theosophy’s seven principles of man, which include the astral body (H. P. Blavatsky, The Key to Theosophy, 1889). See Spiritualism and the Occult.
- “polar lights accompanied by strong sounds”: Northern peoples and Arctic travellers have long reported that the aurora crackles, hisses, and whistles, a sound scientists long doubted. See Astronomy.
- “The lonely cause of suffrage had seemed to my mother to be quite unworthy”: Catherine does not believe in suffrage, and that was common among rich, white women from elite social and political backgrounds at the time. They argued that it would disrupt gender roles and the family structure, doubted women’s political capacity, and opposed broader progressive reforms such as prohibition. Racism drove them too, for they feared the vote would spread to women of color. They argued that it would simply double the size of the electorate without adding any new value or perspective. Opposition also came from business and industry since it may lead to increased regulation and reforms that would hurt their profits. See Women’s Suffrage.
  - The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage was founded in 1911 by Josephine Dodge.
- “Babylon is fallen”: “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen” (Revelation 18:2). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
  - “Babylon is fallen, is fallen” (Isaiah 21:9). See The Bible.
- “an Alpine crystal-hunter who had cut great steps in ice”: Crystal hunters, the Strahler of the Swiss Alps, have climbed for rock crystal since the Middle Ages. See Mountains.
- “the heavenly bridegroom none should see”: “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him” (Matthew 25:6). See the Chapter 33 resources and The Bible.
- “this great courtesan with a snow pompadour”: The pompadour, hair swept high off the forehead, is named for Madame de Pompadour (1721-1764), mistress of Louis XV.
- “death’s dateless night”: “For precious friends hid in death’s dateless night” (Shakespeare, Sonnet 30). See Shakespeare.
- “Yet though there was no time, though all were immortal”: Parmenides and the paradox of motion: Parmenides, an ancient Greek philosopher, argued that change and motion are illusions and that reality is unchanging and indivisible.
- “the cloud-capped towers”: See the Chapter 35 resources and Shakespeare.
- “picketed Buckingham Palace”: Buckingham Palace is the monarch’s official London residence and a working royal palace.

    - On May 21, 1914, Emmeline Pankhurst was arrested at the palace gates as suffragettes tried to bring a petition to King George V. See Women's Suffrage.
- "the land of the somnolent Kurds": Kurds or Kurdish people are an Iranian ethnic group native to the mountainous region of Kurdistan.
- "like the greatest escape artist": The greatest escape artist was Harry Houdini (1874-1926), who escaped from handcuffs, straitjackets, and his Chinese Water Torture Cell.
- "lived all her life in Italy": Italy's history has influenced the world with its art, architecture, and legal systems: Roman Empire, Catholic Church, Renaissance, Art and Architecture, Culture.
- "There were jeweled daggers and poisoned cups": The poisoned cups recall the Borgias, Pope Alexander VI and his son Cesare, whose enemies were said to die of poison.
- "easeful dreams of a lost romance": "I have been half in love with easeful Death" (John Keats, "Ode to a Nightingale," 1819). See Romantic Poets.
- "a funeral gondola black as a blackbird": Franz Liszt wrote La lugubre gondola, "the funeral gondola," in Venice in 1882, and the next year a gondola carried Wagner's coffin down the Grand Canal. See Music and Composers.
- "donjons and walls and angle towers": Donjon is the great tower or innermost keep of a castle.
- "that great cavalier servente": In eighteenth-century Italy a cavalier servente, or cicisbeo, was a married woman's acknowledged escort. Byron describes the custom in Beppo (1818). See Romantic Poets.
- "all base metals were transmuted by time into finest gold": The alchemists sought to transmute base metals into gold. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.
- "the aqua fortis of memory": Aqua fortis is an archaic term for nitric acid.
    - Aqua fortis, "strong water," dissolves silver but not gold, so assayers used it to part the two. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.
- "Life contained death as a cloud contained a passing star": Zeno's paradoxes: the finite can contain the infinite. Aristotle reports Zeno's argument "that that which is in locomotion must arrive at the half-way stage before it arrives at the goal" (Aristotle, Physics 6.9, trans. R. P. Hardie and R. K. Gaye, 1930). Neil deGrasse Tyson explains that the halves, "even though there's an infinite number of them," sum "to a finite answer in a finite amount of time": "Yes, the finite can contain the infinite, and indeed it does" (Neil deGrasse Tyson with Chuck Nice, "Cosmic Queries – In a Zeptosecond," StarTalk Radio, September 3, 2024). See Aristotle.
- "She had wept if she heard a skirt whirling": Young told Studs Terkel that Cousin Hannah came partly from an Alpine story in which two bloomer girls shed their skirts at a summit, and the younger, going back for hers, was lost: "the lady lost her life for a skirt" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See the Chapter 31 resources. See Cousin Hannah.

- “never oblique, never obtuse”: Catherine is described as obtuse (“But she was obtuse”), but Cousin Hannah is described as the opposite, acute. These descriptions are called “masculine virtues.” Catherine could not help admiring these traits, though she could not compete with them. The contrast between obtuse and acute highlights the difference between Catherine and Mr. Spitzer’s more passive, bewildered, or dreamlike states on the one hand, and Cousin Hannah’s active, clear-headed, and vigorous character on the other.
- “a widely netted seine catching only the biggest star or fish”: There have been numerous studies on human memory with conclusions that it is very accurate or very inaccurate. They suggest although people don’t recall a large fraction of what they experience, what they do remember is accurate at least for a few days (Nicholas B. Diamond, Michael J. Armson, and Brian Levine, “The Truth Is Out There: Accuracy in Recall of Verifiable Real-World Events,” Psychological Science 31, no. 12, 2020).
- “Not even when trains were stopped, buried by snow”: In the Great Blizzard of March 1888, trains were stranded in drifts from New York to New England. See Snow, Ice, and Winter.
- “her grand idée fixe”: An idée fixe is an obsession. Berlioz gave the name to the melody that haunts his Symphonie fantastique (1830). See Music and Composers.
- “the rescue of pale ladies held by one-eyed ogres”: See the Polyphemus entry in the Chapter 36 resources. See Homer’s Epics.
- “Mr. Spitzer writing now his nocturne in memory of her”: The nocturne, a night piece for piano, was invented by John Field in 1812 and perfected by Chopin. See Music and Composers.
- “she had found a stairway to heaven”: “And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it” (Genesis 28:12). See Genesis.
- “Cousin Hannah must have believed that the dead were silent”: “The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence” (Psalm 115:17). See The Bible.
- “being never twice the same”: Heraclitus and the flux: he emphasized the constant state of flux and change in the universe, implying that perpetual motion is also a metaphor for the ever-changing nature of reality. See Heraclitus and Flux.
    - “Heracleitus is supposed to say that all things are in motion and nothing at rest; he compares them to the stream of a river, and says that you cannot go into the same water twice” (Plato, Cratylus 402a, trans. Benjamin Jowett). See Plato and Platonism.
- “the word perpetual was that which had always frightened my mother”: A perpetual motion machine, one that runs forever without a source of energy, is impossible under the first and second laws of thermodynamics. The earliest known design is the overbalanced wheel of the Indian mathematician Bhāskara II (Siddhānta Shiromani, about 1150); Villard de Honnecourt drew another about 1230. (Wikipedia)

- “action was no necessary criterion or measure of life”: Those that take action, do things, and are preoccupied with accomplishments are rewarded. The mid-western, Protestant work ethic is set in these standards. The Protestant work ethic is implicitly reflected through the character of Miss MacIntosh and her attitudes toward life, labor, and morality (Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, 1905). In 2021 young people in China began “lying flat” (Elsie Chen, “These Chinese Millennials Are ‘Chilling,’ and Beijing Isn’t Happy,” New York Times, July 3, 2021). It recalls Diogenes the Cynic, a Greek philosopher, who lived in a large storage jar in Athens, often called a barrel, scorning comfort and convention. Work is considered “a false idol” and people instead rest, exercise, and relax as a form of “resistance.” See Miss MacIntosh.
- “these irrational, mystical, four-faced doorways”: Janus, the Roman god of doorways, had two faces, and Janus Quadrifrons, the four-faced Janus, had a temple with four doors. See Greek Mythology.
- “Clovis or Cuthbert or Crispin or Charles the Mad or the Beloved or the Bold”: Clovis I (about 466-511) united the Franks. Saint Cuthbert (died 687) was the monk-bishop of Lindisfarne, and Saint Crispin, patron of shoemakers, gave his name to the day of Agincourt in Henry V. Charles VI of France (1368-1422) was called both the Beloved and the Mad, and Charles the Bold (1433-1477) was the last Valois duke of Burgundy.
  - Clovis was the first king of the Franks to unite all of the Frankish tribes under one ruler.
  - Cuthbert was an Anglo-Saxon saint in the Celtic tradition.
  - Crispin is the patron Saint of cobblers, curriers, tanners, and leather workers.
  - Charles the Mad was king of France. He is known for his mental illness and psychotic episodes. He was also called Charles the Beloved. He at times believed that he was made of glass.
  - Charles the Bold was the Duke of Burgundy.
- “sans peur et sans reproche”: Sans peur et sans reproche means without fear and beyond reproach.
  - The phrase was the epithet of Pierre Terrail, seigneur de Bayard (1476-1524), “le chevalier sans peur et sans reproche.”
- “a French chevalier who had travelled great distances”: French chevalier is a French title originally equivalent to the English knight.
- “a Red Cross knight”: Catherine is sorry that Hannah “was not a French chevalier… or a Red Cross knight.” The Redcrosse Knight of Edmund Spenser’s The Faerie Queene (1590) stands for holiness. With Una he slays the dragon that has imprisoned her parents.
- “Richard Coeur de Leon”: Richard Coeur de Leon, Richard the Lionheart, was King of England. He had the reputation for being a great military leader and warrior.
- “the early French kings carrying their oriflammes”: The oriflamme was the battle standard of the kings of France in the Middle Ages, kept at the abbey of Saint-Denis.

- “some old Rinaldo riding”: Rinaldo is a legendary knight in medieval France.
  - He is Renaud de Montauban, a paladin of Charlemagne, and the Rinaldo of Boiardo’s Orlando Innamorato (1483) and Ariosto’s Orlando Furioso (1516).
- “his bayard, his wonderful bay steed”: Bayard is a magic bay horse ridden by Rinaldo. It had the magic ability to adjust its size to fit the rider.
  - It could stretch to carry all four sons of Aymon at once.
- “the Prince Charming to awaken this Sleeping Beauty”: In Perrault’s “Sleeping Beauty” (1697) the whole household sleeps for a hundred years with the princess, until the prince comes. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “the life-sized chessmen”: In Through the Looking-Glass (1871) Alice finds the chessmen alive and walks into a life-sized game of chess. See Alice in Wonderland.
- “whether he was a man or a butterfly”: Zhuangzi’s butterfly dream. See the Chapter 37 resources and Taoism and Zhuangzi.
- “a lost psyche drifting down the wind”: In Greek psyche means both soul and butterfly. Apuleius tells the story of Psyche and Cupid in The Golden Ass. See Greek Mythology.
- “most people, it had been Mr. Spitzer’s unfortunate observation, were at some level disoriented”: Doctors still test whether a patient is “oriented” to person, place, and time, the same three matters Mr. Spitzer names. See Madness and Sanity.
- “by nightshade and bella donna”: Deadly nightshade, Atropa belladonna, enlarges the pupils and blurs the sight. Italian women are said to have used it to make their eyes beautiful, hence bella donna, “beautiful lady.” See The History of Opium.
- “Lunacy reigned supreme”: Lunacy comes from the Latin luna, the moon, which was long believed to cause madness. See Moon and Stars and Madness and Sanity.

Vocabulary

Amulet

A charm worn against evil.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Barouche

A fashionable four-wheeled carriage with a folding half-hood and two seats facing each other.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Bisect

To cut or divide into two parts.

Cavalier

A horseman or gallant gentleman; also offhand and disdainful.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Chamois

A goat-antelope of the Alps.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Conquistador

A Spanish conqueror of the Americas.

Courtesan

A mistress of a rich or noble man.

Crystal-hunter

A prospector in the Alps who climbs into rock clefts to find quartz crystals.

Divertissement

A diversion or entertainment.

Donjon

The great tower or innermost keep of a castle.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Espousal

The taking up of a cause; also marriage.

Eunuch

A man who has been castrated. Eunuchs were employed for centuries to guard harems and to serve as officials in royal courts in the Middle East, China, and Byzantium. See The eunuch (Ch 35).

Fitful

Starting and stopping; irregular.

Flagstone

A flat paving stone.

Fortitude

Courage in bearing pain or trouble.

Freebooter

A pirate or plunderer.

Frigid

Very cold; stiffly unfriendly.

Imperious

Proud and commanding.

Incisive

Sharp and clear in thought.

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Insurrectionist

A rebel.

Jasper

An opaque, often red, variety of quartz.

Labyrinthine

Like a labyrinth; intricate and confusing.

Limitary

Of or at a limit.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Misanthrope

A hater of humankind.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Nomadic

Wandering from place to place.

Obdurate

Stubborn, unyielding.

Oblique

Indirect; slanting.

Obtuse

Slow to understand.

Ogre

A man-eating giant of folktale.

Perennial

Lasting or returning year after year.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Preternatural

Beyond what is natural.

Renunciation

The act of giving something up.

Revivification

A bringing back to life.

Rivulet

A small stream.

Sahib

Master, a title for Europeans in colonial India.

Seine

To fish with a large hanging net.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Spectre

A ghost.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women's right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women's Suffrage.

Tenebrous

Dark, shadowy, obscure.

Transient

Passing quickly; not lasting. As a noun, a hotel guest who stays only a short time.

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists' dream of turning base metal into gold.

Trenchant

Sharp, incisive.

Tryst

An appointed meeting, as of lovers.

Turnkey

A jailer.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Vagrant

Wandering, with no settled home.

Chapter 39

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Vera reflects on the irony that Cousin Hannah, a rationalist in the avant-garde of suffrage, became for Catherine a figure of dead romance, a knight errant who could not be held to mortal law. Catherine, lonely and drugged, half believes she imagined Hannah's visit: "It was as if the perpendicular pronoun I had come to see my horizontal mother." Her "I" means many things. She is the chair, the lamp, Brooklyn Bridge, a great hostess and a recluse at once, travelling everywhere without leaving the house. Her soul is a house of endless rooms, and in every room someone is missing. She knows that opium has poisoned all pleasures at their source, and that knowledge of so many selves has only added to her torment. Her sanity, she believes, is simply knowing that she is insane, and she would not trade her beautiful false selves for one dull true one. She greets her phantoms, Lord Murdock Burdock Thrushmorton, who twitters like a cage of canaries, and Mr. Res Tacamah, the drug bottle with very large ears, and wonders whether God, too, is dreaming opium dreams, and whether dream and reality are the same.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Cousin Hannah · Joachim Spitzer · Lord Murdock Burdock Thrushmorton · Mr. Res Tacamah · The Black Coachman · Vera Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Dreams and Imagination · Duality and Doubles · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Madness and Sanity · Memory and the Past · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Birds · Clocks and Watches · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Fog and Mist · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · The House · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Buddhism · Descartes and Dualism · Existentialism · Hinduism · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Plato and Platonism · Schopenhauer · William James and Pragmatism · Wittgenstein

Allusions: Ancient Egypt · Angels and Archangels · Astronomy · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Greek Mythology · Judaism · Milton · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The History of Opium · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- Early on, Catherine reflects on a great Bostonian lady, an avant-garde suffrage leader, who paradoxically evokes a “dead romance” despite her rational, modern activism. Catherine senses this figure as “not quite of this modern world,” caught between reality and a haunting, unreal past marked by interruptions and failures of communication (telephones ringing, busy signals, wrong parties). This sets the tone for Catherine’s own sense of isolation and distance from life itself, revealing her fragile grasp on reality and her compensatory use of imagination.
- The description of “Cousin Freemount-Snowden” as an immortal phantom, “a creature of the immortal night,” fighting dragons and monsters, symbolizes Catherine’s perception of this suffrage figure as timeless and mythic. This passage explores themes of mortality, idealism, and the tension between dreams and reality. Catherine questions whether such a figure should be subject to “mortal law” or if she belongs to a realm beyond normal human experience.
- Catherine’s experience of hallucinations and the fragmentation of the self is vividly portrayed: “It was as if the perpendicular pronoun I had come to see my horizontal mother,” and the sense of multiple selves dancing or dividing. She questions her own reality, the reality of the visitor, and the continuity of identity, wondering if she or the visitor is dead, if she is dreaming, or if the “I” she knows is stable or shifting.
- A profound metaphor describes Catherine’s soul as a vast, infinite house with “many rooms,” “many stairways,” and “many heavens,” where she moves endlessly without finding an exit. Each room contains different versions of herself, different guests, and missing elements, symbolizing her fractured identity and the elusive nature of self-knowledge. The imagery of “The floors wavered like water. The walls seemed to move.” underscores the instability of her mental state.
- Catherine experiences time as fluid and overlapping, seeing “faces like old town clocks” striking different, “deranged” hours and existing simultaneously in many places: ski hotels, regattas, ancient cities. This dissolves the linear notion of time and blends memories, fantasy, and present experience, emphasizing the theme of timelessness and Catherine’s alienation from ordinary reality.
- Catherine acknowledges that opium “poisoned all pleasures at their source,” creating a “swirling fog” that distorts reality, moves stars out of their stations, and shifts castles from mountain to mountain. This highlights the role of addiction in her mental fragmentation and the blurring of the rational cosmos she once loved, showing how her perception is both enchanted and trapped by drugs.
- Catherine’s self-awareness of her madness is striking: she believes her “own sanity was simply this—she knew she was insane.” The novel explores how troubles and madness are cyclical, manifesting repeatedly in different guises, symbolized by

dragons turning into saints and vice versa. This passage conveys the tragic and complex nature of mental illness and the futility of self-knowledge in curing it.

- Catherine interacts with imaginary or symbolic figures, Mr. Spitzer, Lord Murdock Burdock Thrushmorton, Mr. Res Tacamah, who represent parts of her fractured mind or external influences. Despite her isolation, she enacts social rituals, greeting these "guests," which reflects her remaining attachment to social life and her imaginative engagement with her fragmented reality.
- The chapter ends with a powerful image of the sea meeting the shore, the dead meeting the living, and the fog as a place for "absent-minded persons" who "walked with their eyes hidden behind their hands." It suggests a liminal space between life and death, reality and dream, emphasizing Catherine's existential state of existing in a world of blurred boundaries where neither clear truth nor stable identity exists.
- The final reflection questions whether reality and dream are distinct or the same, if God too is dreaming, and if reality is a shared hallucination or creation. This philosophical meditation ties Catherine's personal experience to universal themes about perception, existence, and the meaning of life, ending the chapter on a note of profound ambiguity and mystery.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "If the visit was real, then the visitor was not." What does Catherine gain by doubting one or the other?
- Catherine "really was enslaved… perhaps for the very simple reason that she imagined herself free." How can believing oneself free be a chain?
- Her "sanity was simply this—she knew she was insane." Is that sanity?

Characters

- Hannah must "ride, ride, ride to that victory which would be her own extinction." What victory ends in extinction?
- Catherine would not give up "all the beautiful false selves for the sake of one who was true." What would the true self be like?
- Lord Murdock Burdock Thrushmorton is "a wooden leg stamping along old Gothic streets." Why might Catherine welcome him at all hours?

Connections

- Catherine's soul is "a many-spiraling house with many rooms." How does this house compare to the real house by the sea?

- In Chapter 37 Catherine asked who the dreamer was. Here she asks whether God is “dreaming these opium dreams.” Is the question the same?
- The perpendicular I and the horizontal mother: how does Vera’s place in this chapter differ from her mother’s?

Reflection

- Does self-knowledge heal, or can it add “to these wild waves of thoughts”?
- Is a world with no mistakes, as Catherine says, a pity?
- Which is the greater mystery, order or “that disorder which seemed itself innate”?

Research: Characters

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s mother)

- Central figure, a woman caught between reality and dreams.
- A social hostess and recluse, a traveler and prisoner of her mind.
- Struggles with mental illness, opium addiction, and fragmented identity.
- “She said that her imagination was all there was.”
- She “really preferred confusion to order, these interesting, illusive ambiguities.”
- She is “this horizontal lady, her heart like wandering snowflakes, her eyes congealed.”

Cousin Hannah Freemount-Snowden

- A symbolic visitor, representing a heroic figure from a bygone era.
- Described in mythic terms, she embodies ideals and struggles that contrast with Catherine’s condition.
- “Her great Coriolanian eyebrows bristling, her hair streaked with white, her great Roman nose casting its shadow.”
- She was “never recreant from her great cause,” and “she must ride, ride, ride to that victory which would be her own extinction.”

Mr. Spitzer

- A character that also imbues symbolic or imaginary concepts like rationality, science, or a caretaker.
- Envious of Catherine’s imaginative light, yet also a voice of reason.
- “He had supposed he was the lamp-lighter and the flame, the city of trembling bridges.”
- He “most loved or claimed he loved” the rational cosmos.

Lord Murdock Burdock Thrushmorton

- An eccentric figure “twittering like a cage of canaries,” blending the absurd with the gothic.
- Represents the chaotic, unpredictable elements in Catherine’s world.
- He is “a wooden leg stamping along old Gothic streets,” “a perfect English gentleman,” “really quite canary-brained.”
- “Twitter on, Burdock. Twitter on.”

Mr. Res Tacamah

- Author of fantasies, controlling madness through dreaming rather than acting.
- His drug bottle symbolizes Catherine’s opium use and the blurred line between control and chaos.
- He is “the porcelain drug bottle with very large ears,” which “contained the purple fog and the glowering genii.”

The Black Coachman

- Catherine goes out with him, “his eyes rolling like dice,” to make afternoon calls in the great world capitals.
- He is “wound in his cloth of gold, for surely he was her prince of the East.”

Research: Themes

Duality of Reality and Imagination

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination · Duality and Doubles

- Catherine exists simultaneously in multiple realms: physical, mental, spiritual.
- She is described as living through dreams and hallucinations, often unable to distinguish between real visits and imagined ones (e.g., the visit from Cousin Freemount-Snowden).
- Her imagination is described as “all there was,” compensating for isolation and loss.

Fragmented Identity and Multiplicity of Selves

See: Identity and the Self

- Catherine perceives herself as many selves, sometimes contradictory, never unified.
- She contemplates which self is true or dominant, fearing that choosing one would mean losing the many fascinating false selves that sustain her.

- This fragmentation extends to her questioning of self-knowledge and sanity, recognizing her madness but finding it integral to her existence.

Timelessness and the Fluidity of Time

See: Time

- Time is portrayed as elusive, nonlinear, and sometimes meaningless.
- Catherine experiences multiple times and places at once: simultaneous winters in different ski resorts, many historical eras.
- The narrative questions the nature of time, blending past, present, and future, life and death.

Isolation and Alienation

See: Isolation and Connection

- Catherine feels isolated, both physically and psychologically.
- Despite her social prominence and many guests, she is ultimately alone in her infinite, maze-like mental house.
- The imagery of empty rooms, phantom guests, and the sea's roar emphasizes her alienation.

Illness and Madness

See: Madness and Sanity

- Catherine's opium use and mental state are central to her experience.
- She is aware of her insanity and the limitations imposed by it.
- Madness is depicted as both a torment and a source of her vivid imagination and insight.

Imagery of the Sea and Fog

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- The sea symbolizes the boundary between life and death, reality and dream.
- Fog and mist represent the unclear, shifting nature of perception and consciousness.
- The sea's spray and the fog's enveloping nature create a liminal space where conventional rules do not apply.

The Role of Memory and History

See: Memory and the Past

- Catherine recalls historical figures and events with intimate detail, blending fact and fantasy.

- Her memory is selective, fragmented, and often symbolic.
- This reflects the human tendency to reconstruct identity and meaning through past narratives.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Telephones and Interruptions

- “All romance had already been destroyed by telephones and Western Union messengers.”
- Represent modernity’s intrusion and the destruction of romance and continuity.
- Catherine’s complaints about missed calls and busy signals symbolize her disconnection from the world.

The Infinite House

See: The House

- Catherine’s soul is compared to a vast, labyrinthine house with many rooms and doorways.
- Each room is a partial reflection of another, symbolizing fragmented consciousness.
- “In every room, there was someone missing. There was something missing.”

Stars, Moons, and Light

See: Moon and Stars · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Celestial imagery emphasizes timelessness, otherworldliness, and Catherine’s ethereal state.
- Light and darkness interplay to suggest knowledge, madness, and mystery.

Dragons, Saints, and Mythical Creatures

See: Angels, Devils, and Myth

- Mythic battles represent internal struggles with despair, identity, and societal constraints.

Sea and Shore

See: The Sea and Water

- The meeting of sea and land as a metaphor for the interface between life and death, reality and dream.

The Umbrella

See: The Umbrella

- Catherine is seen “raising her white umbrella over her like a cloud,” and takes the waters “under many white umbrellas strung with planetary pearls.”
- Against Belshazzar “she had raised her white frilled umbrella.”

Clocks

See: Clocks and Watches

- She passes “faces like old town clocks seen through a blowing mist, each clock striking a different deranged hour.”
- Lord Burdock is “striking like a dozen distraught city clocks,” “striking thirteen bells far out at sea where no time was.”

Mirrors

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- The rooms have “mirrors looking out on clouds or mirroring nothing,” and “space was the illusion in a frameless mirror.”
- “Every room being but the partial reflection of every other.”

Fog and Mist

See: Fog and Mist

- Obscure perception and the blending of boundaries.
- Creates a liminal space where conventional truths dissolve.

Research: Resources

- “the rational suffrage movement”: Cousin Hannah is described as being part of the “avant-garde” women’s suffrage movement, and that is a real thing. Its most famous figure, Inez Milholland Boissevain (1886-1916), led the 1913 suffrage parade in Washington, D.C., in a flowing white cloak on a white horse. A lawyer and peace activist, she belonged to the Greenwich Village circle of progressives and socialists around The Masses, a magazine that combined art, satire, and political commentary, along with Dorothy Day, Crystal Eastman, and Louise Bryant. See Women’s Suffrage.
  - During the American Revolution some women could and did vote. New Jersey’s constitution of 1776 gave the vote to “all inhabitants” worth fifty pounds, and women voted there until 1807.
  - Inez Milholland collapsed on a speaking tour in 1916. Her last public words were, “Mr. President, how long must women wait for liberty?”

- “destroyed by telephones and Western Union messengers”: The telephone had its critics who thought that it would degrade face-to-face conversation, break up the home life, and it allowed people to talk too much. No law or official rule barred women from the telephone. The limits they met at first came from wealth, from where the telephones were, and from changing social norms. The industry sold the telephone for business, and men complained that women were frivolous with a tool built for serious business, using the lines for gossip and long social calls. Some early companies tried, without success, to set strict time limits on residential calls to keep the lines open for men. Yet the system would have collapsed without women. Emma Nutt became the first woman telephone operator in Boston in 1878, the switchboards were soon run almost entirely by women, and women’s calling at home became a mainstay of the business (Claude S. Fischer, America Calling: A Social History of the Telephone to 1940, University of California Press, 1992; Michèle Martin, “Hello, Central?”: Gender, Technology, and Culture in the Formation of Telephone Systems, McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1991).
- “buzzings like thousands of Libyan honey bees”: Herodotus wrote of the Gyzantes of Libya, “in their country much honey is made by bees, and much more yet, it is said, by men who have the skill” (Herodotus, Histories 4.194, trans. A. D. Godley, 1920).
- “Someone had gone from France to Hades”: Hades in Greek mythology is the god of the Greek underworld. See Greek Mythology.
    - Hades is also the name of his realm, the land of the dead.
- “that great knight errant storming against this castle perilous”: In Malory’s Le Morte d’Arthur (1485), Sir Gareth rescues the Lady Lyonesse, besieged in the Castle Perilous.
- “coming with her petard”: A petard was a bomb for blowing in a gate. “For ’tis the sport to have the engineer / Hoist with his own petar” (Shakespeare, Hamlet 3.4). See Shakespeare.
- “her great Coriolanian eyebrows bristling”: Coriolanian eyebrows means a feature referring to Gaius Marcius Coriolanus, a Roman general famed for his exceptional valor.
    - Shakespeare’s Coriolanus (1608) is the proud general who scorns the people. See Shakespeare.
- “her great Roman nose”: Roman nose or Aquiline nose is a human nose with a prominent bridge, giving it the appearance of being curved.
- “the seven-headed monsters wearing golden turret crowns”: The seven-headed monsters may refer to the beast from the sea: “and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns” (Revelation 13:1). In Sumerian myth a seven-headed serpent was killed by the warrior god Ninurta and hung on his chariot. See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “the terrifying, red-eyed basilisks”: The basilisk is a legendary reptile reputed to be a serpent king who can cause death with a single glance.

    - Pliny the Elder wrote that the basilisk kills with its glance and its breath (Natural History 8.33).
- “She had slain the minotaur”: Minotaur is a large, bull-headed man in Greek mythology who is trapped in a labyrinth. See the Chapter 35 resources and Greek Mythology.
- “she imagined herself free”: “No one is more a slave than he who thinks himself free without being so” (Goethe, Elective Affinities 2.5, 1809).
- “the perpendicular pronoun I had come to see my horizontal mother”: English is almost alone in capitalizing the pronoun I, which grew into a single tall stroke in Middle English so that it would not be lost in the line.
- “The dead were those who travelled fastest”: “Die Todten reiten schnell,” “the dead ride fast,” is the refrain of Gottfried August Bürger’s ballad “Lenore” (1773). Bram Stoker quotes it in the first chapter of Dracula (1897).
- “The personal pronoun I did not always mean”: “I AM THAT I AM” (Exodus 3:14). Jesus uses the phrase “I am” in seven distinct statements each emphasizing a specific aspect of His divine nature and purpose, connecting him to the God revealed in the Old Testament. Descartes wrote, “I think, therefore I am” (René Descartes, Discourse on Method, 1637), which then leads into Existentialism and Absurdism. Existentialism proposes the idea that people are free to choose their own meaning and are responsible for their choices, there are no inherent meaning or purpose to life and instead people are responsible for creating meaning, personal experience and subjective reality are used to shape understanding of the world, freedom, responsibility, choice, self-discovery and the absurdity of human existence are explored. Anaïs Nin wrote that Young’s work was not absurdist, because Young believed there was an inherent beauty to the world (Anaïs Nin, The Novel of the Future, Macmillan, 1968). See Descartes and Dualism and Existentialism.
- “She was Brooklyn Bridge”: Brooklyn Bridge: See the Chapter 2 resources.
- “what was her personal identity among so many transshifting objects”: Young spoke of “the profound influence upon me of William James and Saint Augustine in ‘The City of God’” (Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Marguerite Young,” Review of Contemporary Fiction 23, no. 1, Spring 2003 (1989 original)). She told Studs Terkel, “William James made a beautiful statement, man is body, soul, and clothing” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). William James wrote The Varieties of Religious Experience with twenty lectures. William James also supported Pragmatism that considers words and thought as tools and instruments for prediction, problem solving, and action, and rejects the idea that the function of thought is to describe, represent, or mirror reality. See William James and Pragmatism and Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “one for a murdered archduke”: Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria was shot at Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, and the First World War followed.
- “beginning memento mori”: Memento mori is an artistic or symbolic reminder of the inevitability of death.

- “the spokes of the wheels of her carriage were sleeping cherubim”: “And when I looked, behold the four wheels by the cherubims, one wheel by one cherub, and another wheel by another cherub” (Ezekiel 10:9). See The Bible.
- “She was immured”: Immured means to enclose within or as if within walls.
- “she was extra muros”: Extra muros means outside the walls or community.
- “an old friend from Newport”: Newport is a city set on Aquidneck Island in Rhode Island.
    - In the Gilded Age the very rich built summer “cottages” there, such as The Breakers (1895).
- “Czar Kolokol, king of the Kremlin bells”: Czar Kolokol also known as Tsar Bell is a bell on display at the Moscow Kremlin.
    - It was cast in 1733-1735, cracked in a fire in 1737, and has never been rung.
- “though this lady had lived and died in the twelfth century”: The twelfth-century lady may be Rosamund Clifford, mistress of King Henry II. Legend says he hid her in a labyrinth at Woodstock, where Queen Eleanor found her and offered her the dagger or the poisoned bowl, and Rosamund drank the poison. Young’s lady dies by the dagger.
- “those hidden from history”: History is the study and the documentation of the past. Events before the invention of writing systems are considered prehistory. History is an umbrella term comprising past events as well as the memory, discovery, collection, organization, presentation, and interpretation of these events. Historians seek knowledge of the past using historical sources such as written documents, oral accounts, art and material artifacts, and ecological markers (Wikipedia). Many historians believe that the production of history is embedded with bias because events and known facts in history can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Constantin Fasolt suggested that history is linked to politics by the practice of silence itself (Constantin Fasolt, The Limits of History, University of Chicago Press, 2004). According to Michel-Rolph Trouillot, the historical process is rooted in the archives, therefore silences, or parts of history that are forgotten, may be an intentional part of a narrative strategy that dictates how areas of history are remembered (Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History, Beacon Press, 1995). Historical omissions can occur in many ways and can have a profound effect on historical records. Information can also purposely be excluded or left out accidentally. Gerda Lerner, a twentieth century historian who focused much of her work on historical omissions involving women and their accomplishments, explained the negative impact that these omissions had on minority groups. Her books Black Women in White America: A Documentary History (Pantheon Books, 1972), The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History (Oxford University Press, 1979), and Why History Matters: Life and Thought (Oxford University Press, 1997) have been used to examine women’s history. Women’s history is the study of the role that women have played in history and the methods required to do so. It includes the study of the history of the growth of women’s rights throughout recorded history, personal achievement over a period of time, the examination of individuals and groups of women of historical significance, and the

effect that historical events have had on women (Wikipedia). Howard Zinn, in A People's History of the United States (Harper and Row, 1980), presented what he considered to be a different side of history from the more traditional, fundamentally nationalist glorification of the country. Zinn portrays a side of American history that can largely be seen as the exploitation and manipulation of the majority by rigged systems that hugely favor a small aggregate of elite rulers from across the orthodox political parties. Zinn inspired Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz to write An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States (Beacon Press, 2014). It is the third of a series of six ReVisioning books which reconstruct and reinterpret U.S. history from marginalized peoples' perspectives. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- "beginning with Icarus who flew too near the sun": Icarus flew on wings of feathers and wax made by his father Daedalus, flew too near the sun, and fell into the sea, which is named Icarian for him (Ovid, Metamorphoses 8). See Greek Mythology.
- "the soul which was divided into only two parts": The divided soul may refer to the bipartite soul in Christian theology where the human being is divided into two distinct parts: material and immaterial/body and soul.
    - Plato divided the soul into three parts, reason, spirit, and appetite (Republic 4). See Plato and Platonism.
- "the reversals of polarities, the meetings of opposites": See the reversals entry in the Chapter 37 resources.
- "She knew when the Phoenicians were about to sail": Phoenicians were an ancient civilization in the eastern Mediterranean in what is now Lebanon.
    - The Phoenicians were the great sailors of the ancient Mediterranean, and Herodotus says they sailed around Africa (Histories 4.42).
- "darkened Brooklyn or Boston Harbor": Brooklyn is a borough of New York City.
    - Boston Harbor is a natural harbor of Massachusetts Bay.
- "the seal boats were about to sail from their ice citadels in Labrador": Labrador is the mainland region of the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador.
    - In the sealing disaster of 1914, seventy-eight men of the SS Newfoundland froze to death on the ice.
- "the Gloucester fishermen who had gone down a hundred years ago": Gloucester is a city in Essex County, Massachusetts and an important fishing city in US history.
    - Gloucester has lost thousands of fishermen to the sea. Its Fisherman's Memorial (1925) bears the words "They that go down to the sea in ships" (Psalm 107:23). See The Bible and The Sea and Water.
    - Sailors buried at sea were sewn into their sailcloth. See the Chapter 33 resources.
- "my mother's soul was like a many-spiraling house with many rooms": "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2). Teresa of Ávila pictured the soul as a castle of diamond or clear crystal with many rooms, as in heaven there are many mansions (The Interior Castle, 1577). See Augustine and Christian Theology and The House.

- “many cubits adding to dazzling cubits”: “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” (Matthew 6:27). See The Bible.
- “trailing clouds of deathless glory”: “But trailing clouds of glory do we come / From God, who is our home” (William Wordsworth, “Ode: Intimations of Immortality,” 1807). See Romantic Poets.
- “bevies including the Egyptians and the Florentines”: Egyptians are from Egypt. See Ancient Egypt.
    - Florentines are from Florence, Italy.
- “numerous variable sahibs”: Sahib comes from the Arabic for companion or owner. In India it became a courteous title like “Mister,” used especially for Europeans.
- “the Midnight Express”: Midnight Express has been referenced in art where it refers to a large locomotive. It seems to mean transportation at night while the passengers sleep. The Midnight Express (1924) is also a silent film about trains.
- “great leviathans rolling, lifting like islands in the flood”: “Leviathan, which God of all his works / Created hugest that swim the ocean stream,” is taken for an island by the pilot of a night-foundered skiff (John Milton, Paradise Lost 1.201-208, 1667). See Milton.
- “for surely he was her prince of the East”: The black coachman is in Catherine’s dreams as her “prince of the East” which refers to Lucifer, the light bringer, Venus, morning star. The black coachman is “wound in his cloth of gold.” “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” (Isaiah 14:12). See The Black Coachman and The Bible.
- “the purple roof-tops of pagodas”: A pagoda is an Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves that serves a religious function in Buddhism. See Buddhism.
- “the faces with Roman numerals”: Roman numerals are a number system which originated in ancient Rome.
- “She saw an idiot who had become a great philosopher”: Wittgenstein, despite his genius, was known for his unconventional behavior and challenging personality. He even questioned his own sanity, asking Bertrand Russell if he was an idiot. Russell asked him to write something over the vacation, and after reading it told him not to become an aeronaut (Bertrand Russell, “Ludwig Wittgenstein,” in Portraits from Memory and Other Essays, Simon and Schuster, 1956). His profound insights into philosophy, language, and logic led to his recognition as a major philosopher. The idea of a philosopher becoming an “idiot” is a common trope often referencing Diogenes of Sinope. Arthur Schopenhauer was also considered eccentric. See Wittgenstein and Schopenhauer.
- “the stormy petrels flying”: Petrels are said to be named for St. Peter, because they seem to walk on the water (Matthew 14:29). See Birds.
- “the great regattas at Cowes”: The regatta at Cowes is called Cowes Week and is one of the longest running regular regattas in the world.
    - The first regatta there was held in 1826.

- “the horse races at Deauville”: Deauville, in Normandy, France, has a racecourse for thoroughbred horses.
    - The racecourse opened in 1864.
- “Florentine plazas”: Florentine plazas are in Florence, Italy.
    - The Champs-Élysées is an avenue in the 8th arrondissement of Paris, France.
    - Champs-Élysées means Elysian Fields, the paradise of heroes in Greek myth, which is why Young sets them “after this life is over.” See Greek Mythology.
- “how opium had poisoned all pleasures at their source”: Thomas De Quincey turned from “The Pleasures of Opium” to “The Pains of Opium” in Confessions of an English Opium-Eater (1821). See The History of Opium.
- “her runic dirges”: Runic describes runes which are the letters in the runic alphabet used in Germanic languages before the adoption of the Latin alphabet.
    - Dirges are a song or hymn of grief or lamentation before a funeral or memorial. The word comes from the Latin “Dirige, Domine,” the first words of an antiphon in the Office of the Dead.
- “take arms against a sea of troubles”: “Take arms against a sea of troubles” is from Hamlet, Act III, Scene I, the famous soliloquy “To be, or not to be.” See Shakespeare.
- “Equalities, which had always been innate”: Gender fluid philosophy challenges the traditional binary view of gender, suggesting that gender is not fixed but rather a spectrum or a dynamic process that can change over time. This fluidity can apply to both gender identity and gender expression, meaning how a person presents themselves to the world. Simone de Beauvoir in, The Second Sex, was foundational in distinguishing between biological sex and social gender, laying the groundwork for later explorations of gender as a social construct. The novel embraces gender fluid philosophy primarily through its poetic and symbolic depiction of identity as unstable, multiple, and mutable. Characters traverse and blur gender boundaries; metaphors of transformation underscore the ephemeral nature of identity; and the narrative challenges fixed binaries by portraying a world where selves, including gendered selves, are in constant flux. This fluidity is not articulated in explicit gender theory terms but is deeply woven into the novel’s exploration of selfhood, embodiment, and the interplay between reality and illusion. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
    - Gender fluid mythological figures: Zeus, Aphrodite, Hermaphroditus, Teiresias
- “a blushing coward who would leave woman to fend for herself”: Research about masculinity expanded in the 1970s onward. Julián Marías wrote in his book Metaphysical Anthropology (1971) that man’s condition is insecurity, neediness, ignorance, indecision and helplessness. However, males are seen as having the main quality of strength. If he doesn’t then he feels he is inferior and must make up for this lack. Male strength may be physical, but can also consist in cunning, intelligence, prestige, experience, authority, aplomb, capacity of expression, aptitude for revealing or feigning those faculties. The paradox according to Marias is that man is ignorant, weak and threatened which leads to man’s pretension that he is the source of

knowledge, strength, power and security. Joseph Pleck examined masculinity by doing a meta analysis of the male role starting with the 1930s and found it to consist of numerous instances of blatant misrepresentation of data, twisted reinterpretations of disconfirming results, misogyny, homophobia, and class bias (Joseph H. Pleck, The Myth of Masculinity, MIT Press, 1981). Alan G. Miller examined the myth of masculinity in patriarchal society as men are supposed to be competitive, diligent, disciplined, level-headed, strong, virile, controlled, successful (Alan G. Miller, "The Myth of Masculinity: A Panel," American Journal of Psychoanalysis 33, no. 1, 1973, 65-67). Women, if considered at all, were presumed to be the opposite if for no reason other than no one ever asked them. Thomas J. Gerschick and Adam S. Miller later studied how men with physical disabilities come to terms with these ideals (Thomas J. Gerschick and Adam S. Miller, "Coming to Terms: Masculinity and Physical Disability," in Men's Health and Illness: Gender, Power, and the Body, ed. Donald Sabo and David Frederick Gordon, Sage, 1995). Young disparages the stereotypical feminine virtues as well. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- "It was not merely the void—it was the aching void": "But they have left an aching void / The world can never fill" (William Cowper, "Walking with God," Olney Hymns, 1779).
- "And how should my mother have self-knowledge": Self-knowledge and its limitations: inaccessibility of the mind, cognitive biases, excessive self-criticism, self-deception, over-analysis, paranoia.
- "even like dragons slain by saints": The best known is St. George, who slays the dragon in The Golden Legend of Jacobus de Voragine (about 1260).
- "she knew she was insane, quite mad": "Divine madness" or "theia mania" refers to unconventional, sometimes unpredictable behavior attributed to divine inspiration or the influence of a god, often associated with mystical experiences or spiritual practice. Plato explored the idea as a source of creativity and inspiration: "the greatest of blessings come to us through madness, when it is sent as a gift of the gods" (Plato, Phaedrus 244a, trans. Harold N. Fowler, 1925). It can take the form of "religious ecstasy" where a person has a profound connection to the divine, transcending normal perceptions and societal norms. See Plato and Platonism.
- "which of many selves should she have knowledge of": Know thyself is an Ancient Greek aphorism that has been attributed to almost a dozen Greek sages. It is the first of three Delphic maxims. The two maxims after know thyself were nothing to excess and surety brings ruin. The maxim, or aphorism, know thyself, has had a variety of meanings attributed to it in literature, and over time, as in early ancient Greek the phrase means know thy measure. Laozi likewise ranks knowing oneself above knowing others (Tao Te Ching 33).
- "her rival Belshazzar": Belshazzar was the son and crown prince of Nabonidus, the last king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire.
    - "In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain" (Daniel 5:30). See the Chapter 33 resources and The Bible.

- “instead of wandering stars”: “Wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever” (Jude 1:13). See The Bible.
- “wandering Jews”: Wandering Jew is a mythical, immortal man whose legend began to spread in Europe in the 13th century. Young explained her interpretation in the essay “The Artist as Wanderer” (Marguerite Young, Inviting the Muses: Stories, Essays, Reviews, Dalkey Archive Press, 1994), where to her this represents the external and internal wandering of an artist. See Judaism.
- “a simple scientific truth or statement of true or false”: Absolutism versus relativism: absolutism asserts universal moral truths, while relativism denies them. Absolutism emphasizes the inherent rightness or wrongness of actions, while relativism considers the context of the action and the perspective of the individual or group. Absolutism allows for universal moral condemnation, while relativism may hesitate to judge actions based on another culture’s standards. The opposite of absolutism in government is democracy.
- “great torch-bearers with streaming meteoric hair”: A comet is a long-haired star, from the Greek komētēs. See Astronomy.
- “striking thirteen bells far out at sea”: A ship’s bell strikes at most eight bells, at the end of each four-hour watch. Thirteen bells is no time at all. See The Sea and Water.
- “Oh, come in, she would say”: This is what Young would do in her classroom. At Iowa she “would pause to greet Henry James at the door” (David O. Dowling, “The Guru,” in A Delicate Aggression: Savagery and Survival in the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, Yale University Press, 2019). She told Studs Terkel of a dying lady in a New York hospital, the source for Catherine’s greetings, who greeted guests who were not there: “Oh, isn’t that Mr. Henry James? How do you do, Mr. James?” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). That is a big clue as to what is going on here. See Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “Is it God’s drug”: Karl Marx famously described religion as “the opium of the people” (Karl Marx, A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, 1844), suggesting that it numbs the pain of social inequality and exploitation. Lenin called it “a sort of spiritual booze” (Vladimir Lenin, “Socialism and Religion,” 1905). Religion may be used to maintain the status quo and discourage social change. This view might assert that religion offers easy answers to complex questions about the universe, life, and death. It may appeal to those who lack resources and/or education to form different perspectives. The novel suggests that religion, like opium, can be both a source of comfort and a form of escapism or a way to cope with the harshness and uncertainties of mortal life. Catherine’s opium paradise, filled with angels and ethereal visions, embodies this duality: it is an enchantment that extends her life beyond the physical but also confines her to a dreamlike state, disconnected from concrete reality. This resonates with the Marxist critique of religion as “the opium of the people,” implying a narcotic that dulls awareness and delays confrontation with real suffering. However, Young also complicates this view by showing that such illusions, whether religious or drug-induced, can be necessary for survival amid profound existential

despair. In Chapter 1, Miss MacIntosh's critique highlights the need to face reality soberly and practically, warning against being seduced by illusions that reject nature and the "bare face" of existence. See The History of Opium and Miss MacIntosh.

- "the porcelain drug bottle with very large ears": Tacamahac, or tacamahaca, is an aromatic resin once sold by apothecaries, and Mr. Res Tacamah may take his name from it. The "glowering genii" recall the Arabian Nights tale of the fisherman who uncorks a brass bottle from the sea and lets out a jinni. See Fairy Tales and Folklore and The History of Opium.
- "Lord Montrose of Montrose": Lord Montrose of Montrose may refer to James Graham a Scottish nobleman, poet and soldier, lord lieutenant and later viceroy and captain general of Scotland.
  - He "changed his personality whenever he changed his high silk mourner's hat." Young told Studs Terkel, "William James made a beautiful statement, man is body, soul, and clothing" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See William James and Pragmatism and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- "a skull grinning at a banquet table": At Egyptian banquets, Herodotus says, a man carried round a wooden corpse in a coffin to remind the guests that they would be like it when dead (Histories 2.78). See Ancient Egypt.
- "and if it had been, then what a pity for the world": Utopias and dystopias are both capable of producing oppressive environments.
  - Young's Angel in the Forest (1945) tells of New Harmony's two utopias, the Rappites and the Owenites. See Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- "And was not God dreaming, too": In Hindu myth Vishnu sleeps on the serpent Shesha upon the cosmic ocean, and the world is said to be his dream. See Hinduism.
- "should not Gabriel lose his plume": Gabriel is the archangel who brings God's messages, to Daniel (Daniel 8:16) and to Mary (Luke 1:26). Michael is the guardian of Israel (Daniel 12:1). See Angels and Archangels.

Vocabulary

Allay

To ease or quiet.

Ambient

Surrounding.

Avant-garde

The vanguard; those who lead in new ideas.

Balloon fish

A pufferfish, which swallows water to swell its body into a spiny ball when threatened.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Benumbed

Made numb.

Billows

Great waves.

Bittern

A marsh heron with a booming call.

Casque

A helmet.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chimera

A monster of Greek myth, part lion, part goat, part serpent; any wild, impossible fancy.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Commingling

Mixing together.

Congealed

Thickened or stiffened, as with cold.

Countenance

As a verb, to tolerate or approve of. As a noun, the face.

Cubit

An ancient measure of length, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, about eighteen inches.

Dank

Unpleasantly damp and cold.

Demented

Out of one’s mind.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Distilled

Purified or concentrated, as by boiling and condensing.

Distraught

Deeply upset.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Errant

Wandering; straying from the proper course.

Escarpment

A long, steep slope or cliff.

Genii

Spirits, jinn.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Hermit crab

A crab that lives in an empty shell borrowed from another creature.

Hypothetical

Supposed; existing only as an idea.

Immured

Shut in or imprisoned, as if walled up.

Indisposed

Slightly ill; unwell.

Khan

A title of rulers in Central Asia.

Knight errant

A medieval knight who wandered in search of adventure.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Mantilla

A lace scarf worn over the head and shoulders.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Neap tide

The tide with the smallest difference between high and low water, twice a month at the quarter moons.

Negligee

A woman’s light, flowing dressing gown.

Ogre

A man-eating giant of folktale.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Perpendicular

Upright; at a right angle to the horizon.

Phantasmagoric

Like a phantasmagoria, a shifting series of dreamlike or nightmarish images. A phantasmagoria was an eighteenth-century magic-lantern ghost show.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Recluse

A person who lives shut away from others.

Recreant

Cowardly; unfaithful to a belief.

Regatta

A series of boat races.

Sahib

Master, a title for Europeans in colonial India.

Sarcophagus

A stone coffin, often carved, placed above ground. The plural is sarcophagi.

Sloop

A sailboat with one mast.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Squire

A knight’s attendant.

Tenement

A crowded, run-down apartment building.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Variegated

Marked with patches of different colors.

Volatile

Changeable; quick to evaporate.

Chapter 40

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, is addicted to opium.*

Summary

Catherine remembers Cousin Hannah's voice, a husky baritone like iron bells, and believes Hannah taught her every language of the living and the dead, from Saracen and Provençal to the speech of seals and Platan rails, though Catherine herself had studied nothing but the French of a Peacock Alley menu. In her room she still converses with Alcibiades, Dante, Daniel Boone, and Darius, who answers the kitchen telephone. Her memories come without sequence, the echo before the song, the death before the life. She once greeted every stranger as a cousin and went to bed to escape the embarrassment, and now she introduces the living among the dead, to Mr. Spitzer's patient wonder. She suspects that Hannah's adventures, like her own, may have been dreams. She had no faith to lose, and she cannot say whether opium caused her somnolence or her somnolence the opium. She is many selves at once, the horse and the rider, and she believes that a ship's figurehead knows more than its captain, because it always goes first.

Characters present

Cousin Hannah · Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · The Black Coachman · Vera Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Birds · Clouds and Storms · Dogs · Horses and Carriages · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · Opium

Philosophy: Aristotle · Buddhism · Descartes and Dualism · Hinduism · Nietzsche · Plato and Platonism · Stoicism · Taoism and Zhuangzi

Allusions: American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Dante · Exploration and the Poles · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Judaism · Milton · Music and Composers · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Sir Walter Raleigh · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a vivid, almost surreal description of Cousin Hannah's voice as "a husky baritone, ranging between bass and tenor…as loud, as heavy as iron bells ringing in a leaden-colored northern sky." This voice is not merely physical but carries an oratorio-like Gothic cathedral weight, symbolizing a profound, almost otherworldly presence. Cousin Hannah is portrayed as a polyglot fluent in "dead languages," "languages of the dead," and innumerable tongues, both real and imagined, from "fourteenth-century Saracen or Spanish cavalier" to "Sanskrit from a holy text printed on a snowflake" and "the hieroglyphic language of the drowned Egyptian sailor." This linguistic breadth represents a connection across time, cultures, and even worlds: living and dead. It suggests a mystical or dreamlike knowledge that transcends normal human experience.
- The narrative explores the disordered nature of Catherine's memories and perceptions, emphasizing non-linear time and chaotic mental states. Events do not follow sequentially but occur in a "medley, the imbroglio, Pandemonium, Saturnalia of her deranged imagination." Time is depicted as fluid, with "a step forward would be a step backward," and phenomena such as "the after-glow came before the sunset" or "the echo came before the song." This passage captures the confusion between reality and dream, suggesting a psychological or metaphysical state where logic and chronology dissolve.
- Catherine is described as "many selves, many beautiful, volatile Psyches wandering about" yet physically "lying in bed, propped up among satin pillows." This duality between her fragmented inner selves and her physical frailty conveys themes of identity fragmentation and alienation. She greets strangers as friends or relatives, blurring social boundaries, and retreats into solitude to avoid "social embarrassments." The passage evokes loneliness and the tension between imaginative expansiveness and corporeal confinement.
- The chapter reflects deeply on death and what follows, with Catherine's dreams merging "life… and death" into one indistinct realm. The phrase "life was that which, as it had had no beginning, should have no end, not even this death" reveals a mystical vision of existence as continuous and cyclical rather than finite. The suffragette's struggles are framed as part of a cosmic drama involving light and darkness, "cloud-rack and storm" rather than "eternal darkness." This suggests hope and transformation rather than finality in death.
- The closing passages emphasize fluidity and interconnectedness: "All was water. The water flowed over the mooned sand. The sentinels slept at the shifting borderlands." This dreamlike imagery expresses a world without fixed boundaries, where "there was no place, but there were all places dreaming together, flowing like water into each other." Catherine's sense of ubiquity, being in many places at once, or being both rider

and horse, symbolizes a dissolution of individual selfhood into a larger, flowing existence.

- The final metaphor contrasts the figurehead of a ship with its captain, with Catherine believing “the figurehead knew more, the waters roaring at its mouth. For one thing, it always went first.” This image can be read as a symbol of intuition, the unconscious, or the spiritual leading the conscious self through the turbulent seas of life and death.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- English was, Catherine says, “the only foreign language to her.” What does she mean?
- “Perhaps the most important thoughts were those which never found expression.” Why should Hannah have spoken at all, if “silence should have spoken for her”?
- Had opium caused her somnolence, or had her somnolence been the cause of her taking opium? Which came first?

Characters

- Hannah “had come not to create but to destroy the last romance on earth.” Why does Catherine remember her as romance itself?
- Mr. Spitzer waits “all his life here to prove that he no longer lived.” What would such proof look like?
- Catherine greeted every stranger as “Cousin Jack” or “Cousin Wilbur.” Is her mistake a kind of welcome?

Connections

- In Chapter 39 Catherine was “the chair… the lamp… Brooklyn Bridge.” Here she is “both the fox-hunter and the fox.” How do her selves multiply?
- Hannah always whispered, “I am dead.” How does this echo Mr. Spitzer, who in Chapter 36 “had led a single life— knowing he was dead”?
- The wheels of the coach are “the sleeping seraphim,” as the cherubim were in Chapter 39. Where is this carriage going?

Reflection

- “If one had no knowledge, should one not have freedom to imagine”?
- Can a person understand a language she has never learned?
- Is it better to go first, like the figurehead, or to steer?

Research: Characters

Cousin Hannah

- A suffragette and member of an old, aristocratic family (“Old Guard”).
- Portrayed as a spectral, dream-like figure, both vibrant and ghostly.
- Speaks in multiple languages, including dead and mythical tongues, embodying the “languages of the dead” and those never spoken.
- Eccentric, passionate, and combative, yet enigmatic in her presence and communication.
- Her voice is described as powerful and haunting, a “Gothic cathedral weight.”
- Seems to exist partly in the realm of dreams or memory rather than pure reality.
- Her voice was “a husky baritone, ranging between bass and tenor and partaking somewhat of the quality of both.”
- She swore like “an old veteran of the cavalry,” with “zounds,” “egad,” “caitiff,” “craven,” and “tallyho.”
- “I am dead—had not old Cousin Hannah always whispered, even when she was vitally alive, the beau ideal of suffrage.”

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s mother)

- Reflects on her memories and impressions of Cousin Hannah.
- Although limited in formal education, she surprisingly understands many languages and voices, real or imagined, symbolizing a deep intuitive or dreamlike comprehension.
- Lives a life intermingled with dreams, illusions, and layers of time and memory.
- Struggles to order events or states of being logically, experiencing time and experience as fragmented and fluid.
- Has an opium habit that blurs reality and dreams, contributing to the fluidity between life and death, reality and imagination.
- English was “the one language she really knew, the only foreign language to her.”
- She had greeted every stranger as a cousin, “so that she had gone to bed to save herself from further social embarrassments. Then she had begun to speak where there was no one.”
- “She had had no faith to lose, so change had followed change, and chance had followed chance.”
- She was always “the errant somnambulist,” and she believes “the figurehead knew more.”

Mr. Spitzer

- Embodies a skeptical and analytical perspective amid the swirling dreamlike and often chaotic narrative centered on Catherine and Cousin Hannah.
- Portrayed as a patient observer who frequently comments on Catherine's behavior and mental state.
- He is described as believing himself to be "non-competitive," a detail that suggests a self-aware, possibly detached attitude toward social or intellectual contests.
- His habitual gestures like pulling the jowl of his cheek, tapping his teeth with a toothpick which is noted as a "tiny diamond-headed gold walking stick," add a layer of characterization that conveys both a certain meticulousness and an almost aristocratic fastidiousness. This imagery paints Mr. Spitzer as a man deeply engaged in subtle, perhaps cynical reflection.
- His observations reveal an inclination toward rational skepticism. For example, he frequently notices Catherine's "serene unconcern for facts," and how she "would introduce the living among the dead," blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy, life and death. Mr. Spitzer seems to see Catherine's tendencies as both a kind of madness and a poignant human frailty, noting how she assumes that some living people have already "passed over to the other shore," thus reflecting her confusion or perhaps her unique perception of existence.
- He is described as "waiting all his life here to prove that he no longer lived, that he had died long ago," which imbues his character with a certain existential irony or fatalism.
- In the context of the chapter's dreamlike atmosphere, where time is non-linear, identities are fluid, and reality merges with imagination, Mr. Spitzer functions as a grounding figure, representing a rational, if somewhat resigned, viewpoint.

The Black Coachman

- "She heard the coachman's whip like the dark tree branches whirling," and "horses and coach and coachman were one entity passing through the rolling fog."

Research: Themes

Language and Communication

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Language is a major motif: Cousin Hannah's polyglot abilities symbolize the bridge between past and present, life and death.
- Vera's mother understands languages not through formal study but through mystical or dreamlike insight.
- The narrative suggests some languages transcend spoken word, being part of an ineffable, universal communication.

Memory, Dream, and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination · Memory and the Past

- The chapter blurs the boundaries between what is remembered, what is dreamed, and what is real.
- Time is non-linear; events and voices intermingle without chronological order, reflecting Catherine's fragmented memory and dream state.
- Catherine frequently questions the reality of her experiences, wandering "not only the known world but the unknown world which she knew so very well because no one knew the unknown."

Death and Immortality

See: Death and Mortality

- Characters like Cousin Hannah and references to historical or mythical figures suggest a liminal state between life and death.
- For Catherine, death is not an end but a transformation or continuation of existence in another form: "life was that which, as it had had no beginning, should have no end, not even this death."
- The motif of ghosts, spirits, and the "dead languages" reinforces the permeable boundary between the living and the dead.

Identity and Multiplicity of Self

See: Identity and the Self

- Catherine perceives herself as many selves, reflections, and chimeras, sometimes unable to distinguish her true self from her images or memories.
- This multiplicity reflects the complexity of identity within the realms of memory, dream, and consciousness.

Time and Order

See: Time · Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- The chapter challenges conventional notions of time and causality ("the echo came before the song," "death came before life").
- Time is cyclical, layered, and full of "refractions" and "oblique passages," making logic and sequence unreliable.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Gothic Cathedral Voice

- “Her voice had been a Gothic cathedral weight, an oratorio accompanied by many singing, whistling voices.”
- Symbolizes the weight and grandeur of Cousin Hannah’s presence and communication.

Clouds, Stars, and Celestial Imagery

See: Moon and Stars · Clouds and Storms

- Frequently used to evoke dreamlike states, mystery, and the vastness of time and space.

Mirrors and Reflections

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- Suggest duality, multiplicity of identity, and blurred boundaries between self and other.

Angelic and Mythical Figures (e.g., angels, unicorns, griffins)

See: Angels, Devils, and Myth

- Symbolize transcendence and the mingling of reality and fantasy.

Opium and Somnolence

See: Opium

- Represent altered states of consciousness, blurring reality and dream.

The Horse and Rider

See: Horses and Carriages

- Symbolize unity and inseparability of entities, reflecting on identity and consciousness.
- “Sometimes she thought she was riding on her own back… she did not know whether she was the horse or the rider, the carrier or the carried.”

Research: Resources

- “Was her vizor up or down”: A vizor, or visor, is the movable front of a helmet, lowered to cover the face in battle.
- “Silence should have spoken for her”: “Speech is silvern, Silence is golden” (Thomas Carlyle, Sartor Resartus 3.3, 1836).

- “and the black sunlight”: “Le Soleil noir de la Mélancolie,” “the black sun of Melancholy” (Gérard de Nerval, “El Desdichado,” 1854).
- “for all was fair in love and war”: “all was fair in love and war” is a proverb generally attributed to John Lyly’s 1578 novel, Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit. Euphues is described as a type of student who is “apt by goodness of wit, and applicable by readiness of will, to learning, having all other qualities of the mind and parts of the body.” Although the exact phrasing used today, “All’s fair in love and war” didn’t appear until Francis Edward Smedley’s 1850 novel, Frank Fairleigh; or, Scenes from the Life of a Private Pupil, a domestic English drama of virtue rewarded and vice getting its just deserts, based on Smedley’s own experiences.
- “like turreted steeplechase riders”: See the steeplechase entry in the Chapter 35 resources.
- “which was fourteenth-century Saracen or Spanish cavalier”: Saracen were primarily Arab Muslims, Turks, Persians, or other Muslims according to Christian writers during the Middle Ages in Europe.
    - Cavalier is associated with the Royalist supporters of King Charles I and across Europe as a style of dress during the seventeenth-century.
- “the language of the Nubian boy”: Nubians are an ethnolinguistic group of people indigenous to what is now present-day Sudan and Egypt. See Ancient Egypt.
- “the language of Volpone who died an imaginary death”: Volpone is a comedy play by English playwright Ben Jonson. It is a satire of greed and lust.
    - In Act 5 of Volpone (1606) he feigns death to watch his would-be heirs, and is unmasked.
- “which was Sanskrit from a holy text printed on a snowflake”: Sanskrit is a classical language of South Asia. It is the sacred language of the Vedas. See Hinduism.
- “which was ancient Eskimo hunter”: Eskimo are the indigenous peoples who live from eastern Siberia, Alaska, Canada, and Greenland.
    - Eskimo is Young’s word. Many Inuit and Yupik people now reject it. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “the hieroglyphic language of the drowned Egyptian sailor”: Egyptian sailor may refer to the Tale of the Shipwrecked Sailor. The proverbs from this story are: the mouth of a man saves him; do not act arrogant; why give water to a bird before it is slaughtered. It is interpreted as a shipwrecked traveler goes on a spiritual quest through the cosmos and meets a primordial god that provides the traveler with a moral vision to return home with. See Ancient Egypt.
- “the language of the dead Finnish king with the long heron toes”: Finnish is from Finland and herons are considered the king of the wading birds.
    - See the heron-footed King Canute in the Chapter 35 resources.
- “third-century Chinese polo players storming over the roofs of Peking”: Polo is a horseback ball game and one of the oldest known team sports.

    - Peking, now known as Beijing, is the capital of the People's Republic of China.
    - Polo was the passion of the Tang court in China in the seventh and eighth centuries.
- "which was Provencal, that language of the wandering Troubadour": Provencal is a language and region of France.
    - Troubadour was a composer and performer of lyric poetry during the High Middle Ages.
    - Jaufre Rudel sang of amor de lonh, love from afar, for a countess of Tripoli he had never seen. His legend says he sailed to her and died in her arms.
- "which was Greek shepherd singing to his flock": Greek shepherd may refer to several references listed. The Passionate Shepherd to His Love is a poem by Christopher Marlowe which was responded to by Raleigh in Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd and later by different poets over the years. See Sir Walter Raleigh.
    - Pan in Greek mythology is the god of the wild, shepherds and flocks, rustic music and impromptus, and companion of the nymphs. He has the hindquarters, legs, and horns of a goat, in the same manner as a faun or satyr. See Greek Mythology.
    - In Greek mythology, Daphnis was a Sicilian shepherd who was said to be the inventor of pastoral poetry.
- "her furies against archaeologists with pick and spade": Feminist archaeology employs a feminist perspective in interpreting past societies. It often focuses on gender, but also considers gender in tandem with other factors, such as sexuality, race, or class. Feminist archaeology has critiqued the uncritical application of modern, Western norms and values to past societies. It is additionally concerned with increasing the representation of women in the discipline of archaeology, and reducing a masculine bias within the field. In archaeology this includes: focusing on presumed male roles such as hunter, warrior, chief, and farmers; under-analyzing activities considered to be in the female domain by western tradition; interpreting data from the perspective of middle-age, middle-class, western white men (Margaret W. Conkey and Janet D. Spector, "Archaeology and the Study of Gender," Advances in Archaeological Method and Theory 7, 1984). See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "like her furies against believers in a future life": In Chapter 36 Catherine wondered whether Hannah had "gone over from the cross to the crescent." Here Hannah rages against "believers in a future life or a past life," as in Chapter 35, where she "had had no faith… in any after-life."
- "the French of a Peacock Alley menu": Peacock Alley was the long corridor joining the Waldorf and Astoria hotels in New York, opened in 1897, where fashionable society strolled to see and be seen. The name moved with the Waldorf-Astoria to Park Avenue in 1931 and lived on in its restaurant.
- "owls and nightingales and whirling dervishes": Whirling dervishes or Sufi whirling is a meditation practice performed within a worship ceremony.
    - The whirling dervishes are the Mevlevi order, founded in Konya by the followers of the poet Rumi in the thirteenth century.

- “chantings of Tibetan monks”: Tibetan monks in Tibetan Buddhism chant mantras which are phrases that protect the mind from negativity. See Buddhism.
- “cries of Chinese mandarins with great butterfly sleeves”: Chinese mandarins or Mandarins was a bureaucrat scholar in ancient China, Korea and Vietnam. They were officials appointed through the imperial examination system.
- “screaming contests of Platan rails like the human voice exerted to its utmost pitch”: Young’s source is W. H. Hudson, who describes the giant wood rails, the ypecaha, of La Plata: “This is a tremendous screaming concert,” and “The screams they utter have a certain resemblance to the human voice, exerted to its utmost pitch” (W. H. Hudson, The Naturalist in La Plata, 1892, chapter 19, “Music and Dancing in Nature”). See Birds.
- “as if it were she who had driven the sun against the clouded net, stopping time”: “And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed” (Joshua 10:13). See The Bible.
- “who else had talked to so many water carriers in clouds”: The water carrier is Aquarius, the constellation of the zodiac. See Astronomy.
- “a rider in the great Coffin of Stars”: Coffin of Stars may refer to Delphinus and the main group of stars called Job’s Coffin. See The Book of Job and Astronomy.
- “voices buzzing like bees in Magellanic Clouds”: Magellanic Clouds are two irregular dwarf galaxies in the Southern Celestial Hemisphere.
    - They are named for Ferdinand Magellan, whose crew recorded them on the first circumnavigation of the world (1519-1522). See Exploration and the Poles.
- “so many pharaohs in swan boats passing with the sentinel moon”: The pharaohs’ boats recall the solar barque of Ra, which carried the sun god across the sky by day and through the underworld by night. See Ancient Egypt.
- “or Boston Greek”: Boston Greek: a significant wave of immigration between 1890 and 1921 to the US with many settling in Boston. Greeks entering the country rose from 524 in 1890 to 25,675 in 1910 (Thomas Burgess, Greeks in America, 1913, quoted in George J. Leber, The History of the Order of AHEPA, 1922-1972, Order of AHEPA, 1972). About a hundred Boston Hellenes formed the Plato Society in 1890 to help with life in their new country and to provide religious services. It disbanded after several years for lack of money. In 1899 efforts resumed to bring the Greeks of Boston together, and in 1905 the Hellenic Association of Boston was chartered (Christopher Gussis, “The Historic Boston Greek Cathedral: Reliving 100 Years,” Annunciation Greek Orthodox Cathedral of New England). The Boston community bought a church building, the first owned by Greeks after that of New Orleans, and in 1910 the Pan-Hellenic Union fixed its headquarters in Boston (Leber).
- “how should she be this human Tower of Babel”: Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 is an origin myth to explain why the world’s peoples speak so many different languages. “Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the LORD did there confound the language of all the earth” (Genesis 11:9). See Genesis.

- “just as a thought is changed by speech”: “A thought once uttered is a lie” (Fyodor Tyutchev, “Silentium!,” 1830).
- “the king of the Medes”: King of the Medes may refer to Darius the Mede who is mentioned in the Hebrew Bible in the Book of Daniel as a King of Babylon but is not known to history. See The Bible.
- “the language of bawling Alcibiades, that drunken war lord”: Alcibiades was a prominent Athenian statesman, orator, and general.
    - In Plato’s Symposium (212d) Alcibiades bursts in drunk, crowned with ivy and violets, and praises Socrates. See Plato and Platonism.
- “Alexander the Great, King of Macedon”: Alexander the Great, King of Macedon, was a king in ancient Greece.
- “the bird king whose head was turned backward upon his shoulders”: In Dante’s Inferno 20 the diviners walk with their heads twisted backward: “For tow’rds the reins the countenance was turned, / And backward it behoved them to advance” (trans. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, 1867). See Dante.
- “many who were kings before Christ and many who came afterward”: Young’s list runs from Alexander the Great to Boethius, Balboa, Baldwin, Columbus (“Christolpho Colombo”), Cánovas del Castillo, Hugh Capet, Dante, Diderot, and Harold Harefoot.
- “Boethius, Balboa, Baldwin”: Boethius or Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius was a Roman senator, consul, magister officiorum, and philosopher.
    - Balboa or Vasco Nunez de Balboa was a Spanish explorer, governor, and conquistador. In 1513 he became the first European to see the Pacific from the Americas.
    - Baldwin may be Baldwin I, the first crusader King of Jerusalem (1100-1118).
- “Christolpho Colombo”: Christolpho Colombo or Christopher Columbus was an Italian explorer and navigator who completed four voyages across the Atlantic Ocean. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “Canovas del Castillo”: Canovas del Castillo or Antonio Canovas del Castillo was a Spanish politician and historian known principally for serving six terms as Prime Minister and instrumental in reinstituting the Bourbon monarchy.
    - He was assassinated by the anarchist Michele Angiolillo in 1897.
- “Hugh Capet who had arisen from his watery grave”: Hugh Capet was the King of the Franks.
    - He reigned from 987 to 996 and founded the Capetian dynasty.
- “ageless Dante”: Dante or Durante di Alighiero degli Alighieri was a Florentine poet, writer and philosopher. See Dante.
- “revolutionary Diderot”: Diderot or Denis Diderot was a French philosopher, art critic, and writer.
    - He edited the Encyclopédie (1751-1772).

- “Harold Harefoot”: Harold Harefoot or Harold I was King of England.
  - After his death in 1040 his half-brother Harthacnut had his body dug up and thrown into a fen, and it was later buried again (Anglo-Saxon Chronicle).
- “that she listened for hours to Ahaseuris, the Wandering Jew”: Ahaseuris or Ahasuerus is the name of a king, the husband of Esther, in the Book of Esther from the Bible. A German pamphlet of 1602 gave the same name to the Wandering Jew, and Young follows it. See The Bible and Judaism.
- “as she preferred to think of him, the Everlasting Jew”: Der ewige Jude, the Everlasting Jew, is the German name of the Wandering Jew. The Everlasting Jew is also the title of a modern collection of the writings of Rabbi Isaac Lichtenstein (1825-1908), ed. D. Thomas Lancaster (First Fruits of Zion, 2013). Lichtenstein who after an encounter with the Gospel became an outspoken disciple of Yeshua (Jesus) of Nazareth, but he remained in his post as district rabbi for several years. Despite pressure from rabbinic authorities, Jewish believers, and Christian leaders, he could not be compelled to renounce Judaism or his devotion to the Torah. He is regarded as a pioneer of the Messianic Jewish movement. See Judaism.
- “Hebrew parables in palaces of red sandalwood”: Hebrew parables or Mashal/nimshal is a short parable with a moral lesson or religious allegory.
  - Solomon made pillars and harps of almug trees (1 Kings 10:12), often identified as red sandalwood. See The Bible.
- “tinkling bells and many horns in faraway Cathay”: Cathay is an alternative European historical name for China.
- “How else could she communicate now so easily with Darius the Magnificent”: Darius the Magnificent is most likely Darius I, the Great, King of Persia (522-486 BC). Another possibility is Dara Shikoh, who was the eldest son and heir-apparent of the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. He was defeated by his younger brother.
- “the sleepy voice of Potiphar”: Potiphar is the captain of the Pharaoh’s guard who is said to have purchased Joseph as a slave in the Hebrew Bible and Quran (Genesis 39:1). See Genesis.
- “Cousin Hannah had also spoken the King’s English”: “Here will be an old abusing of God’s patience and the King’s English” (Shakespeare, The Merry Wives of Windsor 1.4). See Shakespeare.
- “such words as zounds”: Zounds is short for “God’s wounds,” the wounds of Christ, as egad is for “ah, God.”
- “defender of the faith”: “Defender of the faith” is a title traditionally held by the British monarch, symbolizing their role as the supreme governor of the Church of England. The title was originally granted by Pope Leo X to Henry VIII in 1521 for his defense of the Catholic Church against Martin Luther. While the title was later revoked by the papacy, it was reestablished by Parliament and continues to be used by the monarch today. Here it is one of Cousin Hannah’s oaths.

- “Avaunt, villains, knaves, blackamoors, blackbirds, Boanerges”: Avaunt means to move away, depart. Boanerges is a vociferous preacher or orator. A nickname applied by Jesus to James and John in Mark 3. “Boanerges, which is, The sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17). See The Bible.
- “both the fox-hunter and the fox”: Oscar Wilde called the English fox-hunter “the unspeakable in full pursuit of the uneatable” (A Woman of No Importance, Act 1, 1893).
- “the medley, the imbroglio, Pandemonium, Saturnalia”: Medley is a varied mixture of people or things.
    - Imbroglio is an acutely painful or embarrassing misunderstanding.
    - Pandemonium is a wild uproar among a crowd of people. John Milton invented the name in Paradise Lost for the capital of Hell. (Paradise Lost 1.756). See Milton.
    - Saturnalia was an ancient Roman festival and holiday in honor of the god Saturn. It was held on December 17th of the Julian calendar and later expanded with festivities through to December 23rd. The Saturnalia reflects the contradictory nature of the deity Saturn himself with joyful and utopian aspects of careless well-being and disquieting elements of threat and danger.
    - The actual date of Jesus’s birth is unknown. A reported correspondence between Cyril of Jerusalem and Pope Julius I, quoted by John of Nikiu in the 9th century, is sometimes given as a source for a claim that, in the fourth century AD, Pope Julius I formalized that the nativity of Christ should be celebrated on December 25th as possibly a way to entice more converts to Christianity. Vestiges of the Saturnalia festivities may still be preserved in some of the traditions now associated with Christmas. The custom of gift-giving at Christmas time resembles the Roman tradition of giving small or gag gifts and the lighting of Advent candles resembles the Roman tradition of lighting torches and wax tapers. Likewise, Saturnalia and Christmas both share associations with eating, drinking, singing, and dancing. (Wikipedia)
- “occultations as when a star crossed the moon”: An occultation is the passing of one heavenly body in front of another, as when the moon hides a star. Catherine has it the other way round. See Astronomy.
- “maybe Daniel Boone, wearing his coonskin hat”: Daniel Boone: See the Chapter 70 resources.
    - Boone himself wore a broad-brimmed felt hat. The coonskin cap belongs to the Davy Crockett craze of the 1950s. See American Writers.
- “the life of the oppossum which, when caught, feigns death”: Playing possum: the opossum, when caught, falls limp and seems dead for minutes or hours.
- “the ubiquitous pigeons of St. Mark’s Square”: St. Mark’s Square or Plaza San Marco is the principal public square of Venice, Italy.
- “She was struck by moon blindness”: Catherine claims to have moon blindness even though she knew it affected horses and not humans. Moon blindness or equine

recurrent uveitis is the leading cause of blindness in horses with the specific cause unknown. See Horses and Carriages.

- “She heard the angelus”: See the angelus entry in the Chapter 35 resources.
- “an emperor’s riding party hunting the unicorn”: See the Unicorn Tapestries entry in the Chapter 35 resources.
- “balloonists who had not been sighted for years”: S. A. Andrée’s balloon expedition to the North Pole vanished in 1897. The men’s last camp was found on White Island in 1930. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “lutenists who had known Mozart who had not known them”: By Mozart’s day the lute had nearly fallen out of use. See Music and Composers.
- “harpists harping on a sea of glass”: “And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire… stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God” (Revelation 15:2). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “what anachronism could there possibly be in the realm of the dead”: Anachronism is a chronological misplacing of persons, events, objects, or customs.
- “A horse knew what the horseman did not know”: Balaam’s ass saw what Balaam could not: “And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand” (Numbers 22:23). See The Bible and Horses and Carriages.
- “combing her hair in a psyche knot”: Psyche in psychology is the totality of the human mind, conscious and unconscious. Psyche knot is a woman’s hair style in which the hair is brushed back and twisted into a conical coil usually just above the nape. See the Psyche entry in the Chapter 38 resources.
- “who should know when the dream ended”: In philosophy there is the question of dreams by Zhuangzi, Plato, and Aristotle. Descartes asked how he could know that he was not now dreaming (Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation 1, 1641), which seems to be the same question Catherine is preoccupied with. Descartes’ answer was that we cannot trust our senses in waking life without invoking a benevolent God who would not deceive us. Catherine takes this one step further at the end of Chapter 39 and asks, “who could be right if God was dreaming?” In psychology the question “Is Life a Dream?” is answered with the coherence of the waking world does give evidence that it is not just a figment of our imagination. However, the objects that we perceive as permanent are in reality through the science of quantum physics mostly made up of empty space. In a sense people do live in a dream world that is created by the mind. When people are awake, their minds conform their dreaming to a reliable set of patterns, which they assume to be determined by a reality that exists independently of their experience of it, though they have no way of knowing that reality except through the complex ways in which it affects their dream. There is also reality that is experienced and affected by psychedelic drugs and other altered states of consciousness (Sharon Hewitt Rawlette, “Is Life a Dream?,” Psychology Today, July 31, 2019). See Taoism and Zhuangzi, Plato and Platonism, Aristotle, and Descartes and Dualism.

- “I am dead—had not old Cousin Hannah always whispered”: Nietzsche’s phrase, “God is dead” (Friedrich Nietzsche, The Gay Science 125, 1882), refers to the demise of traditional religious belief and the moral structures built upon it. He believed this shift opened up new possibilities for humanity to create its own values and meaning. Marcus Aurelius wrote, “Consider thyself to be dead, and to have completed thy life up to the present time” (Marcus Aurelius, Meditations 7.56, trans. George Long, 1862), where one focuses on present experiences and accepts the inevitability of death, rather than clinging to the past or fearing the future. See Nietzsche and Stoicism.
- “the dust returning always to the dust”: “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19). See Genesis.
- “non angli sei angeli”: Non angli sei angeli (They are not Angles but angels) is attributed to Pope Gregory I after seeing pale-skinned boys at a slave market. The Latin is properly non Angli sed angeli, “not Angles but angels.” Bede tells the story (Ecclesiastical History of the English People 2.1, 731).
- “lived through easeful death”: See Keats’s “easeful Death” in the Chapter 38 resources. See Romantic Poets.
- “ignotum per ignotius”: Everything is explained as “ignotum per ignotius” which is explaining the unknown by means of the more unknown. It is not a logical fallacy but rather a criticism that is not useful in a particular context.
- “a golden mean between extremes”: Aristotle placed virtue at the mean between two extremes, as courage lies between cowardice and rashness (Nicomachean Ethics 2.6). See Aristotle.
- “a sound mind in a sound body”: “Orandum est ut sit mens sana in corpore sano,” “one should pray for a sound mind in a sound body” (Juvenal, Satire 10.356).
- “as if the truth were mighty and would prevail”: “Magna est veritas, et praevalet,” “great is truth, and it prevails” (1 Esdras 4:41, Vulgate). See The Bible.
- “her succumbing to this fatal drug habit by gradual degrees”: Addiction is a complicated phenomenon that overwhelms people and can harm an individual and those around them.
- “the errant somnambulist”: In Bellini’s opera La Sonnambula (1831), the sleepwalking Amina crosses the high, broken bridge of a mill. See Music and Composers.
- “the roaring, silent sea of dreams where all should change”: “Nothing of him that doth fade, / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange” (Shakespeare, The Tempest 1.2). See Shakespeare.
- “Would the sheathbills have told”: Sheathbills are Antarctic shore scavengers, ruddy turnstones are wading shorebirds, and stormy petrels are seabirds of the open ocean. See the petrel entry in the Chapter 39 resources and Birds.
- “A rider on a bicycle was to her one entity”: “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” (W. B. Yeats, “Among School Children,” 1928).
- “All was water”: Thales, the first Greek philosopher, held that all things are water (Aristotle, Metaphysics 1.3). See Aristotle.

- “the long-bodied coach dogs barking at the wheels”: Coach dogs, usually Dalmatians, ran beside carriages to guard the horses. See Dogs.
- “the turning wheels of spokes which were the sleeping seraphim”: See Ezekiel’s wheels and cherubim in the Chapter 39 resources.
- “As between the figurehead and the greatest captain of the greatest boat”: Plato’s parable of the ship (Republic 6.488), where a quarrelling crew ignores the true navigator, symbolizes the dangers of a political system not based on expertise. It is often called the Ship of State, where the ship represents a nation or government, with the crew, captain, and passengers symbolizing different social classes or politicians. See Plato and Platonism.
  - The Ship of Fools is Sebastian Brant’s Das Narrenschiff (1494), and Katherine Anne Porter’s novel Ship of Fools (1962).

Vocabulary

Altitudinous

Lofty.

Aplomb

Self-assurance, poise.

Beau ideal

The perfect type or model.

Beau monde

Fashionable society.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Blackamoor

An old term for a Black African or any dark-skinned person, common in European art and in decorative figures of Black servants. It is now considered offensive.

Caitiff

A base, despicable person.

Cavalier

A horseman or gallant gentleman; also offhand and disdainful.

Chimera

A monster of Greek myth, part lion, part goat, part serpent; any wild, impossible fancy.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Convex

Curved outward.

Craven

Cowardly.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Crystal-hunter

A prospector in the Alps who climbs into rock clefts to find quartz crystals.

Debacle

A sudden collapse or disaster.

Dervish

A member of a Sufi order known for whirling in worship.

Elixir

A medicine sold as a cure-all.

Errant

Wandering; straying from the proper course.

Feigned

Pretended.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Gauntlet

An armored glove.

Griffin

A mythical beast with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.

Halloo

A shout to urge on hounds.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Imbroglio

A confused or complicated situation.

Inchoate

Only begun; unformed.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Irresolute

Undecided, wavering.

Knave

A dishonest man; a rogue. Also the jack in a deck of cards.

Limpidly

Clearly.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Minuscular

Tiny. Young's form of minuscule.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Oblique

Indirect; slanting.

Oratorio

A large musical work for voices and orchestra on a sacred theme.

Parable

A short story that teaches a lesson.

Phantasmal

Ghostly; like a phantom or an illusion.

Pollarded

Cut back to the trunk to make a dense head of branches.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Refraction

The bending of light as it passes from one medium to another.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Sandalwood

A fragrant wood from India and the Pacific, burned as incense and used in perfume.

Scudding

Moving fast before the wind.

Sentient

Able to feel and perceive.

Sentinel

A guard or watchman.

Sepulchral

Of the tomb; gloomy and deathly.

Seraphim

The highest order of angels, each with six wings. The singular is seraph.

Somnambulist

A sleepwalker.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard. Spar is also the name for certain shiny, easily split crystalline minerals, such as Iceland spar.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Steeplechase

A horse race over fences, ditches, and water jumps, first run cross-country from one church steeple to another.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women’s right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women’s Suffrage.

Tallyho

The huntsman’s cry on sighting the fox.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Turnstone

A shorebird that turns over stones to find food.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Ubiquity

The state of being everywhere at once.

Venturesome

Daring.

Vizor

An old spelling of visor, the movable front of a helmet.

Volatile

Changeable; quick to evaporate.

Chapter 41

Content note: *This chapter mentions the suicide of Mr. Spitzer's twin brother, Peron.*

Summary

After death, Catherine still travels, and she insists that only a hair's breadth lies between life and death. Her selves leave her body on errands in the void, and she counts her pearls, afraid that when she has counted them all she will be lost. She walks naked through warm snow among footprints that may be hers or a gopher's, and she is lost for years inside her own ear, a continent of stairways, echoes, and grand pianos, crying, "Let me out of my ear!" The house moves in the night. She takes the night train from Boston to New York through the Alps and the Gobi, followed by brigands, and returns as if she had never gone. She believes she commands winds, tides, and stars, yet she cannot walk. Mr. Spitzer keeps his sorrow alive, and Catherine thinks him less tragic than Peron, who leapt to his death. She remembers that Hannah paid a price for her lack of sorrow, and now, with Hannah dead, she keeps up their rivalry alone. Things left by imaginary visitors, a purple feather fan, riding gloves, an emperor's white umbrella, prove to her that someone came.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Cousin Hannah · Peron Spitzer · Vera Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Duality and Doubles · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence

Symbols: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Birds · Clocks and Watches · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · Music and Instruments · Pearls and Jewels · Roses and Flowers · Silence and Deafness · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The House · The Umbrella

Philosophy: Aristotle · Freud and Jung · Hinduism · Taoism and Zhuangzi

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · American Writers · Astronomy · Ecclesiastes · Edgar Allan Poe · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, Vera relates Catherine's conviction that there is no true difference or only an infinitesimal difference between life and death. This passage sets the tone for the entire chapter, establishing Catherine's liminal state between existence and non-existence, and the fluidity of identity and time.
- Catherine's spirit is described as moving outside her body, with multiple selves that come and go, one of which may be immortal and lost. This idea reflects the fragmentation of identity and the mystical uncertainty about what constitutes the "self."
- A powerful metaphor emerges with Catherine being lost inside her own ear, described as a vast continent filled with echoes, voices, and labyrinthine paths. This can be interpreted as symbolic of mental disorientation, isolation, and the struggle to find meaning or escape from her internal world.
- Catherine imagines traveling by night train through surreal, impossible landscapes: Alpine mountains, the Gobi Desert, cities without lights, accompanied by mysterious figures. This passage highlights the surreal, dreamlike quality of her consciousness and the dislocation from ordinary reality.
- The chapter describes the old house where Catherine resides as a place that moves and changes, with furniture shifting, mirrors lopsided, and windows looking out on different seas or streets. This emphasizes the instability of her environment, mirroring her unstable mental state and the blurring between inner and outer worlds.
- Despite her frailty, Catherine is described as having almost supernatural control over natural phenomena (winds, waves, stars, tides) and as a "great engineer" and "mathematical genius." This passage elevates her to a mythic stature, emphasizing her complex inner life and imagination.
- It is revealed that Catherine cannot physically walk and that her life has become largely a dream or internal experience, one that others perceive as her "absence." This underscores the theme of illusion versus reality and the isolating effects of her condition.
- Catherine reflects on the absence of sorrow in her life as a sorrow itself. She denies tragedy to Mr. Spitzer, who believes his grief makes him tragic, and to Cousin Hannah, whose death "had been quite natural," and grants it only to Peron, who killed himself. These passages delve into the psychology of grief and emotional existence.
- The narrative describes strange phenomena in the house, objects appearing and moving mysteriously, footprints, feather fans, riding gloves, which suggests the presence of invisible guests or spirits. This contributes to the surreal, haunted atmosphere and the blurring between the real and the spectral.
- Toward the end, Catherine's ability to vanish, to be many persons simultaneously, and to fail to recognize herself is emphasized: "She could be many persons with many heads, limbs, arms."

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “For to see all things would be to see nothing.” How can seeing everything be a kind of blindness?
- “She travelled, but she never moved.” Where does Catherine go, and how does she come back?
- “The lack of sorrow was a sorrow, too.” What has Catherine missed?

Characters

- Mr. Spitzer is “like a man who, having made one mistake, must make it again and again for the rest of his life.” What was his first mistake?
- Catherine thinks Hannah “should have created for herself an antagonist greater than this life.” Has Catherine done so herself?
- Peron, “smiling when he should have wept,” leapt from the tallest building. Why does Catherine think him the more melancholy twin?

Connections

- In Chapter 40 Catherine heard Hannah speak every language of the living and the dead. Here she is “lost inside her ear.” What has changed?
- Catherine has swallowed a divan “so that she could not get through the door,” and she dreams of “a key to the door.” Where else does the novel borrow from Wonderland?
- The guests fear wine “drugged with that nepenthe.” How is nepenthe like Catherine’s opium?

Reflection

- “Absence was not necessarily the same as death.” Can someone be absent while present?
- Would “an honest life” have been better for Catherine?
- Are there sorrows a person keeps alive on purpose?

Research: Characters

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s mother)

- Central character, portrayed as a dreamer, visionary, and tragic figure embodying the liminal state between life and death.
- She is both powerful and vulnerable, with an intricate inner life of dreams and illusions.

- Her physical immobility contrasts with her spiritual and imaginative wanderings: “She travelled, but she never moved.”
- “She could not walk. She only thought she walked, for she was this sleeping lady.”

Joachim Spitzer

- A figure who represents rationality, optimism, and unrequited love. He “believed himself to be the incorrigible optimist.”
- “He did his best to keep his sorrow alive.”
- He struggles with his own sorrow and identity, often diminished in comparison to Catherine’s grandeur.
- He serves as a foil to Catherine’s mystical and dreamlike existence.

Cousin Hannah

- A suffrage captain, now dead, who lives on in Catherine’s memories and imagination.
- She was “unable to blush if she lost her skirt, unable to stagger or lean upon an escort’s arm, unable to faint.”
- Represents a life of action and struggle, contrasted with Catherine’s dreamlike and evasive existence, though Catherine insists “there had been no tragedy in her life or in her death.”

Peron Spitzer

- A figure symbolizing tragic melancholy and finality in death.
- “Peron had killed himself by jumping from the tallest building in a cloud as a star flashed, as a train whistled.”

Research: Themes

Life and Death as Intertwined States

See: Death and Mortality · Duality and Doubles

- Catherine insists there is little difference between life and death, “only an infinitesimal difference… a hair’s breadth.”
- Her spirit moves beyond the physical body, engaging in multiple selves and journeys that may never return, implying immortality is linked to loss and absence.
- Death is not final; rather, it is a transformation or continuation of life in another form or realm.

Dreams and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Dreams and Imagination

- Dreams are not substitutes but the only reality; Catherine never truly moves physically but travels extensively in her dreams. “Her dreams were not the substitute for reality—they were the only reality there was.”
- The house itself is a shifting, surreal place, moving through time and space, inhabited by invisible guests, spirits, and echoes.
- Time collapses; events are timeless or simultaneous, reflecting Catherine’s fractured perception.

Isolation and Estrangement

See: Isolation and Connection

- Catherine is isolated, physically immobile but mentally and spiritually wandering widely.
- She experiences a profound estrangement from the living world, which no one notices because of her pervasive absence and contradictory behavior.
- The lack of sorrow, paradoxically, is itself a sorrow, highlighting emotional detachment.

The Power of Imagination and Creation

See: Dreams and Imagination

- Catherine wields quasi-miraculous powers over natural elements: controlling winds, tides, stars, and raising the spectral dead.
- She is portrayed as a “great engineer” and “mathematical genius” who constructs bridges, cities, and controls cosmic forces.
- Despite her powers, she is vulnerable to exhaustion and fears losing her imaginative faculties: “her imagination might perish before she perished.”

Memory, Identity, and Self

See: Memory and the Past · Identity and the Self

- Identity is fluid; Catherine can be many persons at once, sometimes failing to recognize herself.
- Memories and past experiences collapse into moments without clear distinctions between past and present.
- She grapples with who she is, where she is, and what form she might take after death.

Sorrow Kept Alive

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Mr. Spitzer’s sorrow has “outlived itself,” and “there is no longer necessity of feeling what one feels.”
- “The lack of sorrow was a sorrow, too.”

The Ear as a Metaphor for Consciousness and Entrapment

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Catherine describes the ear as a vast, labyrinthine continent, the “doorway to the soul,” as she says Aristotle called it, where she is lost and wanders endlessly.
- The ear symbolizes the inner world of sound, memory, and consciousness, filled with echoes, voices, and spectral presences.
- She pleads to be let out of her ear, symbolizing a desire to escape mental imprisonment.

Illusion, Appearance, and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- Personality and human form are mere appearances, like shadows or reflections on water.
- Catherine’s physical appearance is marked by “imaginary blemishes” she tries to conceal with beauty spots, illustrating the tension between surface and essence.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Pearls and Planets

See: Pearls and Jewels · Moon and Stars

- Pearls counted by Catherine symbolize worlds, memories, or selves; counting them leads to loss or dissolution.

Snow and Winter

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Snow imagery recurs throughout, symbolizing purity, coldness, death, and mystery.
- Catherine walks naked through snow and blizzards that are warm and opalescent, blending opposites.

The House

See: The House

- A living, shifting entity with invisible servants, moving through time and space.
- Represents Catherine’s mind or inner world, harboring ghosts, memories, and dreams.

The Ear

See: Silence and Deafness

- A labyrinthine metaphor for consciousness, entrapment, and the soul's journey.

Mirrors and Reflections

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- Used to explore identity, illusion, and self-recognition.

Doors and Keys

See: Keys, Doors, and Locks

- "She complained for years that she was the door through which she passed or could not pass."
- When she dies, "she would have found a key to the door. She would have found a keyhole, perhaps only a keyhole in a cloud."

Animals and Mythical Creatures

See: Angels, Devils, and Myth

- Elephants, rabbits in lace veils, falcons, and spectral figures populate Catherine's dream world, symbolizing various aspects of memory, power, and mystery.

Research: Resources

- "with finger minarets breaking through foam and cloud, mosaic emperors": The gold mosaics of Byzantium show emperors in glass and gold, as Justinian and Theodora in San Vitale, Ravenna (547). W. B. Yeats, in "Sailing to Byzantium" (1928), leaves the body behind: "And therefore I have sailed the seas and come / To the holy city of Byzantium," calling on the "sages standing in God's holy fire / As in the gold mosaic of a wall."
- "Sunt lacrimae rerum": Sunt lacrimae rerum means there are tears for things or life is tragic. Aeneas, seeing the Trojan War painted on the walls of Carthage, weeps: "sunt lacrimae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt," "there are tears of things, and mortal things touch the mind" (Virgil, Aeneid 1.462). Young adds, "But her tears were never for persons."
- "One lost one's magnetic sense, such as migratory birds are perhaps guided by": Young's "perhaps" came just before the proof. In 1965 Friedrich Merkel and Wolfgang Wiltschko showed that caged European robins orient by the earth's magnetic field ("Magnetismus und Richtungsfinden zugunruhiger Rotkehlchen," Die Vogelwarte 23, 1965, 71-77). See Birds.
- "She looked like a domino": Patches of black silk or velvet, called mouches, flies, in France, were worn in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to hide smallpox scars and to set off the whiteness of the skin. Addison reported Whig and Tory ladies at the opera patching on opposite sides of their faces (Joseph Addison, The Spectator, no.

81, June 2, 1711). A domino is the hooded cloak worn with a half mask at masquerades, and the game pieces, black with white spots, share the name. Catherine reverses them, a white face with black patches. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.

- “the snow-white whetsaw owls”: Whetsaw owls may refer to the Saw-whet owl found in North America and one of the smallest owl species. Its name comes from its call, said to sound like a saw being whetted on a stone. See Birds.
- “the pocket gophers with large cheek pouches”: Pocket gophers are named for their fur-lined cheek pouches, which open outside the mouth and carry food to their burrows.
- “the groundhogs who emerged on Candlemas Day”: Catherine describes the groundhog seeing its shadow like the custom in the US called Groundhog Day, yet she mentions it is like Candlemas Day also known as the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus Christ and is a Christian Holy Day. Both happen on February 2nd.
    - German settlers in Pennsylvania brought the Candlemas lore of the badger and the hedgehog, and the groundhog took their place. An old rhyme runs, “If Candlemas Day be fair and bright, / Winter will have another flight.”
- “the rabbits wearing lace veils and silver petticoats, walking upright”: Alice first sees “a White Rabbit with pink eyes” run close by her, and Young’s rabbits have “pink eye’s” (Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 1865, chapter 1). See Alice in Wonderland.
- “Caesar’s campaign”: Caesar’s campaign could refer to the Gallic War or Caesar’s civil war.
- “the War of the Roses”: The Wars of the Roses (1455-1487) were civil wars between the House of Lancaster, the red rose, and the House of York, the white, fought over control of the English throne.
    - See the 1920 Tennessee War of the Roses under “trooping her suffrage colors of rose on white,” below.
- “mad Antony’s love”: Mad Antony’s love may refer to Mark Antony’s obsession with women, above all Cleopatra, for whom he lost Rome. In Shakespeare’s Antony and Cleopatra his dotage is “the bellows and the fan / To cool a gipsy’s lust” (1.1). He had five wives and fathered many children. See Shakespeare.
- “Helen of Troy”: Helen of Troy: See the Chapter 23 resources. Helen also mixes the nepenthe later in this chapter.
- “a bee buzzing in her cheek, a night bird whistling in her ear”: The ringing, buzzing, whistling, and roaring Catherine hears are the sounds of tinnitus, heard by the sufferer and by no one else (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, “Tinnitus”). See Silence and Deafness.
- “Aristotle had said that the ear was the doorway to the soul”: Aristotle was a Greek philosopher. The phrase “doorway to the soul” is not found in Aristotle. The nearest is his judgment that sight serves the needs of life, “but for developing intelligence, and in

its indirect consequences, hearing takes the precedence," for "rational discourse is a cause of instruction in virtue of its being audible" (Aristotle, On Sense and the Sensible 1, trans. J. I. Beare, 1908). See Aristotle.

- "so many doors and porticoes and fallen columns": Young's continent is built from the anatomy of the ear. The inner ear is called the labyrinth. Its cochlea, Latin for snail shell, winds two and a half turns, and its vestibule opens on the middle ear through two doors, the oval and round windows. The whole lies inside the petrous bone, from the Greek for rock, the hardest bone in the body.
- "thousands and ten thousands of piano keys": Hermann von Helmholtz likened the inner ear to a piano whose strings each answer to one pitch, proposing first the arches of Corti and then the fibers of the basilar membrane as the tuned strings (Hermann von Helmholtz, On the Sensations of Tone, 1863, trans. Alexander J. Ellis, 1875). See Music and Instruments.
- "like Balboa discovering the Pacific Ocean": Balboa may refer to Vasco Núñez de Balboa, the Spanish explorer who crossed the Isthmus of Panama and in 1513 became the first European to see the Pacific from the Americas. See the Chapter 40 resources. See Exploration and the Poles.
    - Keats gave the moment to Cortez: "Or like stout Cortez when with eagle eyes / He star'd at the Pacific—and all his men / Look'd at each other with a wild surmise— / Silent, upon a peak in Darien" (John Keats, "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer," 1816). Catherine, on "great cliffs overhanging the silent purple sea," names the right explorer. See Romantic Poets.
- "She was dining at the Ritz": The Ritz is named for César Ritz, the Swiss hotelier who opened the Hôtel Ritz in Paris in 1898. A Ritz-Carlton opened in New York, at Madison Avenue and 46th Street, in 1911, and another in Boston in 1927.
- "the house with its turrets and towers and porches moved in the night": In L. Frank Baum's The Wonderful Wizard of Oz (1900) a cyclone carries off Dorothy's house: "The house whirled around two or three times and rose slowly through the air." It comes down in a strange land. See American Writers.
    - Later Catherine directs "the great tornadoes which blew us all apart."
- "so many little cuckoo clock Swiss villages": The cuckoo clock comes from Germany's Black Forest, where clockmakers built it from the eighteenth century, not from Switzerland. Its Swiss home is a tourist's, and a film's: in The Third Man (1949) Harry Lime says Switzerland had "five hundred years of democracy and peace, and what did that produce? The cuckoo clock." See Clocks and Watches.
- "the frozen great Gobi Desert where was no railway": The Gobi Desert is a large desert in East Asia. By 1956 the Trans-Mongolian Railway crossed the Gobi, linking Ulaanbaatar with Beijing.
- "Were they following her or the nowhere train?": "A nowhere train" may reference Anita Leslie's Train to Nowhere (1948), her memoir of driving ambulances in World War II in

North Africa, Italy, France, and Germany, for which de Gaulle awarded her the Croix de Guerre.

- “only a few old Tory refugees”: Tory is a person who holds a political philosophy that is based on the British version of traditionalism and conservatism. In the American Revolution the Tories were the Loyalists to the Crown. Some sixty thousand left the United States, about half of them for Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, along with some fifteen thousand people they held in slavery (Maya Jasanoff, Liberty’s Exiles, Knopf, 2011).
- “and crinolines”: A crinoline is a stiff petticoat. The crinoline, named for crin, horsehair, and lin, linen, came in the 1840s, and the steel cage crinoline in 1856, long after the Loyalists. Young dresses her refugees in two centuries at once.
- “the antidote would be worse than the poison”: “The remedy is worse than the disease” (Francis Bacon, “Of Seditions and Troubles,” Essays, 1625).
- “Had she not built great bridges, often with only a sigh?”: See the Bridge of Sighs in the Chapter 36 resources.
- “where only the raven had spoken”: Ravens are often considered a mediator between life and death.
  - “And he sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth” (Genesis 8:7). See Genesis.
  - Poe’s raven speaks only “Nevermore” (Edgar Allan Poe, “The Raven,” 1845). See the Chapter 26 resources. See Edgar Allan Poe.
- “Had she not made a man into a tortoise with stars upon his back?”: Circe turns Odysseus’s men into swine (Odyssey 10). See Homer’s Epics.
  - Catherine, “a great mathematical genius,” may also recall the Lo Shu. In Chinese legend a turtle rose from the Luo River in the time of Yu the Great bearing on its shell a pattern of dots, the magic square of three, in which every row, column, and diagonal adds to fifteen.
- “She had caused the lories capsized”: A lory is a small parrot. Capsized at low tide, Young’s lories may be dories, the small flat-bottomed boats of New England fishermen, the “old lobster dories” of Chapter 22.
- “Like furies of the avenging ghost”: In Aeschylus’s Eumenides (458 BC) the ghost of Clytemnestra rouses the sleeping Furies to hunt her son Orestes. See the Furies in the Chapter 34 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “Pallida morte futura”: Pallida morte futura means “pale with death to come.” Virgil uses it of Dido as she climbs the pyre to kill herself (Aeneid 4.644). Young follows it at once with “pale, pale, pale as death.”
- “Perhaps she was the whirlpool, but she was also the still center”: In Poe’s “A Descent into the Maelström” (1841) the fisherman survives by yielding, lashing himself to a water cask and letting the whirlpool carry him, having seen that round things were drawn down most slowly. See the maelstrom entry in the Chapter 2 resources. See Edgar Allan Poe.

- “nature was unknitting her”: Macbeth’s “Sleep that knits up the ravell’d sleave of care” (2.2). See the Chapter 3 resources. Catherine, the eternal sleeper, is unknit. See Shakespeare.
- “an immortal beauty none had ever loved”: “Immortal beauty” is part of Emerson’s Nature essay: “I am the lover of uncontained and immortal beauty” (Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nature, 1836, chapter 1). For Emerson beauty is not only sensory but a sign of the spiritual order of nature (Nature, chapter 3, “Beauty”). See American Writers.
- “so that she could not get through the door”: Alice, after eating the cake, grows “more than nine feet high,” too large for the little door into the garden, though she holds its golden key (Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, chapter 2). See Alice in Wonderland and Keys, Doors, and Locks.
- “wide enough to admit a longhaired star”: A comet is a long-haired star, from the Greek komētēs. See the Chapter 39 resources. See Astronomy.
- “so many door knobs which should have been apples”: The fruit of the tree of knowledge, traditionally an apple, was “a tree to be desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6). See Genesis.
- “less than the fabric of her dreams”: Prospero’s “the baseless fabric of this vision” and “We are such stuff / As dreams are made on” (The Tempest 4.1). See the Chapter 12 resources. See Shakespeare.
- “He would have known his identity”: Mr. Spitzer complains that Catherine doesn’t see him as the “unique individual.” If she did, “He would have known his identity.” This is what Charles Horton Cooley called the “looking-glass self” (Charles Horton Cooley, Human Nature and the Social Order, 1902). See the Chapter 2 resources. Our self-perception is influenced by how we believe others see us. People in theory develop a sense of self by observing and internalizing how others react to a person, therefore, a person defines oneself based on those perceptions. While this can be powerful there are also self-assessment, internal reflection, values, interests, and passions. Oftentimes our perceptions can be inaccurate and lead to a distorted self-image.
- “He did his best to keep his sorrow alive”: Mr. Spitzer is stuck in the cycle of grief and/or stuck in a depression. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross named five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, On Death and Dying, 1969). See the Chapter 3 resources. People who cling to sorrow or make it a central part of their identity find it difficult to move on from grief or other painful experiences. They may become trapped in a cycle of sadness. People may use this as a way to cope with the pain of loss or trauma. Trauma and memory can form a strong emotional attachment. See Grief, Loss, and Mourning.
    - Freud distinguished mourning, which ends, from melancholia, which clings to the lost: “In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself” (Sigmund Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” 1917, Standard Edition 14, trans. James Strachey, 1957, 246). See Freud and Jung.
- “Mr. Spitzer seemed almost to be imitating himself”: “There were those imitations of which the original was never quite known.” See the Baudrillard entry in the Chapter 37

resources.

- “came no more storming at these ivory gates”: “For two are the gates of shadowy dreams, and one is fashioned of horn and one of ivory. Those dreams that pass through the gate of sawn ivory deceive men, bringing words that find no fulfillment” (Odyssey 19.562-565, trans. A. T. Murray, 1919). Aeneas leaves the underworld by the ivory gate (Aeneid 6.893-898). Hannah no longer storms the gates of Catherine’s false dreams. See Homer’s Epics.
- “unable to blush if she lost her skirt”: See Young’s account to Studs Terkel of the bloomer girls who shed their skirts at an Alpine summit, in the Chapter 38 resources.
- “riding her white horse through a cloud”: Inez Milholland rode a white horse at the head of the 1913 suffrage parade in Washington. See the Chapter 39 resources. See Women’s Suffrage.
- “more vulnerable to the arrows of chance”: “The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (Hamlet 3.1). See Shakespeare.
- “She should have eaten lotus flowers”: Whoever of Odysseus’s men “ate the honey-sweet fruit of the lotus, had no longer any wish to bring back word or to return” (Odyssey 9.94-95, trans. A. T. Murray, 1919). Tennyson’s mariners come “unto a land / In which it seemed always afternoon” (Alfred Tennyson, “The Lotos-Eaters,” 1832). See Homer’s Epics.
- “what happens to one must happen to all”: “And I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all” (Ecclesiastes 2:14). See Ecclesiastes.
- “were there not many roads to the crown of her head”: Catherine asks “...were there not many roads to the crown of her head?” This seems to mimic a saying often called a Hindu proverb: there are many paths up the mountain, all leading to the same place. While the exact phrasing is a modern paraphrase, the underlying concept is deeply rooted in traditional Hindu texts and philosophy. A classic parallel is found in the Siva Mahimnah Stotra (verse 7): “As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee” (as quoted by Swami Vivekananda, address at the World’s Parliament of Religions, Chicago, September 11, 1893). Ramakrishna said, “As many faiths, so many paths” (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, trans. Swami Nikhilananda, 1942). See Hinduism.
    - In yoga the sahasrara, the thousand-petaled lotus, crowns the head, where the channels of the subtle body meet (Arthur Avalon, The Serpent Power, 1919).
- “She was swifter than her own mind”: “That One, though motionless, is swifter than the mind. The senses can never overtake It, for It ever goes before.” “It moves and It moves not. It is far and also It is near. It is within and also It is without all this” (Isha Upanishad 4-5, trans. Swami Paramananda, 1919). Young: “She was far, yet she was near. She was within, yet she was outside.” See Hinduism.

- “She was everywhere at once because she was nowhere”: It seems at varying times that Catherine and Mr. Spitzer are describing powers of omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence.
- “the emperor’s white umbrella”: In Siam and Burma the white umbrella was the sign of the king, and the white elephant was his sacred beast. See The Umbrella.
- “Once there was a purple feather fan”: The White Rabbit, startled, “dropped the white kid gloves and the fan” (Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, chapter 2). Catherine’s visitor leaves a fan and then a pair of gloves. See Alice in Wonderland.
- “drugged with that nepenthe”: Nepenthe is a fictional medicine for sorrow that is mentioned in Greek literature and mythology. In the Odyssey, Helen “cast into the wine of which they were drinking a drug to quiet all pain and strife, and bring forgetfulness of every ill” (Odyssey 4.220-221, trans. A. T. Murray, 1919). See Nepenthe in the Chapter 43 vocabulary. See Homer’s Epics.
    - Poe’s narrator cries, “Quaff, oh quaff this kind nepenthe and forget this lost Lenore!” (“The Raven,” 1845). See Edgar Allan Poe.
- “their skeleton grooms sleeping”: When the princess pricks her finger, “The horses, too, went to sleep in the stable, the dogs in the yard, the pigeons upon the roof, the flies on the wall” (Brothers Grimm, “Little Briar-Rose,” 1812, trans. Margaret Hunt, 1884). See the Sleeping Beauty in the Chapter 29 resources. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “someone whose eyes were the moon and the sun”: “His eyes were as a flame of fire” (Revelation 1:14), and the mighty angel’s “face was as it were the sun” (Revelation 10:1). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
    - “The Moon was gendered from his mind, and from his eye the Sun had birth” (Rig Veda 10.90.13, trans. Ralph T. H. Griffith, 1896). See the Purusha entry below.
- “an action in inaction”: “He who sees inaction in action, and action in inaction, is wise among men” (Bhagavad Gita 4.18, trans. Kashinath Trimbak Telang, 1882). See Hinduism.
- “That which had never been, it was only that which was”: The Bhagavad Gita teaches that the unreal never comes into being and the real never ceases to be (2.16). See Hinduism.
    - “All things under heaven sprang from It as existing (and named); that existence sprang from It as non-existent (and not named)” (Tao Te Ching 40, trans. James Legge, 1891). Young: “greater being in non-being.” See Taoism and Zhuangzi.
- “her Saracen conquests”: Saracen refers to Arab Muslims, Turks, and Persians or other Muslims. See the Saracen entry in the Chapter 40 resources.
- “la lutte finale”: La lutte finale may refer to a line from The Internationale which is a left-wing anthem used in anarchist, communist, and socialist movements. Its refrain is “C’est la lutte finale,” “This is the final struggle” (words by Eugène Pottier, 1871; music by Pierre De Geyter, 1888).

- “still dreaming of an old romance”: Present society is a product of Romanticism, which developed in the late 1700s and early 1800s. Alain de Botton is a current philosopher who goes into this topic. His philosophy of love says people revolve around the concept that often idealizes love, finding meaning and purpose in relationships rather than focusing on the work and effort involved in maintaining them (Alain de Botton, “Why You Will Marry the Wrong Person,” New York Times, May 28, 2016).
- “growing old over night”: If Catherine really woke up she would rapidly age and die, as in old tales and novels. Oisín, returning from Tír na nÓg after three hundred years, touches the ground and becomes an old man. Ayesha in Haggard’s She (1887) withers in a moment (see the Chapter 6 resources). In James Hilton’s Lost Horizon (1933), Lo-Tsen leaves Shangri-La and reaches the outside world an ancient woman. Washington Irving’s Rip Van Winkle (1819) wakes after twenty years (see the Chapter 36 resources). See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “trooping her suffrage colors of rose on white”: The real suffrage colors were purple, white, and gold for the National Woman’s Party, yellow for the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and purple, white, and green for the British suffragettes. In Tennessee in August 1920, when the last state needed ratified the Nineteenth Amendment, “Supporters of suffrage wore yellow roses in public; the anti-suffragists wore red roses,” in “what became known as the War of the Roses” (National Constitution Center, “The man and his mom who gave women the vote”). Hannah’s “red rose of her blood” was, in Tennessee, the flower of her enemies. See Women’s Suffrage and Roses and Flowers.
    - Trooping the Colour is the British ceremony in which a regiment’s flag is carried along the ranks.
- “that from which no traveller returns”: “The undiscover’d country from whose bourn / No traveller returns” (Hamlet 3.1). See Shakespeare.
- “patriarchal suffrage captain”: Cousin Hannah is given this oxymoron title “patriarchal suffrage captain.” Patriarchy is a system of social organization where men hold the primary power and authority versus suffrage which is the fundamental right of all to vote which would lead to all citizens having the power to influence political decisions and hold leaders accountable. The paradox is suggesting that someone who holds patriarchal power but is also advocating for or leading a movement that challenges this very power structure. See Women’s Suffrage.
    - Patriarchal can also mean venerable, like a patriarch of old.
- “Once she dreamed she was the unicorn”: See the Unicorn Tapestries in the Chapter 35 resources.
- “many persons with many heads, limbs, arms”: “A thousand heads hath Purusha, a thousand eyes, a thousand feet” (Rig Veda 10.90.1, trans. Ralph T. H. Griffith, 1896). See Hinduism.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Acumen

Keen insight or shrewdness.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Antagonist

An opponent; one who struggles against another.

Antidote

A remedy that counteracts a poison.

Apostate

One who abandons a faith or cause.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Banditti

Bandits; the Italian plural.

Beau ideal

The perfect type or model.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Bier

A stand on which a corpse or coffin is carried.

Billows

Great waves.

Brigand

A bandit of the hills.

Cadaverous

Pale and gaunt, like a corpse.

Cavalcade

A procession on horseback.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Chagrin

Distress or annoyance at having failed or been humiliated.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Corporeal

Having a body; physical.

Corsair

A pirate, or a pirate ship.

Cosmography

A description or map of the whole universe, both heavens and earth.

Countermand

An order that cancels an earlier one.

Countermarch

A march back the way one came.

Cul-de-sac

A dead end.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Dominoes

A game played with small oblong tiles marked with spots.

Elicit

To draw out.

Emissary

A messenger or agent.

Estuary

The wide mouth of a river, where fresh water meets the tide.

Fetters

Chains for the feet.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Imperceptibly

So slowly or slightly as to go unnoticed.

Incorrigible

Beyond correction.

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Infinitesimal

Extremely small.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Lyrebird

An Australian songbird whose tail, spread, has the shape of a lyre.

Martialing

Young’s spelling of marshaling, arranging in order, as troops.

Mauve

A pale purple.

Mercurial

Quick and changeable in mood. From the swift Roman messenger god Mercury and the liquid metal named for him.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Nepenthe

In Homer’s Odyssey, a drug from Egypt that Helen puts in the wine to banish grief and sorrow. Anything that brings forgetfulness of pain. See On Nepenthe (Ch 82).

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Owlishly

Like an owl; staring wide-eyed and solemn.

Patriarchal

Of or ruled by fathers or men; venerable like a patriarch.

Pedestal

The base on which a statue or bust stands.

Peruke

A powdered wig of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Peruked

Wearing a peruke, a wig popular from the 17th to the 19th century.

Petticoat

An underskirt.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Plumage

A bird’s feathers.

Portcullis

A heavy iron grating lowered to close a castle gateway.

Porte-cochere

A covered entrance where a carriage stops to let passengers out.

Protracted

Drawn out.

Pulverized

Ground to powder.

Pyramidal

Shaped like a pyramid.

Regurgitation

A flowing or casting back.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Sentinel

A guard or watchman.

Sepulchral

Of the tomb; gloomy and deathly.

Sequin

A small shining disk sewn on clothing; first the zecchino, a Venetian gold coin.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Skein

A loosely coiled length of yarn or thread.

Sloop

A sailboat with one mast.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Stalactite

An icicle-shaped formation of minerals hanging from the roof of a cave.

Stalagmite

A column of mineral rising from a cave floor, built by drips from above.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women’s right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women’s Suffrage.

Supernumerary

Extra; more than the number needed. In the theater, an extra with no lines.

Swooned

Fainted.

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Tergiversation

An evasion of straightforward action or a clear-cut statement.

Torrential

Rushing like a torrent.

Transient

Passing quickly; not lasting. As a noun, a hotel guest who stays only a short time.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Tumultuous

Loud, wild, and disorderly.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Unprepossessing

Unattractive; making no good first impression.

Winding sheet

The cloth a corpse is wrapped in for burial.

Windlass

A winch for hauling or hoisting.

Chapter 42

Summary

Catherine dreams that she rides in her glass carriage behind the black coachman and his alabaster horses, through the sleeping house and the sleeping city, to bid farewell to the dying Cousin Hannah, though both ladies are bedridden and the visit can have happened only in a dream. Mr. Spitzer, who goes back and forth between the two dying ladies, is grateful for her dream. He keeps lists of lost ships, the Racehorse, the Arcturus, the Ptarmigan, and searches census rolls from which one person, he suspects himself, is always missing. In Hannah's house of war trophies he finds pictures of her glory, the bloomer girl, the strike leader, the Arab king, and he learns that in the East she was Al Hamid, that she once left a bridegroom at the church door, and that a sheik sent her gold. He expects to find a secret man in her life and finds instead "a secret woman, a bride." Hannah lies in a white room like a desert tent, her face covered and her feet bare. She does not know him, and she cries out for a pavilion to hide her from the storm.

Characters present

Cousin Hannah · Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · The Black Coachman

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Love · Memory and the Past · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · The Search for Meaning · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Clocks and Watches · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Horses and Carriages · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · Pearls and Jewels · Roses and Flowers · Silence and Deafness · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The House · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Aristotle · Augustine and Christian Theology · Buddhism · Freud and Jung · Heraclitus and Flux · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Nietzsche

Allusions: American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Edgar Allan Poe · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · Lynching and Racial Violence · Music and Composers · Napoleon and Wellington · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job · The Civil War · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a dreamlike passage describing Catherine's journey in a glass carriage driven by a black coachman with alabaster horses, passing through surreal landscapes of mirrors, fountains, tapestries, and sleeping cities. This journey is symbolic of transition, memory, and farewell, as she travels to visit Cousin Hannah in a realm beyond ordinary time and space. Catherine's visit is described as hallucinatory, almost otherworldly, blending dream and reality, emphasizing the fluidity of time and the nature of farewell as something that transcends physical existence.
- Mr. Spitzer is preoccupied with lists of sunken and lost ships, the mystery of their disappearance, and the elusive nature of time and memory. This section metaphorically ties the fate of lost ships to the human experience of loss, disappearance, and the unknowability of final destinies. His meditation on finding coordinates, lost passengers, and the ocean's endless mysteries parallels the chapter's broader themes of searching for meaning amid oblivion.
- Much of the chapter is devoted to Mr. Spitzer's detailed remembrance and reflection on Cousin Hannah, the fading suffrage captain. Her life is portrayed as one of militant energy, passion, and struggle by leading crusades, breaking conventions, and battling societal and personal constraints. Yet now, in her old age, she is reduced to a fragile figure, almost unrecognizable, lying in a vast, tent-like death chamber filled with memories and trophies of battles past. The contrast between her former fiery strength and present weakness is poignant, illustrating the inevitability of decline and the loneliness of a warrior's final moments.
- Mr. Spitzer speculates on the hidden personal life of Cousin Hannah, suggesting a secret and perhaps tragic love life that contrasts with her public image of fierce independence and detachment. There is mention of a mysterious bridegroom who was left at the church door and rumors of a secret man or caliph who supported her cause, and in the end Mr. Spitzer finds "a secret woman, a bride." This passage explores the tension between public persona and private vulnerability, and the elusive nature of love and companionship even for the strongest figures.
- The closing passages focus on Mr. Spitzer's visit to Cousin Hannah's death chamber, where he confronts her mortality and the enigma of her spirit. The imagery of snow, white curtains, desert tents, and the blending of life and death create a surreal atmosphere. Mr. Spitzer reflects on the nature of death as a journey and the dissolution of identity. Despite her indifference and silence, he remains faithful, accompanying her in her final hours, contemplating the mystery of the soul, the possibility of resurrection, and the universal fate that awaits all.
- Throughout the chapter, there are numerous philosophical reflections on time, memory, identity, and the interconnectedness of life and death. Mr. Spitzer's musings on eternal recurrence, the blending of opposites, and the fragile boundary between dream and reality deepen the emotional and intellectual impact of the narrative. His lament over

forgotten heroes and lost loves, and his sense of being a witness to fading glory, add a layer of melancholic grandeur.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “For no dream dies except into another dream.” What does Catherine’s visit prove, if it never happened?
- “Farewell was a matter of opinion as to the time, the place, the person.” Has Mr. Spitzer ever said farewell to anyone?
- “The sheath had outlived the sword.” What is left of Hannah?

Characters

- Why does Mr. Spitzer study census reports “from which one person was always missing”?
- Hannah led “the needle workers to strike albeit she was the owner of a mill.” What does the contradiction tell us about her?
- Mr. Spitzer expects a secret man and finds “a secret woman, a bride.” Who might she be?

Connections

- In Chapter 38 Hannah “had wept if she heard a skirt whirling.” Here she is “the great bloomer girl who had taken off her voluminous skirts.” How do the skirts connect?
- Hannah lies “stretched out like a clouded landscape,” as Catherine in Chapter 41 was “stretched out like a clouded horizon.” How are the two dying ladies alike?
- Mr. Spitzer leaves with “Good-night and good-morning.” Where else in the novel does an ending turn into a beginning?

Reflection

- “No one remembered that war in which she had fought.” Why are some heroes forgotten?
- Is a farewell that happens only in a dream still a farewell?
- “Each who dies must die twice.” What is the first death?

Research: Characters

Cousin Hannah (C. H. Freemount-Snowden)

- A formidable, militant suffrage leader whose life was dedicated to battling the conventions of love, society, and gender roles.
- She is depicted as a warrior, storm king, and mystic figure, feared and revered but ultimately isolated and sorrowful in her final days.
- Her identity spans multiple cultural representations (Hannah in Boston, Hamid in the East, and the Great Moor) symbolizing a universal warrior figure.
- “Her last years had been empty. She had lived in those last fleeting years as one whom time had outdistanced.”
- After the wedding that did not take place, she signed her name “C. H. Freemount-Snowden,” on the advice of a Boston numerologist.

Catherine Cartwheel (Vera’s mother)

- She journeys in a glass carriage driven by spectral horses and a coachman, making a dreamlike farewell visit to Cousin Hannah.
- Her journey transcends time and space, emphasizing the fluidity of reality and memory.
- “She had not even leaned on her cane. She had needed no one to show her the way.”

Joachim Spitzer

- An observer and quasi-legal figure who researches lost ships, heirs, and ancient records.
- He represents the search for meaning, order, and connection amid chaos and oblivion.
- He reflects on his own precarious existence and the mysteries surrounding Cousin Hannah.
- “He was the ambassador from one world to another world although he doubtless never would know which ambassador he was, which world it was.”

The Unknown Bridegroom

- A mysterious figure tied to Cousin Hannah by rumor and symbolism.
- He represents lost love, abandonment, and unfulfilled relationships, adding a layer of personal tragedy to Hannah’s public life.

Research: Themes

The Fluidity of Time and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Time

- The narrative challenges linear notions of time. Catherine's journey is described as transcending death and time, visiting Cousin Hannah when both are bed-ridden or dead. Dreams and waking reality blur, reflecting a mystical view of existence where farewell is "a matter of opinion as to the time, the place, the person."

Death and the Afterlife

See: Death and Mortality

- Death is portrayed as both an end and a transformation or a continuation into another dream or realm. The chapter explores death's mysteries, the dissolution of identity, and the hope or doubt surrounding resurrection and eternal life.

Memory and Legacy

See: Memory and the Past

- Cousin Hannah's fading fame and forgotten battles symbolize how history erases even the greatest struggles. Mr. Spitzer's reflections reveal the tension between public recognition and private sorrow, as well as the difficulty of preserving true legacy.

Love and Isolation

See: Isolation and Connection · Love

- Despite her militant exterior, Cousin Hannah harbors hidden loves and intimacies. The narrative hints at secret lovers, lost opportunities for human connection, and the loneliness of a life lived in opposition to societal norms.

Identity and Transformation

See: Identity and the Self

- Hannah's multiple identities (Hannah, Hamid, Al Hamid, Great Moor) and her shifting roles reflect the multiplicity of self and the transformative power of myth and legend. Mr. Spitzer's own uncertainty about his identity parallels this theme.

The Search for Meaning Amid Chaos

See: Order, Chaos, and Discipline · The Search for Meaning

- Mr. Spitzer's obsession with lost ships and records symbolizes humanity's quest for order and meaning despite the inherent chaos of existence. The lost ships, passengers, and forgotten histories mirror Cousin Hannah's own forgotten life.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Glass Carriage and Alabaster Horses

See: Horses and Carriages

- Symbolize the ethereal, dreamlike journey between worlds or states of being. The horses' heads turning like foam and their journey through clouds evoke a passage beyond the physical.

Mirrors and Reflections

See: Mirrors and Reflections · The House

- The house with rooms of mirrors and endless reflections represents the multiplicity of perspectives and the elusive nature of truth and self.

White Tent and Desert Imagery

- Cousin Hannah's death chamber is likened to a desert tent or pagoda, blending Eastern and Western symbols of the sacred and transient. The desert and snow imagery evoke isolation, purity, and the harshness of the final journey.

Lost Ships and Stars

See: The Sea and Water · Moon and Stars

- Ships represent journeys, lost hopes, and the passage of souls. Stars symbolize guidance, memory, and the unreachable. Mr. Spitzer's cataloging of lost ships parallels the attempt to map lost lives and loves.

Snow and Ice

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Metaphors for death, stillness, and the crystallization of time and memory. The persistent snow on Cousin Hannah's face and body symbolizes the inevitability of death and the fading of life's passions.

The Bridegroom and Withered Flowers

See: Roses and Flowers · Weddings and Funerals

- Represent unfulfilled love and abandonment, contrasting with Cousin Hannah's militant independence and loneliness.

Further notes from the text

- Catherine's carriage ride through the sleeping house is full of driving directions: turn right, turn left, follow the winding road, watch for the road's edge and the clouded void. "One could sometimes hear her directing the wind."
- Mr. Spitzer keeps lists of lost ships, some vanished long before his birth, some sunk in calm seas for reasons never known. Hannah's dying is set among these lost vessels.
- He travels back and forth "between two dying ladies," Catherine and Hannah, past sundials with their numbers blotted out by fog.
- Hannah's past is drawn as a military epic: armies riding into war with silken petticoats for flags, camp followers, ladies who left home and husband to follow her. "Always by indirection, she had broken the hearts of many men."
- The town gossips about an abandoned bridegroom from Hannah's past: some say he died early of grief clutching withered flowers, others that he lived to a great age and never married.
- Finding her wrapped in a white sheet, Mr. Spitzer first thinks he has come too late and is in her tomb, then remembers that in the East sleepers cover their faces. He decides he must behave as if he has crossed a far frontier.
- He sees himself as the blind lighthouse keeper, the deaf bell-ringer, the star that does not see its own light, the gatekeeper who does not know which gates he keeps.

Research: Resources

- "the four alabaster horses": The four alabaster horses of the opening become "the eight long-necked horses" a few lines later. See Horses and Carriages and The Black Coachman.
- "Watch out for the swan boats": See the swan boats of the Boston Public Garden in the Chapter 4 resources.
- "fields of mountain asphodel": In the Odyssey, Hermes leads the souls of the dead suitors down to the meadow of asphodel, where the spirits of the dead dwell (Odyssey 24). See Homer's Epics and Greek Mythology.
- "an ancient pharaoh sleeping in a swan boat": See the solar barque of Ra in the Chapter 40 resources. See Ancient Egypt.
- "victimized by routine itself": Mr. Spitzer complains of being "victimized by routine itself" and "valued his dignity perhaps more than his life." He is the old, traditional, for appearances' sake symbol. This also paralyzes him because he can do nothing. He's stuck as all conservative thinking leads to is the center must hold, the line must not be crossed.
    - "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold" (W. B. Yeats, "The Second Coming," 1920).

- “his unflagging search for lost heirs to lost estates”: In Dickens’s Bleak House (1853), the suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce over a lost inheritance “has, in course of time, become so complicated, that no man alive knows what it means” (chapter 1).
- “Epithalamiums sadder still”: The epithalamium, from the Greek for “at the bridal chamber,” was sung outside the bride’s door. Edmund Spenser’s Epithalamion (1595) celebrates his own wedding. Mr. Spitzer finds such songs “sadder still” than elegies. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “Should the lost locate the lost?”: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). See The Bible.
- “if he knew the longitude, then he did not know the latitude”: Latitude can be read from the sun and stars, but longitude needs the exact time. The problem was solved by John Harrison’s marine chronometer H4 (1761), after the British Longitude Act of 1714 offered a prize. Mr. Spitzer carries “two wrist watches.” See Clocks and Watches.
- “all orient pearls”: Orient pearls are the most lustrous, once brought from the East: “Ransack the ocean for orient pearl” (Christopher Marlowe, Doctor Faustus 1.1). See Pearls and Jewels.
- “one eye burning to starboard, one to larboard”: Larboard, the old word for the left side of a ship, sounded so much like starboard that the Royal Navy replaced it with “port” in 1844. See The Sea and Water.
- “Racehorse, lost in the China Sea”: Racehorse, lost in the China Sea may refer to HMS Racehorse in 1864 which sank off the China coast.
    - The gunvessel ran aground near Chefoo, now Yantai, on November 4, 1864, and 99 of her 108 men were lost.
- “marine angels blowing mother-of-pearl horns”: Triton blows his conch shell to call back the waters of the flood (Ovid, Metamorphoses 1.333-342). See Greek Mythology.
- “ships sailing into port with no one on board, the table set with plates of gold”: See the Mary Celeste, found adrift in 1872 with no one aboard, in the Chapter 24 resources.
- “Oceanus which sank”: Oceanus was a Titan son of Uranus and Gaia and the husband of his sister Tethys in Greek mythology. He is the father of the water gods and the great river that circles the world. See Greek Mythology.
- “Arcturus, found drifting”: Arcturus is the brightest star in the northern constellation of Bootes. See Astronomy.
- “Ptarmigan, swallowed”: Ptarmigan is a bird in the grouse subfamily. See Birds.
    - Her captain “frozen in the snow… while writing his last log” recalls the legend of the Octavius. See the Chapter 9 resources. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “Nautilus, turned upside down”: Nautilus is the name of Captain Nemo’s submarine in Jules Verne’s Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea (1870) and of the first nuclear submarine, which passed under the North Pole in 1958.
    - A ship “turned upside down before she ever left harbor” recalls the Swedish warship Vasa, which capsized in Stockholm harbor on her maiden voyage in 1628 and was

raised in 1961, as Mr. Spitzer would raise all the sunken ships of the world.

- “Roman galleys sunk with Egyptian slaves chained to their oars”: The chained galley slave belongs more to Lew Wallace’s Ben-Hur (1880) and its 1959 film than to Rome. Ancient war galleys were rowed mostly by free men, and slaves were pressed to the oars only in emergencies (Lionel Casson, “Galley Slaves,” Transactions of the American Philological Association 97, 1966).
- “sunk off Peiraeus”: Peiraeus may refer to Piraeus which is a port city within the Athens urban area.
    - The Antikythera wreck, found by sponge divers in 1900, carried marble and bronze statues bound for Rome, and bronze statues of Apollo and Athena were dug up at Piraeus in 1959.
- “many old ferry boats capsized”: The excursion steamer Eastland rolled over at her dock in the Chicago River in 1915, and 844 people drowned.
- “He had sought for the elements of harmony, but this was chaos”: Aristoxenus wrote the Elements of Harmony in the fourth century BC, the oldest Greek treatise on music to survive. See Music and Composers.
- “bringing with it the fullness of days”: “So Job died, being old and full of days” (Job 42:17). See The Book of Job.
- “Should not eternal recurrence be the one law of life”: Nietzsche calls it the “moment.” There is an eternal path ahead and behind, and what one has is this moment. He wrote about it in Thus Spoke Zarathustra, in “On the Vision and the Riddle” (Part 3, 1884), and first put the thought experiment in The Gay Science 341 (1882). If one had to live this life over again for all eternity with all its ups and downs, pains and pleasures, would it be tolerable? Would one still choose life, to live? It is a thought experiment for self-reflection and a test of how life affirming a person really is. Nietzsche had the idea of “amor fati” (love of fate) (Ecce Homo, 1888). One would come to love one’s fate, the life that one has led, with a willingness to accept all of it. The Ubermensch is Nietzsche’s concept of a higher type of human or humanity that is connected to eternal recurrence. A person who is capable of loving their life, even in its entirety, is more likely to reach this state. Nietzsche also believed that eternal recurrence would force people to confront the meaninglessness of conventional morality and encourage them to create their own values. By contemplating eternal recurrence, Nietzsche hoped to spark an interest in personal values which would lead to a more authentic and fulfilling life. See Nietzsche.
    - Compare the Wiccan Rede, “An it harm none, do what ye will,” first made public by Doreen Valiente in 1964. Nietzsche set no such limit.
- “the great lamp-lighter going his rounds”: God and light have been closely linked in the Bible. Lamps are lit in many religions around the world, as at Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, and at Hanukkah. Maria Susanna Cummins’s The Lamplighter (1854) was a bestseller. It is about an orphan that is taken in by a lamplighter and raised with love and taught virtue and religious faith. See The Bible.

    - Its success provoked Hawthorne's complaint that "America is now wholly given over to a d——d mob of scribbling women" (Nathaniel Hawthorne, letter to William D. Ticknor, January 19, 1855). See American Writers.
- "Perhaps she had passed under the midnight rainbow": A moonbow, or lunar rainbow, forms when bright moonlight strikes falling rain or spray.
- "through the pearly gates": "And the twelve gates were twelve pearls" (Revelation 21:21). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- "Life was a dream, and death was another dream": Life as a dream is explored in philosophical and spiritual contexts which suggests one's waking life is a subjective experience and may not be a true representation of reality. Some interpret death as not an end but as a transition into another state of being, for example, a dream or a higher level of awareness. Dreams are often considered symbolic reflections of subconscious thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Dreams could be a mirror of waking life where concepts, themes, and memories are explored in a different way.
    - "¿Qué es la vida? Un frenesí… que toda la vida es sueño, y los sueños, sueños son," "What is life? A frenzy… for all life is a dream, and dreams are dreams" (Pedro Calderón de la Barca, La vida es sueño, 1635).
    - "All that we see or seem / Is but a dream within a dream" (Edgar Allan Poe, "A Dream Within a Dream," 1849). See Edgar Allan Poe.
- "But she had outlived her fame": Cousin Hannah dying in obscurity is reminiscent of Shulamith Firestone's funeral where mourners grappled with the idea that a whole generation of feminists had been unable to thrive in the world they had done so much to create (Susan Faludi, "Death of a Revolutionary," The New Yorker, April 15, 2013). See Women's Suffrage.
    - Young said, "I thought of Margaret Fuller in relation to not only Cousin Hannah, but some of the other characters." Fuller drowned off Fire Island in 1850 (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See the Chapter 31 resources. See Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- "the sound of an ivory horn far away": Roland's oliphant, his ivory horn, is blown too late at Roncevaux to save him (The Song of Roland, about 1100).
- "camp-followers": Women followed armies as cooks, laundresses, and nurses. Mary Ludwig Hays, remembered as "Molly Pitcher," is said to have taken her husband's place at a cannon at Monmouth in 1778. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "She was that Jason who had not found the golden fleece": Jason and the Argonauts did win the golden fleece (Apollonius of Rhodes, Argonautica). Hannah, who "had not found the Holy Grail or any object of her quest," is a Jason who failed. See Greek Mythology.
- "that beau sabreur of suffrage": Beau sabreur means a dashing adventurer. Literally it is the "handsome swordsman." The title belonged to Joachim Murat, Napoleon's cavalry marshal, a Joachim like Mr. Spitzer. See Napoleon and Wellington.

- “for the sheath had outlived the sword”: Young inverts Byron: “For the sword outwears its sheath, / And the soul wears out the breast” (Lord Byron, “So, we’ll go no more a roving,” 1817). Hannah, too, “could dance no more, go no more.” See Romantic Poets.
- “the Peloponnesian Wars”: Peloponnesian Wars was an ancient Greek war fought between Athens and the Peloponnesian League (Sparta). It lasted from 431 to 404 BC.
- “the Siege of Rome by Hannibal”: The Siege of Rome by Hannibal may refer to the Second Punic War where Hannibal tried to lure the Romans to fight. Hannibal never besieged Rome. In 211 BC he marched to its gates to draw the Romans away from Capua, and “Hannibal ad portas,” “Hannibal at the gates,” became a Roman byword for terror.
- “the Saracen wars”: The Saracen wars may refer to the Arab raid against Rome. In 846 Saracen raiders sacked the basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul outside the walls. See the Saracen entry in the Chapter 40 resources.
- “the Civil War”: The Civil War may refer to the American Civil War (1861-1865), fought between the United States and the Confederate states, which seceded to preserve slavery. See The Civil War.
- “the Boer War”: The Boer War may refer to the Second Boer war when Boer irregulars and militia attacked colonial settlements in nearby British colonies.
    - The British burned Boer farms and held Boer women and children and Black Africans in concentration camps, where some 26,000 Boers, most of them children, and at least 14,000 Black Africans died. Emily Hobhouse exposed the camps, and the suffrage leader Millicent Fawcett headed the women’s commission sent to inspect them in 1901 (Thomas Pakenham, The Boer War, 1979). See Women’s Suffrage.
- “many Balkan wars”: Balkan wars are a series of conflicts that took place in 1912 and 1913.
- “Custer’s Last Stand”: Custer’s Last Stand also known as Battle of Little Bighorn or Battle of Greasy Grass between Plains Indians and the US military. On June 25-26, 1876, Lakota, Northern Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors destroyed Custer’s command.
- “Sheridan’s March”: Sheridan’s March may join two campaigns of 1864: Sheridan’s Ride, Philip Sheridan’s gallop to rally his army at Cedar Creek, told in Thomas Buchanan Read’s poem “Sheridan’s Ride” (1864), and William Tecumseh Sherman’s March to the Sea through Georgia. See The Civil War.
- “Paul Revere’s ride”: “Paul Revere’s Ride” is a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, written in 1860 and published in 1861, that commemorates the actions of Paul Revere on April 18, 1775. William Dawes and Samuel Prescott rode that night too, and Revere was captured before he reached Concord. See American Writers.
    - Sixteen-year-old Sybil Ludington is said to have ridden some forty miles through what is now Putnam County, New York, on the night of April 26, 1777, to rouse her father’s militia after the British burned Danbury. The story first appeared in print in

Martha J. Lamb's History of the City of New York (1880), and Paula D. Hunt found no reliable evidence of the ride from the time ("Sybil Ludington, the Female Paul Revere: The Making of a Revolutionary War Heroine," New England Quarterly 88, no. 2, 2015). See Women's Suffrage.

- "the sleeping Minute Men": Minute Men were civilian colonists who independently formed militia companies to fight during the American Revolution.
- "the Siege of Atlanta": The Siege of Atlanta may refer to the Battle of Atlanta during the American Civil War. Sherman took the city on September 2, 1864. See The Civil War.
- "camel troops": The United States Army tried camels in the Southwest from 1856, at the urging of Secretary of War Jefferson Davis.
- "the burning of Carthage": The burning of Carthage may refer to the Siege of Carthage or the Third Punic War where Romans attacked and destroyed Carthage. The city fell in 146 BC.
- "the taking of Venice": Napoleon Bonaparte took Venice in May 1797, ending the thousand-year Republic, and handed it to Austria by the Treaty of Campo Formio that October. See Napoleon and Wellington.
- "Cousin Hannah as the great bloomer girl": Amelia Bloomer's The Lily promoted the loose trousers worn under a short skirt in 1851, and the costume took her name. See Young's account to Studs Terkel of the bloomer girls who shed their skirts, in the Chapter 38 resources. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts and Women's Suffrage.
- "like Napoleon on the eve of a battle": Napoleon was a French military and political leader who rose to prominence during the French Revolution. Jacques-Louis David painted him with his hand in his waistcoat in The Emperor Napoleon in His Study at the Tuileries (1812). See Napoleon and Wellington.
- "greater than Waterloo": Waterloo may refer to Napoleon who was defeated in the Battle of Waterloo by the Duke of Wellington. The battle was fought on June 18, 1815. See Napoleon and Wellington.
- "Cousin Hannah launching a balloon": Sophie Blanchard, the first woman to make her living as a balloonist, died in 1819 when fireworks set her hydrogen balloon alight over Paris.
- "wearing an old boater and striped shirt": The straw boater and the shirtwaist were the uniform of the New Woman and the Gibson Girl of the 1890s. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- "leading the needle workers to strike albeit she was the owner of a mill": In the Uprising of the 20,000, the New York shirtwaist strike of 1909, wealthy women such as Alva Belmont and Anne Morgan, the "mink brigade," paid bail and fees for the strikers. Earlier, the Lowell mill girls of Massachusetts turned out in 1834 and 1836. Harriet Hanson Robinson, who led her room out at eleven, became a suffragist (Harriet H. Robinson, Loom and Spindle, 1898). See Women's Suffrage.
- "dressed as an Arab king, wearing a burnoose": Lady Hester Stanhope (1776-1839) dressed as a Turkish man and ruled her household in Lebanon, and Isabelle Eberhardt

rode the Sahara dressed as a man. See the Chapter 36 resources.

- “the narrow channels of a lost cause”: Suffrage for women took a hundred years and many rights for women while Young was alive were not in place. Women and children were still property. Seeing again the erosion of these rights and the incompleteness of them worldwide (2025 saw Bangladesh Islamists protesting the expansion of human rights to women and a general attempt at rolling back gender rights for most parts of the world) one can see where there has to be a complete love (obsession) for something that might never be achieved in one lifetime. See Women’s Suffrage.
    - From Seneca Falls in 1848 to the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 took seventy-two years, and many Black women in the South could not vote until the Voting Rights Act of 1965, more than a century after Seneca Falls.
    - In Young’s lifetime a married woman could be refused credit in her own name until the Equal Credit Opportunity Act of 1974, Louisiana’s “head and master” law let a husband dispose of jointly owned property without his wife’s consent until Kirchberg v. Feenstra (1981), and marital rape was not a crime in every state until 1993.
    - On May 3, 2025, Hefazat-e-Islam rallied in Dhaka demanding that Bangladesh’s Women’s Affairs Reform Commission and its report be scrapped as “contrary to Islamic teachings” (2025 Hefazat Grand Rally, Wikipedia).
- “For where had her great struggles reached”: Mr. Spitzer questions what war has truly accomplished. He reflects on the battles of Cousin Hannah, a fierce and courageous leader in suffrage battles and other struggles, and wonders what her struggles achieved, for she seemed to be dying of a broken heart, forgotten by the world she had fought to change.
- “one Vulcan of the forge”: Vulcan, Hephaestus to the Greeks, is the smith of the gods. See Greek Mythology.
- “organized the pickets around an old town clock”: See the Silent Sentinels of the National Woman’s Party, who picketed the White House in 1917, in the Chapter 32 resources. Arrested pickets were beaten and choked at the Occoquan Workhouse on the “Night of Terror,” November 14-15, 1917, and Alice Paul was force-fed. See Women’s Suffrage.
- “in many hysterical and nervous persons”: Since ancient Greece, hysteria was an umbrella term for numerous symptoms that reinforced harmful stereotypes about women, sex, and gender. Often it was used to pathologize everything men found unmanageable in women. See the hysteria entry in the Chapter 2 resources. Freud and Breuer published Studies on Hysteria in 1895, and the diagnosis was dropped from the American Psychiatric Association’s manual (DSM-III) in 1980. See Freud and Jung.
- “the crystalization of one sad, wild moment”: Miss Havisham stopped her clocks at the moment she was jilted. See the Chapter 4 resources. Hannah reverses her, leaving the bridegroom at the church door. See Clocks and Watches.

- “pictures of the Taj Mahal”: Taj Mahal is an ivory-white marble mausoleum in Agra, India. Shah Jahan built it as a tomb for his wife Mumtaz Mahal, who died in 1631.
- “two ragged mountain climbers climbing Mt. Everest”: George Mallory and Andrew Irvine were last seen climbing toward the summit of Everest on June 8, 1924, and vanished. Edmund Hillary and Tenzing Norgay reached the top in 1953. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “No one net could ever drag in all the stars”: “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind” (Matthew 13:47). See The Bible.
- “this sublunar world”: For Aristotle, all change and decay belong to the world below the moon, while the heavens above it are unchanging (On the Heavens 1). See Aristotle.
- “Forever would a lost psyche wander down the wind”: While death is inevitable there are different forms of immortality, covered above, and St. Augustine’s perspective where he emphasized the eternal significance of the “hour of death” and the importance of being prepared for it since one has been promised forgiveness but not necessarily the time: “No one has promised you that you are going to be alive tomorrow” (Augustine, Sermon 40.5, trans. Edmund Hill, 1990). See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “For every being, Mr. Spitzer had observed, must contain its opposite”: “And as the same thing there exists in us living and dead and the waking and the sleeping and young and old” (Heraclitus, fragment 88). See the philosophy of reversals in the Chapter 37 resources. See Heraclitus and Flux.
- “Only the out-croppings had been seen”: “The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water” (Ernest Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon, 1932). See American Writers.
- “she was Hamid in the East”: One of the Beautiful names of Allah, al Hamid means the praiseworthy, laudable one, the object of all praise.
    - Hannah, from the Hebrew for grace, is the mother of Samuel in 1 Samuel 1. See The Bible.
- “struck fear and trembling”: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12), the source of Kierkegaard’s title Fear and Trembling (1843). See The Bible.
- “each who dies must die twice”: “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Revelation 20:14). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “was solitary as the ace of hearts”: Hearts is the suit of love. See the ace of spades under “he who had played his last spade,” below. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “the difference between right and left”: Nineveh held “more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand” (Jonah 4:11). See The Bible.
- “Here comes the bride”: The tune is the Bridal Chorus from Wagner’s Lohengrin (1850). See the Chapter 2 resources. See Music and Composers.

- “it was the gentleman who left the bride at the church door”: A jilted woman could sue for breach of promise. Indiana, Young’s home state, became the first to abolish such suits in 1935, by a law sponsored by Roberta West Nicholson, and other states followed with “heart balm” laws. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “the chief victim of the harem system”: Another argument for equal rights between men and women is that men would also benefit. Men would have more freedom to express themselves through careers, taking family time, parental leave, and flexible work schedules. Men will not be pressured to conform to the stereotypical male.
- “the caliph who said that he was in a cage”: Ottoman princes were confined for life in the Kafes, “the Cage,” of the Topkapı Palace from the seventeenth century.
- “a secret woman, a bride”: Young told Studs Terkel that the woman behind Cousin Hannah brought home sealed trunks for forty years, and at her death each held a bridal trousseau: “She had a dream too” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See the Chapter 31 resources and Chapter 43. See Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “Where, he wondered, was the great tent-maker now?”: Omar Khayyam’s name means tentmaker. See the Chapter 43 resources. Paul, too, was a tentmaker: “for by their occupation they were tentmakers” (Acts 18:3). See The Bible.
- “creeping under some great skirt or crinoline”: See the crinoline in the Chapter 41 resources. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “like a winding shroud”: In Islamic burial practices the body is wrapped in a plain, usually white shroud.
- “with their faces covered like Ahaseuris”: Ahaseuris or Ahasureus was a king and the husband of Esther in the Bible. In Esther it is Haman’s face that is covered as he is condemned: “As the word went out of the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face” (Esther 7:8). See the Ahasuerus entry in the Chapter 40 resources. See The Bible.
- “Good-night and good-morning”: In Arabic the formal phrase is “Tusbah ala Khair” which can be translated to “may you wake up to a good morning” or wishing someone goodnight and good morning. The answer is “Wa inta min ahlu,” “and you are of its people.”
- “might there be resurrection and eternal life”: “I am the resurrection, and the life” (John 11:25). See The Bible.
- “he who had played his last spade”: The ace of spades has long been called the death card. Peron was a gambler: in Young’s first draft “Mr. Spitzer knew that he was really Peyron the gambler.” See the Chapter 36 resources. See Gambling and Playing Cards and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “death, like love, makes for drawing into a narrow house”: The narrow house is the grave: “And breathless darkness, and the narrow house” (William Cullen Bryant, “Thanatopsis,” 1821). See American Writers.
- “the ideal immortality from his point of view”: There are different views on immortality and what that looks like. Many beliefs and religions focus on the individual’s soul or

spirit after death. In Buddhism there is a state of no-self (Anatta) where there is no permanent, unchanging self or essence, including the individual. There may be some kind of continuation after death but it is not a separate, conscious existence. Non-personal immortality is where philosophers and thinkers believe there may be a collective consciousness with or without an individual component. Symbolic immortality is where immortality lies in one's legacy, impact, and memory is what is remembered after death. This forms a sort of immortality through history. See Buddhism.
    - Mr. Spitzer's ideal is the resurrection of the body of the Apostles' Creed: "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:44). See The Bible.
- "waiting for the spirit to return": "I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished" (Matthew 12:44). See The Bible.
- "Perhaps it was the lackey moth.": The lackey moth is named for its caterpillar's bright stripes, like a footman's livery. See Butterflies and Moths.
- "no one so expert as he in conducting a dying soul on its last journey": Hermes Psychopompos, the guide of souls, led the dead to the underworld, and Charon ferried them over. See the psychopomp in the Chapter 32 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- "uridulations": Uridulations appears in no dictionary. It is almost certainly a printing error for undulations, since the curtain is "blowing with long, slow" waves. Ululation, a long, high-pitched trilling cry, is another possibility.
- "many polarities reversing themselves": The earth's magnetic poles have reversed many times. Fred Vine and Drummond Matthews read the reversals in the striped rocks of the sea floor in 1963 ("Magnetic Anomalies over Oceanic Ridges," Nature 199, 1963). See the reversals in the Chapter 39 resources. See Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos.
- "the deaf bell-ringer ringing these tides": Victor Hugo's Quasimodo, bell-ringer of Notre-Dame, was deafened by his bells (The Hunchback of Notre-Dame, 1831). See Silence and Deafness.
- "a dim-eyed marble Aphrodite": Aphrodite is an ancient Greek goddess associated with love, lust, beauty, pleasure, passion and procreation. Hannah keeps her among the war trophies. See Greek Mythology.
- "dust to crystal dust": See "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust" in the Chapter 26 resources.
- "never by robin redbreast covering him with the autumn leaf": "Call for the robin-red-breast and the wren, / Since o'er shady groves they hover, / And with leaves and flowers do cover / The friendless bodies of unburied men" (John Webster, The White Devil 5.4, 1612). In the ballad of the Babes in the Wood, robins cover the dead children with leaves. See Birds and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- "acting not only against the human law but the divine law": Mr. Spitzer is expressing patriarchy's upheaval if women's perspectives are allowed. In a patriarchal society these changes go against globally established religion and nature.

- “flit from spa to spa under her great white umbrella”: Catherine takes the waters “under many white umbrellas” in the Chapter 39 resources. See The Umbrella.
- “She had tented but for a night”: See Longfellow’s cares that “fold their tents, like the Arabs, / And as silently steal away” in the Chapter 29 resources. See American Writers.
- “came like a thief in the night”: “The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2). See The Bible.
- “how fickle, how irresponsible this great lady was”: Francis I, King of France, is credited with saying, “Woman is always fickle; foolish is he who trusts her.” Brantôme says Francis I scratched “Souvent femme varie, bien fol est qui s’y fie” on a window at Chambord. Victor Hugo gave the line to the king in Le roi s’amuse (1832), and Verdi turned it into “La donna è mobile” in Rigoletto (1851). See Music and Composers.
- “What mad dance was life, and what madder dance was death”: The dance of death, the medieval Danse Macabre, in which Death leads every rank of the living, became Saint-Saëns’s tone poem Danse macabre (1874). See the Chapter 43 resources. See Music and Composers.
- “this whirligig of leaves and stars”: “And thus the whirligig of time brings in his revenges” (Twelfth Night 5.1). See Shakespeare.
- “she being that ivory door”: See the gates of horn and ivory in the Chapter 41 resources. See Homer’s Epics.
- “trailing her clouds of glory”: See Wordsworth’s “trailing clouds of glory” in the Chapter 39 resources. See Romantic Poets.
- “huntress moon with her dogs”: Artemis, Diana to the Romans, is goddess of the moon and the hunt, and her hounds tore apart Actaeon, who saw her bathing. See Greek Mythology.
- “where was now her armor of virtue”: See “the whole armour of God” (Ephesians 6:11) in the Chapter 20 resources. See The Bible.
- “the strength of this snow maiden”: In the Russian tale of Snegurochka, the Snow Maiden, she melts when love enters her heart (Alexander Ostrovsky’s play, 1873; Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera, 1882). See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Music and Composers.
- “should not all be as brides going to the bridegroom”: “Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him” (Matthew 25:6). See The Bible.
- “Perhaps the secret casket contained a vapor and not a jewel”: Morocco opens the golden casket and finds a skull: “All that glisters is not gold” (The Merchant of Venice 2.7). See Shakespeare.
- “the void calling to the void”: “Deep calleth unto deep” (Psalm 42:7). See the Chapter 1 resources. See The Bible.
- “a few Promethean sparks of life”: Promethean means bold, creative, or life-giving, like Prometheus. See Greek Mythology.

    - Prometheus was a Titan god of fire in Ancient Greek who stole fire from the gods and gave it to humanity.
- “No slave might wait on the great Abolitionist”: The suffrage movement grew out of abolition. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott met at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840, where the women delegates were refused seats, and they called the Seneca Falls convention in 1848. See Women’s Suffrage.
    - The movement split over the Fifteenth Amendment. Stanton wrote, “Think of Patrick and Sambo and Hans and Yung Tung who do not know the difference between a monarchy and a republic,” making laws for Lucretia Mott and other learned women (Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Manhood Suffrage,” The Revolution, December 24, 1868).
    - Frederick Douglass answered at the American Equal Rights Association in May 1869: “When women, because they are women, are hunted down through the cities of New York and New Orleans; when they are dragged from their houses and hung upon lamp-posts… then they will have an urgency to obtain the ballot equal to our own” (History of Woman Suffrage, vol. 2, 1882, 382). See Lynching and Racial Violence.
- “Oh, is there no pavilion to hide me from the storm?”: “For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion” (Psalm 27:5), and “thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion from the strife of tongues” (Psalm 31:20). See The Bible.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Adipose

Fatty.

Alabaster

A fine, smooth, white stone used for carving.

Anvil

The heavy iron block on which a blacksmith hammers hot metal into shape.

Apocryphal

Of doubtful truth.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Argosy

A large merchant ship, or a fleet of them.

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Ashes of roses

A grayish pink; also a scent of roses.

Asphodel

A lily-like flower that, in Greek myth, covers the meadows of the underworld where ordinary souls go after death.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Athwart

Across, from side to side; also, against.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Barouche

A fashionable four-wheeled carriage with a folding half-hood and two seats facing each other.

Blackamoor

An old term for a Black African or any dark-skinned person, common in European art and in decorative figures of Black servants. It is now considered offensive.

Buccaneer

A pirate.

Burnoose

A hooded Arab cloak.

Caliph

The title of the chief Muslim ruler, understood as a successor to the Prophet Muhammad.

Casket

A small, often ornate box for jewels or valuables. In American usage, also a coffin, so Young’s “casket containing no jewel” carries both meanings.

Catafalque

A raised platform on which a coffin lies in state.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Certitude

Certainty.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Congealed

Thickened or stiffened, as with cold.

Contraband

Forbidden; smuggled.

Contrariety

Opposition; contrariness.

Cordage

Ropes, especially the rigging of a ship.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Cuirass

Armor for the chest and back.

Declivity

A downward slope.

Delusive

Misleading; giving a false impression.

Deprivation

The lack or loss of something needed.

Despotic

Tyrannical.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Distraught

Deeply upset.

Dubious

Doubtful.

Echoic

Echoing.

Eclat

Brilliance; showy success.

Egregiously

Outstandingly; shockingly.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Elicit

To draw out.

Elixir

A medicine sold as a cure-all.

Emaciated

Wasted away, very thin.

Empearled

Adorned with pearls, or having a pearly sheen.

Enigma

A mystery or puzzle; a person or thing that is hard to understand.

Epithalamium

A song or poem celebrating a marriage.

Eunuch

A man who has been castrated. Eunuchs were employed for centuries to guard harems and to serve as officials in royal courts in the Middle East, China, and Byzantium. See The eunuch (Ch 35).

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Fitful

Starting and stopping; irregular.

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Grimace

A twisted expression of the face.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Hen-pecked

Nagged and ruled by one’s wife.

Hypothetical

Supposed; existing only as an idea.

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Intrepid

Fearless.

Jasper

An opaque, often red, variety of quartz.

Keel and list

To keel over is to capsize, with the keel, the ship’s backbone along the bottom, turning upward. To list is to lean to one side, usually from water taken on.

Lacuna

A blank space or missing part; plural lacunae.

Larboard

The old word for the left side of a ship.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Maharajah

A great king or prince in India. From the Sanskrit for “great king.”

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Minuscular

Tiny. Young’s form of minuscule.

Monsoon

A seasonal wind in South Asia that brings months of heavy rain.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Muezzin

The man who calls Muslims to prayer.

Mummified

Preserved by embalming and drying, as in ancient Egypt.

Myopic

Nearsighted.

Nautilus

A sea creature with a spiral shell. The paper nautilus is a small octopus whose female makes a thin, papery shell.

Nocturnal

Of or happening in the night.

Numerologist

One who reads hidden meanings in numbers.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Ogre

A man-eating giant of folktale.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Pavilion

A large tent; a light ornamental building.

Peregrine

A wanderer or pilgrim; also a falcon.

Perpendicular

Upright; at a right angle to the horizon.

Petticoat

An underskirt.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Precipitous

Very steep; headlong.

Prepossessing

Making a good first impression.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Punctilious

Exact in matters of etiquette and detail.

Rapacious

Greedy; predatory.

Retort

A glass vessel with a long bent neck, used by alchemists for distilling.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Reveille

The bugle call that wakes soldiers in the morning.

Scrutiny

Close, searching examination.

Sedimentary

Settled out like sediment.

Seine

To fish with a large hanging net.

Sequin

A small shining disk sewn on clothing; first the zecchino, a Venetian gold coin.

Sheik

An Arab chief or elder.

Skiff

A small, light boat for rowing or sailing. Young's "skiff moon" is a crescent shaped like one.

Sloop

A sailboat with one mast.

Soughing

Making a soft sighing or rushing sound, like wind in trees.

Spangled

Covered with spangles, small glittering ornaments.

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Sublunar

Beneath the moon; earthly.

Supernumerary

Extra; more than the number needed. In the theater, an extra with no lines.

Swooned

Fainted.

Taper

A slender candle.

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Testamentary

Of a will or testament.

Testimonial

A formal statement given as evidence or proof of something.

Tonnage

The size or carrying capacity of a ship.

Torpor

A sluggish, heavy, half-asleep state.

Transact

To carry out or carry through. Young uses it for crossing a distance, as in “transacted the gulf between two worlds.”

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Tumult

A loud, confused uproar.

Voluminous

Large, full, or great in volume.

Will-o’-the-wisp

A flickering light over marshes that leads travelers astray; anything that deludes.

Chapter 43

Summary

In silk hat and black cape, Mr. Spitzer keeps watch at Cousin Hannah’s deathbed, unsure whether he himself is living or dead. Hannah’s dying becomes a dance of death. She raves through deserts, mountains, and snow, asks whether the lid of the sky is raising or lowering, and speaks to the Emperor Tiberius, a blacksmith, a golden archer, and the Black Moor she calls her love, asking whether she is the anvil or the hammer. The suffrage captain who scorned feminine frivolity longs now for silk skirts, gold-fringed parasols, and her mirror, and Mr. Spitzer wonders whether she had always been “this pale Don Juan beneath her mask.” She searches for “my nymph, my lovely girl,” “my wild swan girl,” and Mr. Spitzer sees her going down like an old ship that no calker can mend. At the end she cries for “my skirt I lost so long ago” and asks, “should love be extinguished by death?”

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Cousin Hannah

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Decay and Ruin · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Love · Memory and the Past · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Clouds and Storms · Fireflies · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · Mountains · Music and Instruments · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Buddhism · Freud and Jung · Hinduism · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory

Allusions: Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Music and Composers · Shakespeare · The Bible · Women’s Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with vivid descriptions of Cousin Hannah’s struggle through dreamlike, stormy landscapes symbolizing her life’s battles and approaching death. The imagery of crossing deserts, climbing mountains, and clouds emphasizes the arduous journey of life and death, and the suffragette’s wild screams indicate confusion and loss of self-identity near death.

- It is revealed that even this great lady “wept if a wandering snowflake touched her hand” and was “fragile as were all mortal things,” prone to “wild dreams, visions, fantasies, presentiments, forebodings, fears of the unknown.” This humanizes her, showing vulnerability despite her public strength and ideals.
- Mr. Spitzer himself is uncertain of his own state, “not sure who he was, whether living or dead,” and reflects on the confusion about who is dying and the nature of death. His belief that “the dead cast no vote” and his abstention from voting reflect his detachment from worldly affairs.
- The narrative explores death as both an ending and a beginning, a “great crucible” where opposites meet, and where “death was that which blew us all along.” It describes Cousin Hannah’s cries and visions as part of a larger metaphysical process, suggesting death is not peace but a storm or dance of contradictory forces.
- Cousin Hannah speaks to various mythic and historical figures like the Emperor Tiberius, a blacksmith, a golden archer, a blackamoor, asking profound questions about identity and fate (“Am I the anvil which is struck or the hammer which strikes?”). This symbolizes her grappling with agency, power, and the unknown as life fades.
- The blackamoor, a mysterious figure she calls her love, and the “great lamp-lighter” who might light her way, appear repeatedly in her delirium. This imagery suggests a guide or companion in the transition from life to death, blending cultural and mystical symbols.
- Mr. Spitzer reflects on how Cousin Hannah’s ravings mix ancient history, myth, and personal memories, with cities, armies, and landscapes blending into a timeless dreamscape. There is uncertainty whether these are real memories, dreams, or hallucinations, emphasizing the blurred boundary between life and death, past and present.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Cousin Hannah cannot decide “whether the lid was lowering or raising.” What does the chapter gain by leaving the direction of the lid unresolved, and how does the question change when the lid becomes the lid of the sky?
- Hannah asks the blacksmith, “Am I the anvil which is struck or the hammer which strikes?” In what ways has the suffrage captain been both over her life? Which does she seem to be at the end?
- Hannah’s visions travel to Ur, Nineveh, Crete, and Babylon. Mr. Spitzer prefers that she speak of the remote past, things “made safe by their remoteness,” rather than of tomorrow’s weather or the next election. Why might the far past feel safer than the near future at a deathbed?
- Near its end the chapter turns to the image of an old ship coming apart, and Mr. Spitzer thinks that “not even the greatest calker could calk her now.” How does this

sinking ship compare with Hannah's own question, "Where's my figurehead?" and with Catherine's figurehead in Chapter 40?

Characters

- Mr. Spitzer keeps his "attitudes of dignity, remorse, patience" because "someone must maintain spiritual equilibrium." Is his calm a gift to the dying woman, a defense for himself, or both?
- Mr. Spitzer admits he is "perhaps not the best of all possible witnesses to death-bed scenes" and has "a tendency to keep things alive after they were gone." How does an uncertain witness change the weight of Hannah's last words?
- Mr. Spitzer suspects the Black Moor "might be a man and not a woman," and Hannah searches for "my nymph, my lovely girl." What does the chapter suggest about the love Hannah denied, and why might it surface only at the end?
- Mr. Spitzer notices "pawn figures moving not only from dream to dream of the dreamer but from dreamer to dreamer," so that the Black Moor resembles the black coachman of Catherine's opium dreams. What would it mean for dreams to be shared, and how does this connect to his sense that "no one could simply be himself"?

Connections

- Hannah spent her life refusing feminine frivolities, yet she cries for the skirt "which I took off so long ago." How does the skirt work as a symbol of the self she set aside for the cause? Does the chapter mourn that choice or honor it?
- In Hannah's heaven "the white hen crows," and "none shall stop her." How does this reversal of the barnyard order echo the work of the suffrage movement? See Women's Suffrage.
- Hannah says, "Then put out the light," and asks whether the turban-winder has come to strangle her. If she is casting herself as Desdemona, what does that reveal about how she has understood love and the men she fought against? See Shakespeare.
- The chapter is titled "The Dance of Death" in the reading guide. How does Hannah's "mad dance" on "a lonely mountain top" compare with the medieval dance of death, in which Death leads every rank of person to the grave? See On the danse macabre (Ch 43).

Reflection

- Mr. Spitzer calls vanity "that which took longest dying" and finds it "in woman's heart as in man's heart" and perhaps "in the heart of God." Is Hannah's cry for her mirror and her skirt a betrayal of her cause, a last joke, or simply a human frailty the chapter refuses to blame her for?
- Mr. Spitzer's understanding "always came too late," arriving "like a gift freely given to one who could not express his appreciation." When does understanding arrive too late

in ordinary life, and is it still worth having?

- “When nothing was possible, all things were made possible.” In what situations does the loss of every option open something new?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- A somber, enigmatic figure who carries a high silk hat and black cape, symbolic of mourning and ritual.
- He is both witness and participant in the suffragette’s dying experience.
- Reflects deeply on life, death, identity, and the nature of existence.
- Struggles with his own sense of being alive or dead, voting or not voting, and the meaning of his presence.
- His observations are philosophical, often pondering the illusions of life and the mysteries beyond death.

Cousin Hannah

- A once powerful figure, now fragile and approaching death.
- Engaged in a fierce, chaotic battle against death, manifested in vivid, surreal visions.
- Experiences wild dreams, hallucinations, and shifting identities in her final hours.
- Struggles with recognition of self and the meaning of life and death.
- Exhibits vanity, fear, ecstasy, confusion, and moments of clarity.
- Her final moments are a “dance of death,” a paradoxical mix of seriousness and frivolity.
- Young called her “Cousin Hannah, the alter ego of the opium lady if she had been set loose in the world” (Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Marguerite Young,” Review of Contemporary Fiction 23, no. 1, Spring 2003 (1989 original)). See Marguerite Young on Her Craft.

Research: Themes

Life, Death, and the Transition Between

See: Death and Mortality

- Death is depicted not as an end but a complex transformation, a journey through storm, cloud, snow, and desert.
- The suffragette’s battle with death is fierce and confusing; death is both a closing and an opening (“Oh, is the lid raising, lowering?”).

- The ambiguity of death and existence is central, with Mr. Spitzer unsure if he or the suffragette is alive or dead.
- Death is associated with loss, revelation, and paradox, often blending into life's experiences.

Memory, Identity, and Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Identity and the Self

- The suffragette's past is fragmented and elusive, mixing real and imagined events.
- Both characters wrestle with who they are and who others have been.
- Dreams and memories flow outside of linear time, suggesting the permeability of identity.
- Reality and illusion are intertwined; the suffragette's visions may be symbolic rather than literal truth.

Vanity and Human Frailty

See: Decay and Ruin

- Despite the gravity of death, vanity persists ("vanity of silken skirts," "great parasols fringed by gold").
- The suffragette clings to images of beauty and love even as she fades.
- The fragility of human existence is highlighted, especially in the face of death.

Love and Loss

See: Love · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- The suffragette expresses deep, eternal love in her delirium, though the identity of lover and beloved is unclear.
- Love and death blur together, raising the question of whether death extinguishes love or transforms it. Her last whispered words ask, "should love be extinguished by death?"
- The paradox of love's endurance beyond death is a poignant motif.

The Role of the Observer

- Mr. Spitzer's role as witness is complicated by his own uncertain status.
- He balances grief with detachment and observation with participation.
- He questions the reliability of memory and perception, acknowledging possible error.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

High Silk Hat & Black Cape (Mr. Spitzer)

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Symbols of mourning, ritual, and his ambiguous status between life and death.

Storm, Snow, Desert, Mountains

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter · Mountains · Clouds and Storms

- Represent the suffragette's internal struggle and the vast unknown of death.

Skirt of Clouds and Waters

See: The Sea and Water · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Clouds and Storms

- Symbolizes beauty, identity, and the suffragette's fading presence.

Black Moor / Blackamoor

See: Shakespeare · The Black Coachman

- A mysterious figure, possibly a lover or phantom, representing the suffragette's complex relationships and desires.

Crystal Casket / Mirror

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- Symbols of self-reflection, identity, and the enigma of existence; the mirror is sought but elusive.

Music (Lute, Harp, Bells)

See: Music and Instruments

- Represents the ethereal, transcendent aspects of life and death; the music continues even as life fades.

Firefly Light / Star

See: Fireflies · Moon and Stars · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Symbolizes hope, guidance, and the fragile spark of life amid darkness.

Bellrope / Bells

See: Music and Instruments

- Represent the passage of time, calling, and the inevitability of death.

Iceberg / Frozen Elements

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Emphasize coldness, isolation, and the slow crumbling of life.

Further notes from the text

- Mr. Spitzer carries his high silk hat, “almost his only God,” and keeps watch unable to help, since he is as one already dead.
- He wonders whether Hannah’s sudden longing for feminine frivolities is a last great joke, a parody of life at the moment life is fading. See Comedy in Chapter 43.
- He had supposed that bodily death and real death would come together. Watching her, he begins to doubt it, and wonders whether the person dying now is someone he has not really seen since his forgotten youth.
- Hannah’s delirium crosses the ancient world, Ur of the Chaldees, Nineveh, Crete, Babylon, and asks for her little boat and her figurehead, linking her dying to Catherine’s image of the figurehead in Chapter 40.
- She cries out to the Black Moor, “beloved of woman,” the figure Mr. Spitzer later connects with the black coachman of Catherine’s dreams.
- Her ravings repeat a paradox that sums up the novel’s method: look not into the things that are, to see the things that are not.
- Near the end he pictures her going down like a ship in a whirlpool, and he is certain he will be on the other shore, not where the wreckage lands. The chapter closes on her whisper that death might be “her life, her love,” and her question, “should love be extinguished by death?”

Research: Resources

- “that high silk hat which was almost his only God”: The high silk hat used to be a clear symbol of authority and status in society. It represented wealth and prestige. Culturally it also represented capitalism, enterprise, and ambition. The first top hats were made of beaver fur felt. From the 1840s silk plush replaced beaver, which gave the silk hat its name. For Mr. Spitzer the hat is “almost his only God.” See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “this great emir of suffrage”: Emir comes from the Arabic amir, meaning commander or prince. It was the title of military leaders and rulers across the Islamic world. Calling Hannah an emir makes her a desert commander, which fits the armies, tents, and camel bells of her deathbed visions.
- “the dead cast no vote”: Padding the rolls with the names of the dead, the “graveyard vote,” was an old charge against city machines such as Tammany Hall. Mr. Spitzer’s brother believed otherwise, and Mr. Spitzer, who has not “been inside a ballot box for years,” sits at the deathbed of a suffrage captain. See Women’s Suffrage.

- “Oh, I am lost! I am saved!”: “I once was lost, but now am found” (John Newton, “Amazing Grace,” Olney Hymns, 1779).
- “Oh, is that you, great lamp-lighter?”: Before electric street lights, a lamplighter walked the streets at dusk with a long pole, lighting each gas lamp, and came back at dawn to put them out. Hannah greets Mr. Spitzer this way when he arrives, and later asks whether “the great lamp-lighter” has come “to light her way through worlds of darkness.” Mr. Spitzer, who has “always tapped at every lamp-post” on his walks, becomes a guide for the dying, yet “not even the great lamp-bearer could light this darkness.” See The lamp-lighter (Ch 29) and On the lamplighter and The Little Prince (Ch 48).
- “So like a palmer she had wandered through this world”: A palmer was a medieval pilgrim who had traveled to the Holy Land and carried back a palm frond as proof. Some palmers had no home and spent their lives traveling between holy sites. The word suits Hannah, whose great cause kept her always on the road and never settled.
- “the auk’s egg”: The great auk was a large flightless seabird of the North Atlantic. Hunters killed the last confirmed pair on the island of Eldey, off Iceland, in June 1844. After its extinction, its eggs became prized collector’s items that sold for large sums at Victorian auctions. Placing the egg among Hannah’s vanities joins beauty to extinction. The Iceland connection also ties it to Mt. Hekla, which appears later in the chapter.
- “the glass barouche”: A barouche was a fashionable four-wheeled carriage of the nineteenth century. It had a folding half-hood and two double seats facing each other, and it was built for being seen in. A barouche made of glass could not exist, which puts it among the vanities that veil and display at once.
- “something almost spontaneously starting up outside of the scheme of time, whether future or past”: Eternalism (philosophy of time) is an approach to the ontological nature of time, which takes the view that all existence in time is equally real, as opposed to presentism or the growing block universe theory of time, in which at least the future is not the same as any other time. Some forms of eternalism give time a similar ontology to that of space, as a dimension, with different times being as real as different places, and future events are “already there” in the same sense other places are already there, and that there is no objective flow of time. It is sometimes referred to as the “block time” or “block universe” theory due to its description of space-time as an unchanging four-dimensional “block,” as opposed to the view of the world as a three-dimensional space modulated by the passage of time (Wikipedia). Mr. Spitzer half suspects that Hannah’s past is not memory at all but a time outside time, and that “one life might contain all.”
    - Hermann Minkowski declared in 1908 that “henceforth space by itself, and time by itself, are doomed to fade away into mere shadows.” When his friend Michele Besso died in 1955, Einstein wrote to Besso’s family, “People like us, who believe in physics, know that the distinction between past, present, and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion” (Albert Einstein, letter of March 21, 1955). See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory.

- “this pale Don Juan beneath her mask”: Don Juan is a legendary, fictional Spanish literature character. He first appeared in a 1630 play, Tirso de Molina’s The Trickster of Seville, and probably most famously in the opera Don Giovanni by Mozart. He was a libertine, womanizer, arrogant, unrepentant, and was punished for these sins. Mr. Spitzer wonders whether Hannah had always been “this pale Don Juan beneath her mask,” the great seducer hidden inside the woman who refused love. See The Pale Don Juan and Music and Composers.
    - Molière’s Dom Juan (1665) and Byron’s unfinished Don Juan (1819-1824), in which the seducer is more often seduced, carried the figure on.
- “the next horse race at Churchill Downs when the track was muddy”: Churchill Downs is the racetrack in Louisville, Kentucky, that opened in 1875 and has hosted the Kentucky Derby ever since. A muddy track favors certain horses and upsets the odds, which is exactly the uncertainty that drew Mr. Spitzer’s gambling brother. Mr. Spitzer judges that this talk of the future would be tactless at a deathbed. See On the Kentucky Derby and Black Jockeys (Ch 80).
- “join the vast majority, just as the Romans said”: The Romans used the phrase “abiit ad plures,” meaning “he has gone to the many,” as a polite way to say someone had died. It appears in Petronius’s Satyricon. The English poet Edward Young used the same idea in his 1721 play The Revenge: “Death joins us to the great majority.” Mr. Spitzer turns the saying around and thinks the city of the dead might be “a smaller city.”
- “Watchman, what hour?”: This is a version of Isaiah 21:11, “Watchman, what of the night?” In the prophecy, someone calls out from the darkness asking how long the night will last, and the watchman answers that “the morning cometh, and also the night.” The verse inspired John Bowring’s 1825 hymn “Watchman, Tell Us of the Night.” Hannah asks it as an old clock strikes, as if the hour of her death were a question someone on the wall could answer.
- “Are they the hooded thirteen apostles?”: The twelve apostles included Judas Iscariot, who betrayed Jesus. Matthias was chosen to take his place (Acts 1:26), and Paul, who came later, is often called the thirteenth apostle. Jesus and the twelve made thirteen at the Last Supper, one root of the old superstition that thirteen at table is unlucky, and Hannah’s “hooded thirteen apostles” picketing the town clock carry that ominous number. In the Eastern tradition there may have been as many as seventy apostles, the seventy whom Jesus “sent them two and two before his face” (Luke 10:1). See The Bible.
- “Is that the black knight?”: In Scott’s Ivanhoe (1819), the Black Knight, “Le Noir Fainéant,” is Richard the Lionheart in disguise. Hannah’s phantoms, too, hide one identity inside another.
- “Did she lift her veil embroidered with the stars”: The veiled goddess of Sais declared, “I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered” (Plutarch, On Isis and Osiris 9, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, 1936). See Ancient Egypt.
- “speaking to a blacksmith who was shoeing her wild horse”: In ancient Greece Hephaestus was the god of blacksmiths and was disabled either at birth or because of

his fall from Mount Olympus. Zeus hurled him from Olympus, and he fell all day until he landed on Lemnos (Iliad 1.590-594). See Greek Mythology.

- “Am I the anvil which is struck or the hammer which strikes?”: In Isaiah 41:7 the craftsmen are encouraged with a job well done when the hammer and anvil work together to make an object. In context the object is an idol, and the prophet is mocking people who build their own gods. Elsewhere the hammer both makes and destroys: “Is not my word like as a fire? saith the LORD; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jeremiah 23:29), and Jael kills Sisera with a hammer and a tent nail (Judges 4:21). See The Bible.
    - Goethe’s second Cophtic Song ends with the choice: rule or serve, suffer or triumph, “Amboß oder Hammer sein,” “be anvil or hammer” (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Kophtisches Lied, Ein Anderes”).
- “the golden archer turning in windy heavens”: Sagittarius, the archer of the zodiac, aims his arrow at the heart of the Scorpion, the red star Antares. See Astronomy.
- “winding, unwinding your turban, the turban moon in the cloud”: A turban is a long cloth wound around the head. Turbans have been worn since around 2350 B.C. (Wikipedia). Hannah sees the moon itself as a turban wound and unwound in the clouds.
- “Is that the rooster crowing?”: “Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice” (Matthew 26:34). Hannah, who denied her love, hears the rooster at the end. See The Bible.
- “what lazar demanding alms”: A lazar is a beggar with a disease, especially leprosy. The word comes from Lazarus, the beggar covered with sores in Luke 16, and it gave its name to the lazaretto, a hospital for contagious diseases. Lazarus of Bethany, who was raised from the dead, also haunts Mr. Spitzer’s world of the living dead. See Lazarus of Bethany (Ch 4).
- “gardens of beautiful odalisques”: An odalisque was a servant woman in an Ottoman harem. The word comes from the Turkish odalık, meaning chambermaid. European painters turned the odalisque into a fantasy of the reclining, veiled woman, most famously in Ingres’s Grande Odalisque of 1814. These are women no man sees “unless he died,” hidden the way Hannah has hidden herself.
- “Mt. Hecla, the iceberg burning with inner fire”: Mt. Hecla or Mt. Hekla is a stratovolcano in Iceland. In medieval Europe it was known as the gateway to Hell, as the Cistercian Herbert of Clairvaux wrote about 1180 in his book of miracles. Mr. Spitzer calls it “the iceberg burning with inner fire” and thinks Hannah was always nearer to it than to “the burning desert sand,” fire hidden under ice.
- “came but with the neap tide”: A neap tide happens twice a month, when the sun and moon pull at right angles to each other at the first and third quarter moon. Neap tides have the smallest difference between high and low water. Young reverses this: Hannah’s “highest tide” arrives with the weakest tide of the month, and her life follows its own rhythm, “harnessed to no moon.”

- “the spokes of the wheel”: Young described the characters in this book as the spokes of a wheel coming out from Miss MacIntosh in the center of the story: “I always thought of Miss MacIntosh as the center of the wheel, the hub,” with the other characters as “the spokes” (Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Marguerite Young,” Review of Contemporary Fiction 23, no. 1, Spring 2003 (1989 original)). In this chapter Mr. Spitzer lets “the spokes of the wheel” extend as far as possible before they reach “the clouded rim of doubt.” See The Wheel and the Spokes and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “the Emperor Tiberius with his trailing purple robes”: Emperor Tiberius or Tiberius Caesar Augustus was the second Roman emperor. He ruled from A.D. 14 to 37, Jesus was crucified during his reign, and he spent his last years withdrawn on the island of Capri. Hannah sees him in “his trailing purple robes,” the color reserved for emperors.
- “Ur of the Chaldees glittering there”: Ur of the Chaldees or Ur Kasdim is a city mentioned in the Bible as the birthplace of Abraham. It stood in southern Mesopotamia, in what is now Iraq. Unlike the cities Mr. Spitzer imagines “buried under the desert sand and never exhumed,” Ur was dug up: the archaeologist Leonard Woolley excavated it between 1922 and 1934 and found its royal tombs. Terah “went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan” (Genesis 11:31). See Genesis.
    - Nineveh was an ancient Assyrian city of Mesopotamia and the capital of the Assyrian Empire. In the Bible, God sends Jonah to preach there: “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city” (Jonah 1:2). It was destroyed in 612 B.C.
    - Crete is the largest and most populous of the Greek islands. It was the home of the Minoan civilization, and in Greek myth it held the labyrinth of the Minotaur. See Greek Mythology.
    - Babylon was the capital of the Babylonian Empire. It was said to hold the Hanging Gardens, it is linked with the Tower of Babel, and the people of Judah were carried there in exile in the 500s B.C.
- “ram’s horn”: The shofar is a trumpet made from a ram’s horn and blown in Jewish worship, especially at Rosh Hashanah. In Joshua 6, priests blow seven ram’s horns and the walls of Jericho fall. Hannah’s “great angel blowing his horn upon a lonely mountain top” also recalls the angels with trumpets in Revelation 8, who announce the end of the world. See On the Battle of Jericho (Ch 59).
- “Was she the burning phoenix or the star?”: The phoenix is the mythical bird that lives for centuries, burns itself on a pyre, and rises again from its own ashes. Herodotus wrote that the Egyptians said it came to Heliopolis every five hundred years. Christians later took it as a symbol of resurrection. For Hannah, who believed in no future life, the question of rising again stays open.
- “Then put out the light”: This echoes Othello, Act 5, Scene 2, where Othello stands over the sleeping Desdemona and says “Put out the light, and then put out the light,” before smothering her in her bed. Several things in Cousin Hannah’s deathbed cries point to the play: she calls to a “Black Moor, beloved of woman,” she asks whether the

turban-winder has come “to strangle me so that I cannot cry out,” and she lies in a bed that has become a deathbed. The suffrage captain, who spent her life refusing the role of wife, casts herself at the end as Shakespeare’s most famous murdered wife. See Shakespeare.

- “None should see the face of love and live”: This echoes Exodus 33:20, where God tells Moses, “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live.” Hannah replaces God with love, which suggests that for her, love was the force too great to look at directly.
- “Comes he not to the dying king?”: In 1 Samuel 16:23, the young David plays the harp for King Saul, and the troubling spirit leaves the king. Hannah calls for her court musician to come with “great gold harp strings,” which places her in the role of a tormented king in need of music. Mr. Spitzer, the musician who hears “the music of the dead,” sits beside her unrecognized.
- “Who blows this great Triton’s shell?”: Triton is a god of the sea in Greek mythology, the son of Poseidon. He blows a conch shell to calm or raise the waves, which is why Hannah asks, “Who blows this great Triton’s shell?” See Triton’s conch in the Chapter 42 resources. See Greek Mythology.
    - Triton shells are a marine mollusk. They are large sea snails named for the god, and their shells have long been blown as trumpets.
- “is it the month of Ramadan?”: Ramadan is the ninth month of the Islamic calendar and a Muslim month of fasting, prayer, and reflection.
- “Is it Shiraz or the sandalwood”: Shiraz is a dark-skinned grape used to produce red wine. Shiraz is also a city in southern Iran, long celebrated as the city of poets, roses, and gardens. The great Persian poets Hafez and Saadi are buried there, which suits Cousin Hannah’s “Shiraz or the sandalwood and the jewel and the incense of a dream.” See Shiraz.
    - Despite the legend that the grape came from Shiraz, DNA testing at the University of California, Davis, in 1998 showed that it is French, a cross of Dureza and Mondeuse Blanche.
- “Or is it the third eye?”: Cousin Hannah asks whether the jewel gleaming in her love’s forehead is “the third eye.” Third eye is a mystical and esoteric concept of a speculative invisible eye on the forehead which provides perception beyond ordinary sight (Wikipedia). In Hindu tradition the god Shiva has a third eye in the center of his forehead, and when it opens it destroys. In one story Shiva burns Kama, the god of love, to ash with it. The forehead point is also the ajna chakra, the seat of inner sight, which the bindi marks. The question ties her lost love to both vision and destruction. See Hinduism.
- “the eighth day of the week”: Eighth day of the week may refer to Burmese Theravada Buddhism where the week has eight days. Wednesday is divided into two parts. Early Christian writers also called the resurrection the “eighth day,” the day after the seven days of creation, and Augustine ends The City of God with the seventh day of rest

leading into “the eighth and eternal day.” It is a time outside ordinary time. See Augustine and Christian Theology and Buddhism.

- “the thirteenth month of the year”: The thirteenth month of the year may refer to the International Fixed Calendar that has thirteen months of 28 days each and the day of the week is constant. A thirteenth month also exists in lunar calendars that add a leap month to catch up with the solar year, such as the second month of Adar in the Hebrew calendar. Like the eighth day, it is a time outside ordinary time.
  - Moses Cotsworth proposed the International Fixed Calendar in 1902, and George Eastman kept the books of the Eastman Kodak Company by it from 1928 to 1989.
- “great dancer in the infinite”: Shiva as Nataraja, Lord of the Dance, dances the universe through creation and destruction within a ring of fire (Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, “The Dance of Shiva,” 1918). See the third eye entry below. See Hinduism.
- “Ah, Black Moor, beloved of woman”: Moors was a term first used by European Christians to designate the Muslim inhabitants of Maghreb, Iberian Peninsula, Malta, and Sicily during the Middle Ages (Wikipedia). Othello is “the Moor of Venice.” The Black Moor becomes a black rooster. See Shakespeare.
- “In heaven the black rooster lays the egg, and the white hen crows”: An old proverb says “A whistling woman and a crowing hen are neither fit for God nor men.” It was used against women who spoke out of their expected place, which makes a crowing hen a fitting image for a suffragette. A rooster laying an egg was considered unnatural and dangerous. Medieval legend held that a rooster’s egg hatched the basilisk, and in Basel in 1474 a rooster accused of laying an egg was tried and burned (E. P. Evans, The Criminal Prosecution and Capital Punishment of Animals, 1906). Hannah’s heaven reverses the order of the barnyard. The hen crows, “and none shall stop her.” See Women’s Suffrage.
- “Forbidden East”: Forbidden East may refer to the Forbidden City in Beijing, the palace of the emperors of imperial China, built in the early 1400s.
- “the men wore skirts, and the ladies wore trousers or bloomers”: The oldest known trousers, found in the Yanghai cemetery in western China, were worn by horse riders some 3,000 years ago (Ulrike Beck et al., “The invention of trousers and its likely affiliation with horseback riding and mobility,” Quaternary International 348, 2014). The Scythian horse riders of the steppes, women as well as men, wore them later, and the Greeks thought trousers fit only for barbarians. Mr. Spitzer’s “forbidden east,” where the men wear skirts and the ladies wear trousers, turns the customs of his own country upside down.
  - Bloomers are divided women’s garments for the lower body. They were developed in the 19th century as a healthful and comfortable alternative to the heavy, constricting dresses worn by American women (Wikipedia). They take their name from their best-known advocate, the women’s rights activist Amelia Bloomer. It became a symbol of women’s rights in the early 1850s. See Amelia Bloomer in the Chapter 42 resources. See Women’s Suffrage and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.

- “pawn figures moving not only from dream to dream of the dreamer but from dreamer to dreamer”: Carl Jung believed that dreams reveal more than they conceal: dreams are “a part of nature, which harbors no intention to deceive, but expresses something as best it can” (C. G. Jung, Memories, Dreams, Reflections, 1962). They are a natural expression of the imagination and speak in the most straightforward language the mind has: mythic narratives. The parts of a person’s mythic life keep a similar structure across the whole lifespan. His collective unconscious is “identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us” (C. G. Jung, The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious, Collected Works 9, part 1, trans. R. F. C. Hull, 1959). It refers to the psychological constants shared by all societies, such as rites of passage into womanhood, or the growing fascination with death after middle age. Mr. Spitzer’s sense that the same figures pass from one dreamer to another is close to Jung’s collective unconscious. See Freud and Jung.
- “Is there no meeting place, place where two parallel lines meet?”: Euclid’s fifth postulate held that parallel lines never meet. In the nineteenth century, mathematicians such as Lobachevsky and Riemann built non-Euclidean geometries in which that rule no longer holds, and in projective geometry parallel lines meet at a point at infinity. Hannah’s question asks whether two lives that ran side by side without touching, like hers and her lost love’s, can meet at the end.
- “walk like the cripple healed by some great, sudden miracle”: In John 5, Jesus tells a man who had been unable to walk for thirty-eight years, “Rise, take up thy bed, and walk,” and in Acts 3 Peter heals a man lame from birth at the temple gate. Mr. Spitzer half expects Hannah, who never gave up a fight, to rise from her deathbed the same way, but “she lay prone as an everlasting horizon.”
- “Is that the tent-maker? Is that the tent?”: The name of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam means “tentmaker.” Edward FitzGerald’s 1859 translation of his Rubáiyát made him famous in English as a poet of mortality, and in one quatrain the body is “but a Tent where takes his one day’s rest / A Sultan to the realm of Death addrest.” The apostle Paul was also a tentmaker by trade (Acts 18:3), and he called the body “our earthly house of this tabernacle,” a tent that will be taken down (2 Corinthians 5:1). Hannah, whose visions are full of desert tents, asks where the tent-maker sets his tent “upon what star or cloud” as her own tent is being struck.
- “Look not into the things that are to see the things that are not”: This inverts 2 Corinthians 4:18, “While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.” Paul is urging faith. Hannah, who believed in no afterlife, is giving a warning.
- “you like Mr. Chandelier moving through clouds”: Mr. Chandelier comes from Catherine Cartwheel’s opium dreams in Chapter 2, the chandelier imagined as her companion with “seven lighted candles in his seven crystal hands.” Hannah’s calling on him is another dream figure passing “from dreamer to dreamer.” See Mr. Chandelier.

- “my wild swan girl”: In folklore the swan maiden sheds her feathered robe to become a woman, and whoever steals the robe can keep her. Tchaikovsky’s Swan Lake (1877) gives the story its best-known form. See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Music and Composers.
- “Bacchus and his crew of satyrs crowned by flowers”: Bacchus, the Roman name for the Greek god Dionysus, is the god of the grape-harvest, winemaking and wine, fertility and orchards (Wikipedia). Hannah asks whether it is “Bacchus and his crew of satyrs crowned by flowers.” See Greek Mythology.
  - Satyrs in Greek mythology are male nature spirits, part goat or horse, who follow Dionysus.
  - Nymphs in Greek folklore are minor female nature deities (Wikipedia).
- “Are those the music-makers”: “We are the music makers, / And we are the dreamers of dreams” (Arthur O’Shaughnessy, “Ode,” 1873). See Music and Composers.
- “somersaultings like Pierrot”: Pierrot is a stock character of pantomime and comedy in the late seventeenth-century Italian troupe of players performing in Paris (Wikipedia). He is the sad clown, with a whitened face and loose white clothes, forever lovesick, usually for Columbine, who leaves him for Harlequin. The mime Jean-Gaspard Deburau made Pierrot famous in Paris in the 1820s and 1830s. Mr. Spitzer sees in Hannah’s “somersaultings like Pierrot” a lovesick clown hidden under the warrior.
  - Marcel Carné’s film Les Enfants du Paradis (1945) made Deburau its hero, the Pierrot who loves silently and loses.
- “not even the greatest calker could calk her now”: A calker, now usually spelled caulker, forces fibers soaked in pitch or tar into the seams between a wooden ship’s planks to make it watertight. Mr. Spitzer’s “maritime memories derived from a remote forefather” turn Hannah’s dying body into an old ship coming apart at its seams.
- “If the Southern Cross should be missing”: Southern Cross or Crux is a constellation of the southern sky that has four bright stars in a cross-shape (Wikipedia). See Astronomy.
- “the Northern Cross should be missing”: Northern Cross is an astronomical asterism in the northern hemisphere of the celestial sphere and is much larger than the Southern Cross (Wikipedia). It is part of the constellation Cygnus, the Swan. See Astronomy.
- “if this earth were totally abandoned, would not a bee zoom in a meadow of wild flowers . . . a leaf fall?”: If a tree falls in the forest does anyone hear it? The riddle was in print by 1883, in the magazine The Chautauquan. The question challenges the notion that perception is essential for reality. Some philosophers argue that the sound requires a conscious observer because it is a form of perception. Others argue that sound is an objective physical phenomenon that exists independently of perception. It can also suggest that life goes on without humans there to witness it, which decenters the human point of view.
  - George Berkeley held that for things of sense “their esse is percipi,” to be is to be perceived (A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, 1710).

- “was there not the white of edelweiss embroidered upon the hem?”: Edelweiss appears as a detail embroidered on the hem of the white skirt Cousin Hannah cries for. It is an alpine flower that grows in high-altitude habitats, and it carries a good deal of symbolism. It has been associated with courage and bravery, resilience and survival, nobility and purity, luck and good fortune. It grows on high, dangerous cliffs, and climbers risked their lives to gather it, which is why it came to stand for courage, a fitting emblem for Hannah.
- “fields of asphodel”: Asphodel may refer to the Asphodel Meadows. It is a section of the underworld in Greek mythology where ordinary souls are sent to live after death (Wikipedia). See the meadow of asphodel in the Chapter 42 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “thin as Pleiades”: Pleiades, also known as The Seven Sisters or Messier 45, is an open star cluster in the night sky visible in virtually every part of the globe (Wikipedia). See Astronomy.
    - One of the seven sisters is said to hide her face, the lost Pleiad, for shame at marrying a mortal (Ovid, Fasti 4.169-178). See Greek Mythology.
- “I see a light upon the other shore”: In Buddhism, awakening is the other shore. The Heart Sutra ends with the mantra “Gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā,” “Gone, gone, gone beyond, gone altogether beyond, awakening, hail.” Mr. Spitzer, too, “would be upon the other shore.” See Buddhism.
- “Is it the will-o’-the-wisp”: A will-o’-the-wisp is a ghostly light seen at night over marshes and bogs. It is also called ignis fatuus, Latin for “foolish fire.” In folklore it leads travelers off safe paths and into the swamp. It is now thought to come from burning marsh gases. Hannah asks, “must I follow her who followed me?” The question makes her lost love a light that is both a guide and a lure.
- “Do I come again to that dark tower? Is that the winding horn?”: These questions recall Robert Browning’s 1855 poem “Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came,” whose title comes from a line Edgar speaks in King Lear. Roland crosses a ruined wasteland to the dark tower where all the knights before him were lost, and the poem ends as he raises his horn: “Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set, / And blew.” Hannah, too, has come to the end of a long quest where others fell. See Childe Roland to the Dark Tower.
- “Shall I put on this body and this love?”: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Corinthians 15:53). See The Bible.
- “Is that my love, my skirt moving through clouds”: Skirt has long been slang for a woman, as in “a bit of skirt.” The skirt Hannah lost “so long ago” may be both the garment she gave up for the cause and the woman she lost. See Young’s account of the bridal trousseaus under “a secret woman, a bride” in the Chapter 42 resources. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “Oh, is she in the shadowed valley”: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil” (Psalm 23:4). See The Bible.

- “Does he come to my bed?”: The goat with gold eyes and a beard recalls Pan, the goat-footed god of the wild, who pursued the nymph Syrinx until she was turned into reeds (Ovid, Metamorphoses 1.689-712). See Greek Mythology.

Vocabulary

Acclimatized

Grown used to a new climate, place, or situation.

Acme

The highest point of something; the peak.

Adventitious

Happening by chance; not essential or built in.

Ambrosial

Divinely fragrant or delicious. From ambrosia, the food of the Greek gods, which gave them immortality.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Amphitheatre

A round or oval open-air arena with rising tiers of seats around a central space, used in ancient Rome for gladiator contests and public spectacles.

Anvil

The heavy iron block on which a blacksmith hammers hot metal into shape.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Arcanum

A mysterious or specialized knowledge, language, or information accessible or possessed only by the initiate. From the Latin arcanus, hidden or closed. Plural: arcana.

Armorer

A maker or repairer of armor and weapons.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Auk

A diving seabird of northern seas. The great auk, a large flightless species, became extinct in 1844. More under Resources.

Balloon fish

A pufferfish, which swallows water to swell its body into a spiny ball when threatened.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Barouche

A fashionable four-wheeled carriage with a folding half-hood and two seats facing each other. More under Resources.

Blackamoor

An old term for a Black African or any dark-skinned person, common in European art and in decorative figures of Black servants. It is now considered offensive.

Breastplate

A piece of armor covering the chest.

Caliph

The title of the chief Muslim ruler, understood as a successor to the Prophet Muhammad.

Calker

Also caulker. A worker who seals the seams of a wooden ship to make it watertight. More under Resources.

Carousel

A merry-go-round. Earlier, a tournament in which horsemen performed exercises and displays.

Casket

A small, often ornate box for jewels or valuables. In American usage, also a coffin, so Young's "casket containing no jewel" carries both meanings.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Centurion

An officer in the Roman army who commanded about a hundred soldiers.

Chimerical

Imaginary, fanciful, or wildly unrealistic. From the Chimera, the fire-breathing monster of Greek myth made of a lion, a goat, and a serpent.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Clapper

The hanging metal tongue inside a bell that strikes it to make it ring.

Cockle

A small saltwater clam with a ribbed, heart-shaped shell. A cockleshell boat is a small, flimsy one.

Colonnade

A row of columns, usually holding up a roof.

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Consummation

The completion or fulfillment of something.

Cosmography

A description or map of the whole universe, both heavens and earth.

Crow’s-nest

A lookout platform high on a ship’s mast.

Crucible

A heat-resistant pot for melting metals. Figuratively, a severe test that changes a person.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Crystal-gazer

A fortune-teller who looks into a crystal ball to see the future.

Crystal-hunter

A prospector in the Alps who climbs into rock clefts to find quartz crystals.

Cup-bearer

A servant who poured and served wine to a king, a position of great trust. Nehemiah was cup-bearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes, and in Greek myth the youth Ganymede was cup-bearer to Zeus.

Dance of death

Also danse macabre. A medieval image of Death leading people of every rank, from pope and king to child and beggar, in a dance to the grave. See On the danse

macabre (Ch 43).

Deference

Polite respect, or yielding to someone else's wishes or judgment.

Disembodiment

Separation from the body; existing as a spirit without a body.

Dopester

A person who predicts the outcome of horse races, elections, or other contests from inside information, or "dope."

Emir

A commander or prince in the Islamic world. More under Resources.

Empearled

Adorned with pearls, or having a pearly sheen.

Enigma

A mystery or puzzle; a person or thing that is hard to understand.

Eunuch

A man who has been castrated. Eunuchs were employed for centuries to guard harems and to serve as officials in royal courts in the Middle East, China, and Byzantium. See The eunuch (Ch 35).

Fallacy

A mistaken belief, or a flaw in reasoning that makes an argument unsound.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Flounced

Trimmed with flounces, wide strips of gathered or pleated fabric sewn to a skirt or dress.

Forebodings

Feelings that something bad is about to happen.

Forecastle

The forward part of a ship below the deck, where the crew lived. Pronounced "FOHK-sul."

Frivolities

Silly, trivial, or lighthearted things.

Gondolier

The boatman who rows a Venetian gondola, standing at the stern with a single oar.

Halcyon

Calm and peaceful. From the halcyon, a mythical bird said to calm the sea while it nested on the waves in winter.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Hanging gardens

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: terraced gardens said to have been built by King Nebuchadnezzar II. No trace of them has ever been found.

Helm

The wheel or tiller that steers a ship.

Ibis

A long-legged wading bird with a downward-curved bill, sacred in ancient Egypt to Thoth, god of writing and wisdom.

Immured

Shut in or imprisoned, as if walled up.

Imponderable

Something that cannot be measured, weighed, or judged.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Inveterate

Long settled in a habit and unlikely to change, as in “inveterate gambler.”

Keel and list

To keel over is to capsize, with the keel, the ship’s backbone along the bottom, turning upward. To list is to lean to one side, usually from water taken on.

Lagoon

A stretch of shallow water separated from the sea by a reef or sandbar.

Lazar

A diseased beggar, especially one with leprosy. More under Resources.

Lethargy

Sluggishness, drowsiness, a lack of energy.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Lunar month

The time from one new moon to the next, about 29.5 days.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Maharajah

A great king or prince in India. From the Sanskrit for “great king.”

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Mercurial

Quick and changeable in mood. From the swift Roman messenger god Mercury and the liquid metal named for him.

Metamorphic

Having to do with a change of form. In geology, rock that heat and pressure have changed.

Mica

A mineral that splits into thin, shiny, nearly transparent sheets and makes rock glitter.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Monsoon

A seasonal wind in South Asia that brings months of heavy rain.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Nag

An old or worn-out horse.

Neap tide

The tide with the smallest difference between high and low water, twice a month at the quarter moons. More under Resources.

Negligee

A woman’s light, flowing dressing gown.

Nepenthe

In Homer’s Odyssey, a drug from Egypt that Helen puts in the wine to banish grief and sorrow. Anything that brings forgetfulness of pain. See On Nepenthe (Ch 82).

Odalisque

A servant woman or concubine in a Turkish harem. More under Resources.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Palmer

A medieval pilgrim who brought back a palm frond from the Holy Land. More under Resources.

Paradox

A statement or situation that seems to contradict itself and yet may be true.

Parasol

A light umbrella carried for shade from the sun.

Parterre

An ornamental garden of flower beds laid out in a pattern. A parterred floor is inlaid in patterned sections.

Perambulations

Walks or strolls, especially leisurely ones.

Peregrinations

A journey, especially a long or meandering one.

Phantasmal

Ghostly; like a phantom or an illusion.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Portfolio

A flat case for carrying loose papers and documents.

Presentiment

An intuitive feeling that something is about to happen.

Principality

A territory ruled by a prince.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Promontory

A high point of land jutting out into the sea.

Roseate

Rose-colored. Also hopeful or overly optimistic.

Rubicon

A small river in northern Italy. Julius Caesar crossed it with his army in 49 BC, starting a civil war, so “crossing the Rubicon” means passing a point of no return. See Crossing the Rubicon (Ch 23).

Sandalwood

A fragrant wood from India and the Pacific, burned as incense and used in perfume.

Sartorial

Having to do with clothing, tailoring, or style of dress.

Seer

A person who sees the future; a prophet.

Shah

The title of the king of Persia, now Iran.

Shell game

A swindle in which a pea is hidden under one of three shells or cups and shuffled, and bettors guess where it is. The operator usually palms the pea, so no one can win.

Skiff

A small, light boat for rowing or sailing. Young’s “skiff moon” is a crescent shaped like one.

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard.

Steeplechase

A horse race over fences, ditches, and water jumps, first run cross-country from one church steeple to another.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women’s right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women’s Suffrage.

Sultanate

A country ruled by a sultan.

Supernumerary

Extra; more than the number needed. In the theater, an extra with no lines.

Surrey

A light four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with two seats, often with a fringed canopy on top.

Testimonial

A formal statement given as evidence or proof of something.

Tonnage

The size or carrying capacity of a ship.

Torpor

A sluggish, heavy, half-asleep state.

Touch

Slang for asking someone for money, especially a small loan. To “make a touch” is to borrow or beg cash.

Transact

To carry out or carry through. Young uses it for crossing a distance, as in “transacted the gulf between two worlds.”

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists’ dream of turning base metal into gold.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Untenable

Impossible to defend, hold, or live in.

Vigil

A period of staying awake to keep watch, especially at the bedside of someone sick or dying.

Chapter 44

Summary

Over the years Mr. Spitzer pieces together the truth of Cousin Hannah's last days. The great bloomer girl, who spent her life urging ladies to take off their skirts, called for her skirt as she died. When he brought her snowdrops, they melted in her hand, and from that moment she began to fade. In her delirium she relived a climb in the snowbound mountains: her love, "my lovely bride," turned back to find her skirt, out of a modesty Hannah calls false since there was no one to see, and was lost in the snow. Hannah blamed herself for letting go, and Mr. Spitzer understands at last that this lost love drove her suffrage battles and her wanderings. He wonders whether great heroes are driven by secret cowardice, whether the burning moth is braver than the star, and whether suffrage was only her mask. In her papers he finds letters in languages no one can read, many like love letters to a great love, and he remembers a sea shell he once found, written over: "For all dead loves and all remembered things. I have travelled through many seas." Perhaps he knows most of love who never loved.

Characters present

Cousin Hannah · Joachim Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Fear and Courage · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Illusion and Reality · Love · Memory and the Past · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Clouds and Storms · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Moon and Stars · Mountains · Music and Instruments · Roses and Flowers · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Heraclitus and Flux · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Plato and Platonism · Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory

Allusions: American Writers · Dante · Edgar Allan Poe · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · Judaism · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, Mr. Spitzer reflects on the paradox of Cousin Hannah, a great feminist and enemy of restrictive fashion, calling for her skirt as she was dying. This paradox highlights the complexities and contradictions in her character. Though she

battled societal constraints, at the end she seemed to long for something she had fought to discard. This mystery sets the tone for the chapter's exploration of illusion versus truth and the human vulnerability beneath heroic veneer.

- Mr. Spitzer's gesture of bringing her snowdrops, delicate white flowers resembling snow, and her agony increasing upon seeing them melt in her hand is a poignant metaphor. It suggests the fragility of life and love, the melting away of hope, and the uncontrollable forces that govern human fate, forces akin to natural phenomena like avalanches and winds, that Mr. Spitzer likens to a musician losing control of his baton.
- Cousin Hannah's dying lament reveals a deep personal grief underlying her public persona. Her repeated cry about finding her skirt is both literal and symbolic, implying a search for identity, love, or completeness that was never fulfilled. This passage underscores the theme of lost love as a motivating force behind her suffrage battles and personal suffering.
- Cousin Hannah's words that "False modesty killed my love" and the declaration that there was "no man in all those mountains" or "one star looking down" mean that no one was there to see her lover's nakedness, so the modesty that sent her back for her skirt was false, and it killed her. Hannah's grief turns to self-accusation: "Did I let go with my hand which should have clung to yours, even through all eternity or for one moment?"
- As she questions whether her love and the love she received were true or false, the suffrage captain's dying confession reveals the complexity of human emotions and relationships. This ambivalence illustrates that heroism and love are not clear-cut or absolute but often involve contradictions and inner conflict.
- Mr. Spitzer's reflection on the possibility that the greatest heroes might be driven by secret cowardice and that this inner failure propels them toward greater battles is philosophically profound. It questions traditional notions of heroism and valor, suggesting that vulnerability and fear are inseparable from greatness.
- The chapter repeatedly returns to death as a process of transformation rather than an end: "flowers turning into birds, birds turning into flowers," and "death was this eternal transmutation." This idea challenges conventional finality of death, proposing a mystical continuity that blurs life and death.
- Mr. Spitzer's struggle to understand the suffragette's life, filled with secret letters, unintelligible languages, and mysteries "greater than the Sphinx," symbolizes the inscrutability of human motivations and emotions. Her heart is portrayed as "in darkness and in terrifying whirlwind," emphasizing that even the most public figures harbor private enigmas.
- The paradox that Cousin Hannah had "never experienced" love, death, or marriage in a conventional sense, yet was the confidante of many secrets and the recipient of many whispered confessions, raises profound questions about knowledge, experience, and empathy. It suggests that knowing about human emotions can be distinct from living them.
- The closing reflections ponder the nature of love and death as inseparable and universal experiences that "all who lived had already died" in some sense, and that the

greatest love might be ineffable and unexpressed. Mr. Spitzer's thoughts on the fate of all lives being "increased by this great mystery of death" provide a somber, philosophical conclusion to the chapter.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "False modesty killed my love, she cried, and not I." Whom does Hannah blame, and does she believe it?
- "There was no man in all those mountains." Why does Hannah call her love's modesty false?
- The snowdrops melt in Hannah's hand, "from that moment she had begun to fade." Why does Mr. Spitzer feel that his own magic did this?

Characters

- Hannah calls her lost love "my lovely bride" and "White lady." How does this change what is known of her?
- Mr. Spitzer is "almost inclined to believe that she had never been a suffragette at all, that suffrage was her mask." Is he right?
- Mr. Spitzer comes "at that gratuitous moment after the end." Why does his understanding always arrive late?

Connections

- Young told Studs Terkel that Hannah came partly from an Alpine story of two bloomer girls who shed their skirts at a summit (Chapter 38). How does this chapter finish that story?
- "Who knocks now at the ivory gates?" Recall the gates of false dreams in Chapter 41. Which of Hannah's memories might pass through the ivory gate?
- Mr. Spitzer hears "race-track music long after Peron's last horse race." How does each of the two ladies' mourners keep a lost one alive?

Reflection

- "Had not the greatest heroes been prompted by secret cowardice?" Can fear make a person brave?
- "He had always thought that the burning moth was more heroic than the burning star." Which is braver?
- "Perhaps he knew most of love who never loved." Can a person know what they have never lived?

Research: Characters

Cousin Hannah / The Great Suffrage Captain

- A once-celebrated suffragette whose public life was marked by courage and activism.
- In private, she was vulnerable, haunted by lost love, and self-doubt.
- Her death is poetic and symbolic, involving imagery of skirts, snowdrops, mountains, and clouds.
- Her lost love was a woman: “Ah, my lovely bride,” “White lady, where are you now?”
- Mr. Spitzer comes to suspect “that she had never been a suffragette at all, that suffrage was her mask.”

Mr. Spitzer

- An old lawyer entrusted with handling Cousin Hannah’s affairs after her death.
- Reflective, cautious, and rational, yet deeply affected by the mysteries he uncovers.
- He struggles to reconcile the public image of Cousin Hannah with the private truths he learns.
- Acts as witness and interpreter of the suffragette’s life and legacy.

Research: Themes

Truth Versus Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality

- The chapter opens with the idea that truth in life is rare but powerful, like granite and sunlight amidst illusions (moonbeams). Mr. Spitzer slowly pieces together the fragmented truth of Cousin Hannah’s life, which is elusive and fleeting.
- The suffragette’s public persona versus her private reality is a central tension. Though once celebrated, her fame has faded, and her true self remains mysterious and partly hidden.

Love and Loss

See: Love · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Despite being a fierce fighter for women’s rights, Cousin Hannah is shown to be deeply haunted by a lost love, which shapes much of her life and final moments.
- Her dying cries for her “love,” “little snowdrop,” and her search for a “skirt” symbolize a yearning for something lost, possibly innocence, identity, or a personal connection.
- The narrative suggests that her suffrage activism was motivated by personal heartbreak, intertwining public struggle with private grief.

Heroism and Cowardice

See: Fear and Courage

- The chapter challenges traditional notions of heroism, suggesting that great heroes may be driven by secret cowardice or inner failures.
- Cousin Hannah is portrayed as both a heroic figure and a vulnerable woman who doubted herself at the end.
- Mr. Spitzer debates the nature of courage, recognizing that even the smallest, seemingly weak acts can be heroic, such as a moth’s desire to reach a star.

Death and Memory

See: Death and Mortality · Memory and the Past

- Death is portrayed as a transformative and mysterious force, an eternal transmutation where forms change but essence remains.
- Mr. Spitzer’s reflections suggest that death does not erase a person but deepens the mystery of their existence.
- The chapter explores how memory is fragile; great lives and deeds can be forgotten, and the true nature of a person might never be fully known.

Mystery and the Human Heart

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The suffragette is depicted as a repository of secrets and confidences, receiving the hidden sorrows and loves of others even as her own heart remains obscure.
- The novel questions whether anyone can truly understand love, life, or ambition, suggesting these remain inscrutable mysteries.
- The idea that knowing without experiencing, knowing love without loving, or death without dying, might be a deeper form of understanding is proposed.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Skirts, Laces, Petticoats

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Symbolize femininity, freedom, and perhaps the burden of societal expectations. Cousin Hannah’s paradoxical final request for her skirt contrasts with her life’s advocacy for shedding such encumbrances.
- Her lost love turned back on the mountain for her skirt: “I must find my skirt, my love. Farewell, farewell, my love.”

Snowdrops and Snow

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter · Roses and Flowers

- Represent purity, fragility, and the coldness of death. The melting snowdrops in her hand symbolize fading life and lost love.

Mountains, Clouds, Icebergs

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter · Mountains · Clouds and Storms

- Evoke the harshness and isolation of her inner world and struggles.
- The iceberg imagery suggests overwhelming, unseen dangers and emotional coldness.

Music and Sound

See: Music and Instruments

- Mr. Spitzer often parallels his thoughts to music, hearing the “roaring of the long-tongued surf” and “race-track music,” symbolizing the ongoing passage of time and memory.

Keys and Locks

See: Keys, Doors, and Locks

- “Was there no key to open the human heart, no locksmith to cast the mold for this key, silver or gold, to open this enigmatic lock? Perhaps this mystery was the key.”

The Whirlwind and Darkness

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light · Clouds and Storms

- Represent confusion, chaos, and the unknowability of the human heart.

Research: Resources

- “There was granite, and there was sunlight”: Virginia Woolf set the biographer the same problem: “if we think of truth as something of granite-like solidity and of personality as something of rainbow-like intangibility,” biography must weld the two together (“The New Biography,” 1927). Mr. Spitzer is Hannah’s reluctant biographer.
- “that great bloomer girl”: Lucy Stone and other suffragists adopted the Bloomer costume, which consisted of a knee-length skirt worn over trousers or pantaloons, in the early 1850s. Stone loved the comfort and practicality of the outfit and wore it both at home and in public for about three years. However, the Bloomer costume attracted significant public scrutiny and ridicule, and critics of the women’s rights movement often focused on the reformers’ attire rather than their arguments for suffrage and other

reforms. By late 1853, many prominent suffragists, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, abandoned the Bloomer costume due to the negative attention it generated. Stanton persuaded Stone to follow suit. Stone resumed wearing long skirts, although she never again wore the restrictive corsets and voluminous dresses of the fashionable style. Other notable suffragists like Susan B. Anthony also stopped wearing Bloomers around the same time. Amelia Bloomer, the editor of The Lily newspaper and namesake of the costume, continued to wear it until 1858. Only Elizabeth Smith Miller, who had helped popularize the style, continued to wear bloomers longer, until 1861 (Wikipedia). See Amelia Bloomer in the Chapter 42 resources. See Women's Suffrage and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.

- "some old Triton's horn": See Triton's shell in the Chapter 43 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- "snowdrops delicate as a wraith of mist": The snowdrop flowers through the snow at Candlemas and stands for hope, but an old English belief held that a snowdrop brought into the house foretold a death (Roy Vickery, Oxford Dictionary of Plant-Lore, 1995). See Roses and Flowers and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- "a musician whose baton had gotten loose from him": Goethe's "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" (1797) starts a magic he cannot stop. Paul Dukas set it to music (1897), and in Disney's Fantasia (1940) Mickey Mouse dreams that he conducts the stars and the waves. See Music and Composers.
- "There was a false moon, and there was a false sun": In icy mountain air, ice crystals make mock suns and mock moons beside the real ones. See the Chapter 24 resources. See Moon and Stars.
- "There was not the eye of a sparrow": "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father" (Matthew 10:29). See The Bible.
- "I must find my skirt": This is the Alpine story Young told Studs Terkel, of two bloomer girls who shed their skirts at a summit, and the younger, going back for hers, was lost: "the lady lost her life for a skirt" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See the Chapter 38 resources. See Marguerite Young on Her Craft and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- "false as the heart of darkness and whirlwind": There is a reference to "heart of darkness" again (Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness, 1899, which examines the horrors of Western colonialism).
- "For false was my true love's heart": The line echoes the false true love of folk songs like "A Brisk Young Sailor Courted Me," having some similarities to Madge's subplot.
- "Did I not ask for you at every castle gate?": Legend says the minstrel Blondel searched the castles of Germany for the imprisoned Richard the Lionheart, singing beneath each wall until the king answered from his tower.
- "Who knocks now at the ivory gates?": See the gates of horn and ivory, the gates of false dreams, in the Chapter 41 resources. See Homer's Epics.

- “Is that you, Blackamoor”: The Blackamoor, Hannah’s conscience, may be similar to the Black Coachman for Catherine. See the Black Moor in the Chapter 43 resources. See The Black Coachman.
- “Did I not drive a phaeton through a cloud?”: Phaëton drove the chariot of his father the sun and lost control of the horses, and Zeus struck him down (Ovid, Metamorphoses 2). See the Chapter 62 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “mountain-climbers with their St. Bernards”: See the dogs of the Great St. Bernard Hospice in the Chapter 31 resources.
- “Was not this Mt. Blanc always in my heart?”: Mont Blanc, the “white mountain,” was first climbed by a woman, Marie Paradis, in 1808. Henriette d’Angeville climbed it in 1838 in men’s trousers, and Mark Twain teased that she “cramped their utility by adding her petticoat” (A Tramp Abroad, 1880). See the Chapter 34 resources. See Mountains and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “the dead heart was like a sea shell carrying its own roaring”: The roar in a sea shell is not the sea. The shell gathers the sounds around it and echoes them back. See The Sea and Water.
- “this beau joueur of suffrage”: Beau joueur is a person who shows a spirit of fairness and generosity in sport.
- “splitting her apart into the lover and the loved”: In Plato’s Symposium, Aristophanes tells how the first humans were split in two, so that each half seeks its other: “The women who are a section of the woman do not care for men, but have female attachments” (Symposium 191e, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 1871). See Plato and Platonism and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “a seed of buried hope to move mountains”: “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove” (Matthew 17:20). See The Bible.
- “the love of the Troubadour for the dead love”: See Jaufré Rudel’s amor de lonh, love from afar, in the Chapter 40 resources.
- “mountains of the moon”: Ptolemy placed the Mountains of the Moon at the source of the Nile. See the Chapter 52 resources. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “this great golden chanticleer of suffrage”: A chanticleer is another name for a rooster. It is also a character name in various works of fiction such as Reynard the Fox and The Nun’s Priest’s Tale in the book Canterbury Tales.
    - In Edmond Rostand’s play Chantecler (1910), the rooster believes his crowing makes the sun rise. Hannah “could crow no more.”
- “the beating of her dead heart”: In Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart” (1843), the murderer hears the dead man’s heart beating under the floor: “It is the beating of his hideous heart!” See Edgar Allan Poe.
- “the white feather of cowardice”: In August 1914 Admiral Charles Penrose-Fitzgerald founded the Order of the White Feather, whose women handed white feathers to men out of uniform. Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst turned the WSPU from the vote to

recruiting, and Sylvia Pankhurst wrote that their followers handed out feathers to young men in civilian dress (E. Sylvia Pankhurst, The Home Front, 1932). See Women's Suffrage and Fear and Courage.

- "She was a man without a country": In Edward Everett Hale's "The Man Without a Country" (1863), Philip Nolan curses the United States and is sentenced to live at sea, never to hear his country named again. See American Writers.
- "that poor mollusk who had no sea shell": A mollusk's mantle builds its shell and lines it with mother-of-pearl.
- "eternal transmutation": Transmutation is change and alchemy is a process of elevation. There is a subtle difference between the two and both are associated with the idea of turning lead into gold. They're often used as a metaphor for spiritual or personal growth. With transformation it is inevitable because life is in a constant state of flux. People are in a perpetual process of becoming. Another way of pointing to Thales of Miletus and Heraclitus. The word alchemy comes from the Arabic al-kīmiyā, and Chinese alchemists sought an elixir of immortality as early as the Han dynasty. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica and Heraclitus and Flux.
  - Pythagoras in Ovid: "Omnia mutantur, nihil interit," "All things change, nothing perishes" (Metamorphoses 15.165).
- "Who rung these changes?": In change ringing, a band of bell-ringers rings a set of bells in every possible order without repeating. To ring the changes is to try every variation. See the bells in the Chapter 59 resources. See Music and Instruments.
- "Had not the greatest heroes been prompted by secret cowardice": In Conrad's Lord Jim (1900), Jim jumps from the Patna, a ship he believes is sinking with its pilgrims, and spends the rest of his life trying to redeem that moment. See Fear and Courage.
- "the burning moth was more heroic than the burning star": See Shelley's "The desire of the moth for the star" in the Chapter 35 resources. See Romantic Poets.
- "all things being relative": Albert Einstein was a German theoretical physicist who is best known for the theory of relativity. Relativity was a revolutionary idea that changed the understanding of the universe, though few could explain it. He said in a 1929 interview that, "The meaning of relativity has been widely misunderstood. Philosophers play with the word, like a child with a doll. Relativity, as I see it, merely denotes that certain physical and mechanical facts, which have been regarded as positive and permanent, are relative with regard to certain other facts in the sphere of physics and mechanics. It does not mean that we have the right to turn the world mischievously topsy-turvy" ("What Life Means to Einstein: An Interview by George Sylvester Viereck," The Saturday Evening Post, October 26, 1929, 17). See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory.
- "the greatest captains and kings": "The tumult and the shouting dies; / The Captains and the Kings depart" (Rudyard Kipling, "Recessional," 1897).
- "He preferred to acknowledge those who had always been ignored": See Gray's "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" in the Chapter 33 resources.

- “bearding the sleeping lion in its den”: To beard the lion in its den means to attack someone on their own ground or subject. David told Saul that when a lion took a lamb, “I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him” (1 Samuel 17:35). Here the sleeping lion is Cousin Hannah, “this great anchorite of suffrage.” See The Bible.
    - David “caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him” (1 Samuel 17:35), and Scott’s “to beard the lion in his den” (Marmion, 1808). See the Chapter 31 resources.
- “this great anchorite of suffrage upon the rock”: An anchorite withdrew from the world to live alone. Simeon Stylites lived for decades on top of a pillar in Syria.
- “the shining toils of memory”: Toils are nets for catching game. Octavius says of the dead Cleopatra that “she looks like sleep, / As she would catch another Antony / In her strong toil of grace” (Antony and Cleopatra 5.2). See Shakespeare.
- “there was no such thing as safety”: Helen Keller wrote in The Open Door (1957), “Security is mostly a superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing.” See Fear and Courage.
- “polyandrous countries”: In Tibet, brothers have commonly shared one wife, a custom called fraternal polyandry.
- “withered Cleopatra”: Young reverses Enobarbus: “Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale / Her infinite variety” (Antony and Cleopatra 2.2). See mad Antony in the Chapter 41 resources. See Shakespeare.
- “mysteries greater than the Sphinx”: The Sphinx of Thebes killed all who could not answer her riddle of what walks on four legs, then two, then three, until Oedipus answered, man (Sophocles, Oedipus Rex). See Greek Mythology.
- “languages which could never be translated by the greatest translator”: Linear A, the script of Minoan Crete, has never been read. Michael Ventris deciphered Linear B in 1952, and Champollion read the hieroglyphs in 1822 (see the Chapter 2 resources).
- “we had forgotten our origin”: See Wordsworth’s “Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting” in the Chapter 39 resources. See Romantic Poets.
- “the long fingers of rosy light reaching through the clouds at dawn”: Homer’s dawn is “rosy-fingered,” rhododaktylos Eos, throughout the Iliad and the Odyssey. See Homer’s Epics.
- “Death happened in many ways, more ways than love”: See Webster’s “death hath ten thousand several doors” in the Chapter 15 resources.
- “For all dead loves and all remembered things”: The epigraph Young gave the novel is in this chapter “For all dead loves and all remembered things. I have travelled through many seas.” See Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “Is this your second coming?”: “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven” (Matthew 24:30). See Yeats’s “The Second Coming” in the Chapter 42 resources. See The Bible.

- “the dolphin dying, gasping upon the rock”: “Parting day / Dies like the dolphin, whom each pang imbues / With a new colour as it gasps away, / The last still loveliest” (Lord Byron, Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage 4.29, 1818). See Romantic Poets.
- “Is this as it was, ever will be?”: See the Gloria Patri, “As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,” in the Chapter 10 resources. See The Bible.
- “Must not the lover die of love?”: See the Liebestod, the love-death of Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde, in the Chapter 9 resources. See Music and Composers.
- “how many shapes of snowflakes”: Wilson A. Bentley of Vermont photographed thousands of snowflakes and found no two alike (W. A. Bentley and W. J. Humphreys, Snow Crystals, 1931). See Snow, Ice, and Winter.
- “There was no open sesame”: See Ali Baba’s “open sesame” in the Chapter 52 resources.
- “Judas cock”: The Judas cock may refer to the Book of the Cock/Rooster which was probably written in the 400s or 500s in Arabic or Greek and used by Ethiopian Christians who have and use the text during Holy Week activities. It describes the final three days of Jesus’s life, including a sequence where he reanimated a previously roasted rooster that He sent to spy on Judas Iscariot when he (Judas) was plotting to betray Jesus. The rooster informed Jesus and his disciples of the plan. Among other events, the Book of the Rooster describes Saul of Tarsus’ participation in the arrest, abuse and crucifixion of Jesus, the betrayal of Jesus by a female relative of Judas, a debate between Pilate and Herod about the culpability of Jesus, Mary’s grief, John the Evangelist witnessing the crucifixion of Jesus, the conversations Jesus had with the two thieves he was crucified alongside Gestas (Awsēmobyā) and Demas (Salikonilidākki) and references to other miracles that Jesus performed during his life. The rooster may be based on the Ziz of Jewish mythology, a giant bird. Like the Gospel of Judas from the second century, the Book of the Rooster attempts to explain the betrayal of Judas before the Last Supper, an act which is traditionally seen as abrupt or lacking reason (Wikipedia). See The Bible and Judaism.
  - See the cock that crowed at Peter’s denial in the Chapter 43 resources.
- “a great cone reversed, standing on its apex”: Dante’s Hell is a funnel, a great cone reversed, narrowing circle by circle to its point at the center of the earth (Inferno). See Dante.
- “this old maid”: In Henry James’s The Bostonians (1886), the Boston suffragist Olive Chancellor loves the young speaker Verena Tarrant. Two women who made a home together came to be called a Boston marriage. See American Writers, Women’s Suffrage, and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “suffrage was her mask”: See “this pale Don Juan beneath her mask” in the Chapter 43 resources.
- “a great stone ear or chamber of echoes”: The Ear of Dionysius, a cave in the quarries of Syracuse, carries the smallest sound. Legend says the tyrant Dionysius listened there to his prisoners, and Caravaggio gave it the name in 1608.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Accolade

An award or praise; once the touch of a sword that made a knight.

Addenda

Things added; plural of addendum.

Adventitious

Happening by chance; not essential or built in.

Ambivalence

Mixed or contradictory feelings.

Ambivalently

With mixed or contradictory feelings or meanings.

Anchorite

A hermit who lives shut away from the world for religious reasons.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Blackamoor

An old term for a Black African or any dark-skinned person, common in European art and in decorative figures of Black servants. It is now considered offensive.

Cashiered

Dismissed from the armed forces in disgrace.

Chamois

A goat-antelope of the Alps.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Denigrate

To belittle or blacken.

Empearled

Adorned with pearls, or having a pearly sheen.

Enigmatic

Mysterious; puzzling.

Flounced

Trimmed with flounces, wide strips of gathered or pleated fabric sewn to a skirt or dress.

Frivolities

Silly, trivial, or lighthearted things.

Gratuitous

Uncalled for; without cause.

Griffin

A mythical beast with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Hoar-frost

White frost formed as feathery ice crystals.

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Mantilla

A lace scarf worn over the head and shoulders.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Monsoon

A seasonal wind in South Asia that brings months of heavy rain.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Muleteer

A driver of mules.

Myopic

Nearsighted.

Neap tide

The tide with the smallest difference between high and low water, twice a month at the quarter moons.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Papyrus

Writing material the ancient Egyptians made from the stems of the papyrus reed.

Petticoat

An underskirt.

Phaeton

A light, open, four-wheeled carriage; also a name for some seashells.

Pigeon-hole

A small open compartment in a desk for papers.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Plumed

Decorated with feathers.

Polyandrous

Having more than one husband at a time.

Porphyry

A hard purple-red rock with embedded crystals, prized by Roman emperors.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Quavering

Trembling, as a voice.

Ramification

A branching consequence.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Scimitar

A curved Eastern sword.

Seminal

Seedlike; giving rise to later growth.

Sheik

An Arab chief or elder.

Skiff

A small, light boat for rowing or sailing. Young's "skiff moon" is a crescent shaped like one.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women's right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women's Suffrage.

Tenacious

Holding fast.

Tenebrous

Dark, shadowy, obscure.

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists' dream of turning base metal into gold.

Triton

A sea god of Greek myth, half man and half fish, who blows a conch shell.

Winding sheet

The cloth a corpse is wrapped in for burial.

Wraith

A ghost; a faint, pale shape.

Chapter 45

Summary

Reading by candlelight the letters strangers wrote to Cousin Hannah, asking about lost loves, dead brides, and vanished bridegrooms, Mr. Spitzer marvels that one who never loved should have been taken for an authority on love. From her last ravings he pieces together her secret. She had climbed the snowbound mountains with “her acolyte, her beautiful girl,” who went back over the peak to find her skirt and never returned. Hannah believed she had let go the girl’s hand and killed her love, and that guilt drove all her suffrage battles, yet at the end she cries that it was the girl who let go: “We were two lone women. There was no man.” She dies asking forgiveness, a sea shell roaring at her feet, and is buried in a grey New England churchyard. Mr. Spitzer resolves to keep her secret and wonders what image could mark her grave, perhaps a milestone reading “Twelve Miles.” He mourns how quickly the world forgets, thinking of the pigeons of Boston and Venice and the vanished passenger pigeons, and he is no longer sure whether he is Joachim or Peron.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Cousin Hannah

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Identity and the Self · Love · Memory and the Past · Society, Class, and Race · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Clocks and Watches · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Clouds and Storms · Fireflies · Moon and Stars · Mountains · Music and Instruments · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) · Existentialism · Hinduism · Kant and Hegel · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Nietzsche · Plato and Platonism · Spinoza · Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory

Allusions: American Religious Movements · American Writers · Dante · Don Quixote · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · Women’s Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- Mr. Spitzer contemplates the paradox that Cousin Hannah, devoted to the cause of suffrage and seemingly a great authority on love, had never truly experienced love in the conventional sense. He muses that “if one knew all hearts, one should know none,” and that love is essentially an unreachable image, a vision that, if grasped, leads to its death. Cousin Hannah’s life is described as a “double life, perhaps a triple life,” full of ambivalence, contradictions, and secrecy. This had left Mr. Spitzer disappointed and uncertain about her true nature and feelings.
- The imagery of cold mountains, snow, clouds, and icy landscapes recurs throughout the chapter as metaphors for the suffrage captain’s inner life and death. She is depicted as “sleeping under waters and clouds,” her head “wrapped in veils and clouds and pillowed on stone,” symbolizing her isolation and the inscrutability of her existence. The harshness and coldness of these natural elements reflect the emotional barrenness and the “heart of darkness and mystery” that Mr. Spitzer perceives.
- The novel frequently explores the intertwined relationship between love and death. Cousin Hannah’s dying words and hallucinations evoke a sense of loss, betrayal, and eternal searching for a “dead love,” a love that was “killed” by her own actions or fate. Passages where she cries out about losing her love, wandering through mountains and deserts, and questioning her own identity (“Was I always falling?”) emphasize the tragic dimension of her life and the universal human experience of love’s fragility and mortality.
- Mr. Spitzer is portrayed as a melancholic witness to this woman’s life and death, struggling to reconcile the public image of the suffrage captain with the hidden truths he uncovers. He reflects on the fleeting nature of memory and fame, lamenting that she will be forgotten or remembered only for her public deeds, while her “secret heart” remains obscured. His meditations on pigeons as symbols of souls and memory, and his sorrow at man’s loss of remembrance, highlight the theme of oblivion and the limits of legacy.
- In the final passages, Cousin Hannah’s delirious but poignant utterances reveal her inner torment and longing. She speaks of betrayal, lost love, and the breaking of a bond that “never was,” wandering through cosmic and earthly landscapes in search of forgiveness and reunion. Her invocation of celestial and natural symbols (the moon, stars, snowflakes, sea shells) creates a dreamlike atmosphere where the boundaries between reality and vision blur. Mr. Spitzer hears and tries to interpret these “last remarks,” recognizing the deep sorrow and ambiguity they contain.
- Throughout, there are philosophical interludes where Mr. Spitzer reflects on the nature of existence, suggesting that life and death are continuous, that identity dissolves into “waters and clouds,” and that memory is fragile and transient. He considers death as a form of love and vice versa, and entertains the idea that perhaps only the smallest, most delicate perceptions like butterflies, snowflakes, or ripples of water are free to

escape fate. These reflections frame Cousin Hannah's story within a broader existential context.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "For if one knew all hearts, one should know none." What does Mr. Spitzer mean?
- "Love's image was that which was never reached by love." Why would reaching love end it?
- "I did not let go your hand. It was you who let go my hand." Why does Hannah's story change at the end?

Characters

- Hannah calls herself the one "who killed my love" and calls her girl the "traitor, breaking that bond which never was." Which is the truth?
- Why does Mr. Spitzer want Hannah remembered for "her public deeds" and not for "her secret heart"?
- Mr. Spitzer whispers his name, "daring not to say whether he was Peron who had died young or Joachim who was old." Why does he not know?

Connections

- In Chapter 44 the girl turned back for her skirt. Here Hannah asks, "Does my skirt walk by itself… Or is my skirt my sail?" How has the skirt changed?
- Hannah dies with a sea shell at her feet, and Mr. Spitzer listens to sea shells on lonely beaches. What do the shells carry?
- Mr. Spitzer would bury Hannah in the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, "for she was unknown." How does this connect with his own fear of being forgotten?

Reflection

- "Shall love be infinitely postponed? If infinitely postponed, then it is love." Is love that is never fulfilled the purest?
- Is it kinder to keep a person's secret after death, or to tell it?
- "Nothing frightened him so much as man's loss of memory." What is owed to the forgotten?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- A reflective figure, “this old Joachim who, the light fading from his eyes, trembled at the thought of any kind of love whatever.”
- He has witnessed the suffragette’s life and death.
- He is a skeptic yet compassionate observer, wrestling with doubt about love, death, and memory.
- His perspective is melancholic and filled with symbolic musings.

Cousin Hannah

- A heroic figure involved in suffrage, labor strikes, and adventurous exploits.
- Her private life was a mystery, marked by lost love, guilt, and spiritual wandering.
- She died with a sea shell at her feet, symbolizing her connection to the sea and the unknown.
- Her lost love was “her acolyte, her beautiful girl”: “We were two lone women. There was no man.”
- “Her name was hyphenated like her life.”
- She is described metaphorically as a “sleeping beauty,” a “dead star,” and a “great betrayer of woman,” reflecting her complex legacy.

Research: Themes

Love and Its Ambivalence

See: Love

- Love is portrayed as an unattainable ideal.
- Cousin Hannah’s love life is marked by loss, guilt, and a yearning for a final answer that never comes.
- Cousin Hannah’s lamentations at her deathbed emphasize her betrayal of love (whether by herself or by fate) and her eternal search for her lost love.

Memory, Identity, and the Passing of Time

See: Memory and the Past · Time · Identity and the Self

- Mr. Spitzer struggles with memory’s frailty, likening it to fleeting natural phenomena.
- The chapter meditates on the dissolution of identity.
- Cousin Hannah’s secret life and true self remain ambiguous, veiled in clouds and mystery, reflecting the difficulty of truly knowing another person, especially after death.

Death and Transition

See: Death and Mortality

- The narrative frequently returns to images of death as a form of journey or transformation.
- Death is intertwined with love; “Death is love, and love is death.”
- Cousin Hannah’s death is surrounded by symbolic natural elements which serve as metaphors for her passing and the mystery surrounding it.

Public Versus Private Life

See: Society, Class, and Race

- Cousin Hannah was a public hero, a suffragette with noble deeds and a fiery spirit, yet her private life was marked by confusion, betrayal, and unfulfilled love.
- Mr. Spitzer reflects on how public memory tends to forget the complexity of individuals, often reducing them to symbols or monuments.
- Cousin Hannah had a “double life,” perhaps even a “triple life,” that no one truly understood.

Mysticism and Symbolism

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The chapter is rich with symbolic imagery: mountains, clouds, snow, stars, fireflies, sea shells, the moon, and butterflies.
- These symbols often blur the boundary between reality and hallucination, reflecting Mr. Spitzer’s and Cousin Hannah’s fractured consciousness.
- The narrative suggests the possibility of existence beyond physical death, through memory, spirit, or cosmic forces.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Clouds and Snow

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter · Clouds and Storms

- Ambiguity, transition, death, and the veil between life and afterlife.

Mountain Peaks

See: Mountains

- Obstacles, spiritual heights, isolation, and the vast unknown.

Sea Shell/Sea

See: The Sea and Water

- Memory, the call of the unknown, the eternal sea of life and death.

Fireflies and Stars

See: Fireflies · Moon and Stars

- Fleeting beauty, lost souls, and unreachable ideals.

Butterflies

See: Butterflies and Moths

- Transformation, fleeting perceptions and the fragility of life and consciousness.

Bell/Bells

See: Music and Instruments

- Calls to attention, spiritual awakening, and auditory hallucinations connected to death and memory.

Skirt/Flounces

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- The lost love or spirit, something elusive that the suffragette seeks but cannot find.

Moon

See: Moon and Stars

- Mystery, guidance, and the shifting nature of reality and perception.

Research: Resources

- “penitential palmer with sea shells on his hat”: The scallop shell was the badge of pilgrims to the shrine of St. James at Santiago de Compostela: “Give me my scallop-shell of quiet” (Walter Raleigh, “The Passionate Man’s Pilgrimage,” 1604). See the palmer in the Chapter 43 resources and the scallop in the Chapter 62 resources.
- “cavaliers serventes such as employed by Venetians”: See the cavalier servente, the married lady’s licensed escort, in the Chapter 38 resources.
- “his silent music, dirge or Epithalamium no ear or conch had ever heard”: “Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter” (John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” 1819). See Romantic Poets.

- “There was a rift in his lute.”: “It is the little rift within the lute, / That by and by will make the music mute” (Alfred Tennyson, “Merlin and Vivien,” Idylls of the King, 1859). See Music and Composers.
- “this sleeping beauty whom all ladies become”: See Grimm’s “Little Briar-Rose” in the Chapter 41 resources. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “the whisper of a moth in a hurricane”: See the butterfly effect of chaos theory in the Chapter 2 resources. See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory.
- “the universe was something shaken out of a dice box”: Einstein wrote to Max Born on December 4, 1926, that he was convinced God “does not throw dice.” Peron the gambler believed the opposite. See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory and Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “why should they ever have thought that the blind see best”: Tiresias, the blind seer of Thebes, saw what the sighted could not. See the Chapter 22 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “one who has never seen color knows most of color”: Locke’s “studious blind man” bragged that he now understood what scarlet signified: “It was like the sound of a trumpet” (John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding 3.4.11, 1690). See Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume).
    - Frank Jackson’s Mary knows all the physics of color but has never seen red, and asks what she learns when she does (Frank Jackson, “Epiphenomenal Qualia,” Philosophical Quarterly 32, 1982).
- “a bureau for advice to the lovelorn”: Advice columns for the lovelorn began with Dorothy Dix (from 1896) and Beatrice Fairfax (from 1898). Nathanael West’s Miss Lonelyhearts (1933) is about a newspaperman who answers such letters and is broken by them. See American Writers.
- “before the age of the postage stamp”: The first adhesive postage stamp, the Penny Black, was issued in Britain in 1840.
- “for none had ever yet seen this dead star”: The light of a distant star can travel for thousands of years, so a star still seen in the sky may already be gone. See Moon and Stars.
- “this great father of suffrage”: Young named her own sources for Cousin Hannah (see the Chapter 30 resources and the Chapter 31 resources), and Susan B. Anthony and her sister, Hannah, offer a historical comparison. Mr. Spitzer described Cousin Hannah as “this great father of suffrage.” Susan B. Anthony’s father was the first one in the family to become interested in the women’s suffrage movement. She was interested in social reform. She was a teacher and was paid less than her male counterparts (then as now). Anthony said, “I wasn’t ready to vote, didn’t want to vote, but I did want equal pay for equal work.” The family started out as Quakers and Anthony claimed to be a Quaker but the father moved away from the order to join the Unitarian Church. They were abolitionists and temperance advocates and had the likes of Frederick Douglass speak at their house. She formed a partnership with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucy

Stone. Stanton kept a room for her at her house where she also spent most of her life working with her. Anthony and Stanton went on to write the History of Woman Suffrage. Anthony said this kind of work, “makes me feel growly all the time... No warhorse ever panted for the rush of battle more than I for outside work. I love to make history but hate to write it.” Anthony did not believe in her writing skills which mostly went to Stanton. Most of her quotes come from speeches and lectures. Anthony did not live to see the ratification of the 19th Amendment or equal rights. “There have been others also just as true and devoted to the cause—I wish I could name every one—but with such women consecrating their lives, failure is impossible!” “Now, after 40 years of agitation, the idea is beginning to prevail that women were created for themselves, for their own happiness, and for the welfare of the world.” Back to her religion. It is a mixed bag in that they moved to being Unitarian although proud of her Quaker roots. She was involved with the Friends of Human Progress that included “Christians, Jews, Mahammedans, and Pagans.” She tried to start her own Free church where all were welcome. She later, according to Stanton, became agnostic. “Work and worship are one with me. I can not imagine a God of the universe made happy by my getting down on my knees and calling him ‘great.’” When Anthony’s sister Hannah was on her deathbed, she asked Susan to talk about the great beyond, but Anthony later wrote, “I could not dash her faith with my doubts, nor could I pretend a faith I had not; so I was silent in the dread presence of death.” Hannah was known for her domestic nature, but also for her full sympathy with the reforms championed by her sister. As a teen, Anthony went to parties, and she had offers of marriage when she was older, but there is no record of her ever having a serious romance. Anthony loved children, however, and helped raise the children in the Stanton household. As a young worker in the women’s rights movement, Anthony expressed frustration when some of her co-workers began to marry and have children, sharply curtailing their ability to work for the understaffed movement (Wikipedia). When Lucy Stone abandoned her pledge to stay single, Anthony’s scolding remarks caused a temporary rupture in their friendship. It was a bit more than a temporary rupture. They both formed separate suffrage movements. Anthony wanted a federal constitutional amendment. Stone wanted a more gradual state-by-state approach. Anthony opposed the 15th Amendment because it did not grant everyone the right to vote. Stone supported it as a stepping stone. It was 20 years before their two organizations worked together again. Stone worked out with her husband a separate but equal marriage where Stone retained rights to her property and finances and her personal liberty. Lucy Stone wore bloomers. She also kept her name. They publicly declared their commitment to equality and rejected the idea of a wife’s legal subordination. Journalists repeatedly asked Anthony to explain why she never married. She answered one by saying, “It always happened that the men I wanted were those I could not get, and those who wanted me I wouldn’t have.” To another, she answered, “I never found the man who was necessary to my happiness. I was very well as I was.” To a third she said, “I never felt I could give up my life of freedom to become a man’s housekeeper. When I was young, if a girl married poor, she became a housekeeper and a drudge. If she married wealth she became a pet and a doll. Just think, had I married at twenty, I would have been a drudge or a doll

for fifty-nine years. Think of it!” In a speech in 1877, Anthony predicted “an epoch of single women. If women will not accept marriage with subjugation, nor men proffer it without, there is, there can be, no alternative. The woman who will not be ruled must live without marriage.” See Women’s Suffrage and American Religious Movements.

  - Most of Anthony’s private remarks quoted here, among them her sister Hannah’s deathbed, “Work and worship are one with me,” and her answers on marriage, are drawn from Ida Husted Harper, The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony (1898-1908). “Failure is impossible” closed her last speech, at the National American Woman Suffrage Association convention in Baltimore, February 15, 1906. Her 1877 prediction comes from her lecture “Homes of Single Women.” No source was found for “I wasn’t ready to vote, didn’t want to vote, but I did want equal pay for equal work.” Her paper The Revolution ran “Equal Pay for Equal Work” on March 18, 1869.
  - Anthony and Stanton opposed the Fifteenth Amendment because it gave the vote to Black men and not to women. See Stanton’s “Manhood Suffrage” and Frederick Douglass’s reply in the Chapter 42 resources.
  - Anthony wrote to the young orator Anna Dickinson that her bed was “big enough and good enough to take” her in, and of wanting to “snuggle… closer than ever” with her “Chicky Dicky Darlint.” Late in life she called Emily Gross of Chicago “my new lover” (Lillian Faderman, To Believe in Women: What Lesbians Have Done for America, 2000, 26-28). See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
  - Young said that Esther Longtree, at the end of the book, “is the mother of us all, I would say, quoting Gertrude Stein” (Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Marguerite Young,” Review of Contemporary Fiction 23, no. 1, Spring 2003 (1989 original)). Stein’s opera The Mother of Us All (1947), with music by Virgil Thomson, is about Susan B. Anthony. Steven Shaviro also reported that Young called Mr. Spitzer the father of us all. See Marguerite Young on Her Craft.

- “the great snowy ptarmigan”: The ptarmigan turns white in winter to vanish against the snow. See Birds.
- “Is it on the mountain slope or in the valley of the shadow?”: See Psalm 23:4 in the Chapter 43 resources. See The Bible.
- “Put out the light, she said.”: See Othello’s “Put out the light” in the Chapter 43 resources. See Shakespeare.
- “Break, cable, break”: “And may there be no moaning of the bar, / When I put out to sea” (Alfred Tennyson, “Crossing the Bar,” 1889). See the Chapter 8 resources.
- “colors like the midnight rainbow”: See the moonbow in the Chapter 42 resources.
- “Her name was hyphenated like her life”: See the Boston numerologist who advised “C. H. Freemount-Snowden” in the Chapter 42 resources.
- “a virgin’s blood staining the snow”: In Grimm’s “Little Snow-White,” the queen pricks her finger and wishes for “a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood of the window-frame” (trans. Margaret Hunt, 1884). Hannah’s girl is “white as

the snow upon the mountains," and "Black was my true love's heart though white was her skin." See Fairy Tales and Folklore.

- "her acolyte, her beautiful girl": See Aristophanes's myth in the Symposium and The Bostonians in the Chapter 44 resources. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "some distant roof- top of the world": The Pamirs and the Tibetan plateau are called the Roof of the World. See Exploration and the Poles.
- "The deepest sleep is dreamless.": Socrates says that if death is a dreamless sleep, "to die is gain; for eternity is then only a single night" (Plato, Apology 40d-e, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 1871). The Mandukya Upanishad names deep sleep, where the sleeper desires nothing and dreams no dream, as the third state of the self. See Plato and Platonism and Hinduism.
- "angels rolling away the stones of tombs": "For the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door" (Matthew 28:2). See The Bible.
- "this damosel with the long white veils": "The blessed damozel leaned out / From the gold bar of Heaven" (Dante Gabriel Rossetti, "The Blessed Damozel," 1850). See Romantic Poets.
- "the infernal mountains of frozen furies": The lowest circle of Dante's Hell is not fire but ice, the frozen lake of Cocytus (Inferno 32-34). See Dante.
- "the magnetic North": James Clark Ross reached the North Magnetic Pole in 1831. It wanders, and has moved hundreds of miles since. See Exploration and the Poles.
- "a blot upon this great captain's escutcheon": An escutcheon is the shield that carries a coat of arms, and a blot on it is a stain on the family honor.
- "the innumerable coal mine strikes she had helped to start": Mary Harris "Mother" Jones organized coal miners' strikes from the 1890s into the 1920s. She put her class before suffrage and is reported to have said, "you don't need the vote to raise hell!" (Russell E. Smith, "March of the Mill Children," Social Service Review 41, no. 3, 1967, 298). To suffragists who called her anti, she answered, "I'm not an anti to anything which brings freedom to my class" (The Autobiography of Mother Jones, 1925, 203). See Women's Suffrage.
- "some poor foot soldier or Foreign Legionnaire": See the French Foreign Legion of Beau Geste in the Chapter 72 resources.
- "It would be neither the anchor nor the heart": The anchor on a gravestone is hope: "Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast" (Hebrews 6:19). See The Bible.
- "No sundial marked her hour": Sundials often carry the motto "Horas non numero nisi serenas," "I count only the sunny hours." See Clocks and Watches.
- "the ski trooper shrouded in white": Finnish ski troops in white camouflage held off the Soviet army in the Winter War of 1939-1940, and the American 10th Mountain Division fought on skis in the Italian Alps in 1945.

- “life being that which takes longest dying even in a eunuch’s heart”: In Chapter 43 vanity was “that which took longest dying.” See the Chapter 43 resources.
- “perhaps only a milestone marked—Twelve Miles”: Twelve Miles is what Mr. Spitzer thinks about putting on Cousin Hannah’s gravestone. There are some famous 12 Mile Markers in the US. There are also some in unincorporated communities in Indiana. It can also refer to a territorial waters limit.
    - Twelve Mile is an unincorporated community in Cass County, Indiana, near Young’s own Indiana country. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “this great firebrand of suffrage burning bright”: “Tyger Tyger, burning bright, / In the forests of the night” (William Blake, “The Tyger,” Songs of Experience, 1794). See Romantic Poets.
- “men should exert themselves to climb mountains”: The theme of climbing mountains and the metaphorical meaning of undertaking difficult journeys is recurrent throughout the text, especially in relation to Cousin Hannah. Nan Shepherd in The Living Mountain (written in the 1940s, published 1977) examined what it meant to walk “around” the mountain. “To aim for the highest point is not the only way to climb a mountain.” See Mountains.
    - Asked why he wanted to climb Everest, George Mallory answered, “Because it’s there” (New York Times, March 18, 1923).
- “mountaineers lost long ago stared out from behind great crystal walls”: There are many dead bodies weighing hundreds of pounds that have not been carried off of Mount Everest and other mountains, plus there is an enormous amount of trash that is left at the campsites. See Mountains.
    - Glaciers keep and slowly return their dead. Ötzi the Iceman, who died in the Alps some 5,300 years ago, came out of the ice in 1991. See Mallory and Irvine in the Chapter 42 resources.
- “pigeon poler”: A pigeon fancier flies his birds from the loft roof with a long pole, often flagged, waving it to drive them up and lowering it to bring them home, as Mr. Spitzer the lamplighter, “merely by reaching his pole,” might bring down the stars. In poker a pigeon is an easy mark, which suits Peron.
- “pigeons many-colored as Joseph’s coat”: “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children… and he made him a coat of many colours” (Genesis 37:3). See Genesis.
- “roosting on the heads of gondoliers who carried the dead”: See the funeral gondolas to the cemetery island of San Michele in the Chapter 14 resources.
- “Pigeons had stopped an old town clock.”: On August 12, 1945, a flock of starlings settled on the minute hand of Big Ben and slowed it by several minutes. See Clocks and Watches and Birds.
- “the pigeon with the Red Cross upon its snow-white breast”: Carrier pigeons served in both world wars. Cher Ami carried the message that saved the “Lost Battalion” in the Argonne in 1918, though shot through the breast, and France awarded the bird the Croix de Guerre. See Birds.

- “the Bleeding Heart”: The bleeding-heart dove of the Philippines has a white breast with a blood-red patch at its center, as if it had been wounded. See Birds.
- “passenger pigeons now extinct”: Audubon watched a flight of passenger pigeons pass for three days in 1813, “the light of noon-day” obscured “as by an eclipse” (John James Audubon, Ornithological Biography, 1831). The last, Martha, died at the Cincinnati Zoo on September 1, 1914. See Martha in the Chapter 49 resources. See Birds and Martha the Passenger Pigeon.
- “at Arlington”: Arlington may refer to Arlington National Cemetery, a United States military cemetery in Arlington County, Virginia.
- “the Anatolian calendar”: Young may mean the Rumi calendar, the Julian-based calendar of Ottoman Turkey, used for civil and fiscal affairs from 1840 until the Turkish Republic adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1926.
- “When had she heard the winding horn?”: See Roland’s horn in the Chapter 42 resources.
- “garlanded mules with caissons and riderless horses”: Caissons are chests to hold ammunition. At military funerals a caisson carries the coffin, and a riderless horse follows with boots reversed in the stirrups.
- “he was become his brother”: may be a full confession by Mr. Spitzer that he is not Joachim but Peron.
    - In Young’s first draft, she told Kay Bonetti, “Mr. Spitzer knew that he was really Peyron the gambler” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). See the Chapter 36 resources. Here he whispers his name, “daring not to say whether he was Peron who had died young or Joachim who was old… For really, he did not know.” See Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier”: Tomb of the Unknown Soldier is a historic monument dedicated to deceased US service members whose remains have not been identified in Arlington National Cemetery. It was dedicated in 1921 and has no flame. The perpetual flame burns over France’s Unknown Soldier beneath the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, lit in 1923.
- “the Greeks and Medes, the Persians”: “The law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not” (Daniel 6:8). See The Bible.
- “Here was the noblest Roman of them all.”: Antony over the body of Brutus: “This was the noblest Roman of them all” (Julius Caesar 5.5). See Shakespeare.
- “She knew her Carthage”: may refer to Dido, the legendary founder and queen of Carthage. Dido, whose name also appears as Elissa, is a figure from Phoenician and Roman history and mythology. She is known for founding the city of Carthage and for her tragic love story with the Trojan hero Aeneas. In Virgil’s Aeneid, Dido is depicted as a wise and ambitious leader who built Carthage into a prosperous city, according to some accounts.
    - Cato the Elder ended his speeches “Carthago delenda est,” “Carthage must be destroyed.” See the Chapter 61 resources.

- “a toad with eyes like lamps”: See the toad that “Wears yet a precious jewel in his head” (As You Like It 2.1) in the Chapter 2 resources. See Shakespeare.
- “great krakens curling around the helms of boats”: “Below the thunders of the upper deep, / Far, far beneath in the abysmal sea, / His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep / The Kraken sleepeth” (Alfred Tennyson, “The Kraken,” 1830). See The Sea and Water.
- “challenged icebergs, driving against them with her sword”: Don Quixote charges the windmills, taking them for giants (Miguel de Cervantes, Don Quixote, 1605, chapter 8). See Don Quixote.
- “perhaps the smallest things were indeterminate”: Lucretius taught that atoms swerve, so that something may “break the decrees of fate” (fati foedera rumpat, De Rerum Natura 2.254). Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle (1927) found indeterminacy at the smallest scale of nature. See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory.
- “this wheel of fortune”: In Boethius’s Consolation of Philosophy (about 524), Fortune turns her wheel, bringing the high down and the low up (book 2).
- “was not this body like an old coat hung upon a nail”: “An aged man is but a paltry thing, / A tattered coat upon a stick” (W. B. Yeats, “Sailing to Byzantium,” 1928). See the Chapter 41 resources.
- “Had he not lost his butterfly”: In Greek, psyche means both the soul and the butterfly. See Butterflies and Moths and Greek Mythology.
- “Ah, traitor moon!”: “O, swear not by the moon, th’ inconstant moon, / That monthly changes in her circled orb” (Romeo and Juliet 2.2). See Shakespeare and Moon and Stars.
- “Who is that dwarf, a turret on his head”: May refer to Nietzsche where the dwarf represents self-doubt and the limitations of conventional thought. Zarathustra’s journey involves overcoming the dwarf, symbolizing the overcoming of self-doubt and the embrace of his philosophy, including the concept of eternal recurrence. Young gives him the rose of consciousness. According to Thomas Reid sensory information, particularly in relation to movement, contributes to our subjective experience of the world. This framework suggests that consciousness might be closely tied to our ability to interact with and act upon the world. On sensation and perception, Thomas Reid saw sensation as a primitive feeling or awareness, while perception was the process of interpreting these feelings and associating them with external objects. The ability to distinguish between sensation and perception is linked to consciousness (Thomas Reid, Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man, 1785). The turret is typically a small tower, often ornamental, that juts out from a building. It is typically found on castles, large houses, etc. See Nietzsche.
- “no trumpeter swan could accompany her”: The trumpeter swan was nearly gone but not extinct. In 1932 only 69 were counted in the United States outside Alaska, and the Red Rock Lakes refuge was set aside for them in 1935. See Birds.

- “Shall love be infinitely postponed?”: may refer to Hegel. To deny something is to determine it, and to determine something is to negate it. Spinoza’s principle is “every determination is negation” (Spinoza, letter 50 to Jarig Jelles, 1674). Hegel takes this one step further by suggesting that negation itself is a process of creation, and is even the essence of positive being. By denying a certain trait or characteristic, one is implicitly acknowledging the possibility of its opposite or the existence of a different reality. For Hegel, this power of the negative, or the act of negation, is what drives progress and development. Denying a particular concept allows for the possibility of a new one to emerge, incorporating both the original concept and its negation. This is often explained through the concept of the negation of the negation, where a denial of a denial leads to a new synthesis that transcends both the original thesis and the antithesis. From an existentialist perspective denying a predefined purpose or essence allows for the possibility of individuals to create their own meaning and existence. See Kant and Hegel, Spinoza, and Existentialism.
    - Keats’s lover on the urn can never kiss, and so: “She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss, / For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!” (John Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” 1819). See Romantic Poets.
- “Forgive the cloud which knows not what it whispers”: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). See The Bible.
- “I aspired to greater heights than most, so I fell a greater distance”: Here Cousin Hannah grapples with their desires, failures, and the often painful gap between expectation and outcome, highlighting the complexity of human experience and the poignant cost of reaching beyond oneself.
    - Icarus flew too near the sun and fell into the sea (Ovid, Metamorphoses 8), and “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” (Isaiah 14:12). See Greek Mythology and The Bible.
- “Oh, nightmare, were you my only love?”: The mare of nightmare is a goblin that sits on the sleeper’s chest, as in Henry Fuseli’s painting The Nightmare (1781).
- “Forgive, too, the self-contradiction of life and death, for both were contained within us.”: “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)” (Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” 51). See American Writers.
- “Forgive the secret none can tell”: It is considered a classic riddle and the common answer is death. In a metaphorical sense it may refer to a profound or life-altering experience that can’t be adequately described in words. Or a secret that if revealed would lead to someone’s demise or ruin.
- “His music was made almost entirely of lost chords.”: See Adelaide Procter’s “The Lost Chord” in the Chapter 25 resources. See Music and Composers.
- “all the chessmen were suddenly swept over-board”: See the Rubáiyát’s “Chequer-board of Nights and Days / Where Destiny with Men for Pieces plays” in the Chapter 13 resources.

- “We were two lone women. There was no man.”: This is Hannah’s confession, and the secret Mr. Spitzer will keep. See the bridal trousseaus Young described to Studs Terkel under “a secret woman, a bride” in the Chapter 42 resources. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “Death is love, and love is death”: It is a profound paradox. Life, with its drive to continue, is defined by its end, and everything mortal is part of the natural cycle of birth, death, and decay. The loss of a loved one can deepen the capacity for love and understanding. Love asks for a death of the self, of the ego, as one puts the needs of another first, and sacrificial love puts itself in harm’s way. After death, love endures through memory and legacy. Some religions and philosophies offer an afterlife, reincarnation, or love as a force that conquers death, and some works suggest that the intensity of love can be destructive, a “death” of the self. Isolde’s dying song in Wagner’s Tristan und Isolde (1865) is known as the Liebestod, love-death.
    - “For love is strong as death” (Song of Solomon 8:6). See the Liebestod of Tristan und Isolde in the Chapter 9 resources. See The Bible.
- “I have been a wanderer ever since, wandering over the face of the earth”: Cain, who killed his brother, is sentenced: “a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth” (Genesis 4:12). Hannah believed she had killed her love. See Genesis.
- “ancient Samarkand”: Samarkand is currently in Uzbekistan and is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in Central Asia. It is on the Silk Road, an ancient trade route from China to the Mediterranean.
- “he who loves shall lose himself in love as in death”: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25; see also John 12:25). The loss of self in love is not presented as purely tragic but as an essential part of the human condition and the search for connection beyond isolation. See The Bible.
- “Perhaps body and soul were one.”: Spinoza held that mind and body are one and the same thing, conceived now under the attribute of thought, now under the attribute of extension (Ethics 2, proposition 21, scholium). See Spinoza.
- “sailing with the neap tide”: See the neap tide in the Chapter 43 resources.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Acolyte

An attendant or follower; in church, one who assists the priest.

Alarum

An old word for alarm, a call to arms.

Ambivalence

Mixed or contradictory feelings.

Ambivalently

With mixed or contradictory feelings or meanings.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Aplomb

Self-assurance, poise.

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Athwart

Across, from side to side; also, against.

Bedouin

A nomadic desert Arab.

Bellwether

The lead sheep of a flock, which wears a bell.

Billows

Great waves.

Blackamoor

An old term for a Black African or any dark-skinned person, common in European art and in decorative figures of Black servants. It is now considered offensive.

Caisson

A two-wheeled cart for ammunition, used at military funerals to carry the coffin.

Cannonade

A long bombardment by cannon.

Casket

A small, often ornate box for jewels or valuables. In American usage, also a coffin, so Young's "casket containing no jewel" carries both meanings.

Cavalier

A horseman or gallant gentleman; also offhand and disdainful.

Chagrin

Distress or annoyance at having failed or been humiliated.

Chaplet

A wreath or string of beads worn on the head.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chivalry

The code of the medieval knight; courtesy and protection shown by a man toward a woman.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Cosmography

A description or map of the whole universe, both heavens and earth.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Crystal-gazer

A fortune-teller who looks into a crystal ball to see the future.

Crystal-hunter

A prospector in the Alps who climbs into rock clefts to find quartz crystals.

Defile

A narrow pass between mountains.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Dubious

Doubtful.

Effigy

A sculpture or model of a person, especially one lying on a tomb.

Empearled

Adorned with pearls, or having a pearly sheen.

Enigma

A mystery or puzzle; a person or thing that is hard to understand.

Epithalamium

A song or poem celebrating a marriage.

Equivocation

The use of vague or double-edged words to avoid committing oneself.

Escutcheon

The shield bearing a coat of arms.

Eunuch

A man who has been castrated. Eunuchs were employed for centuries to guard harems and to serve as officials in royal courts in the Middle East, China, and Byzantium. See The eunuch (Ch 35).

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Fitful

Starting and stopping; irregular.

Flounced

Trimmed with flounces, wide strips of gathered or pleated fabric sewn to a skirt or dress.

Fluted

Marked with long rounded grooves, like a column.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Gondolier

The boatman who rows a Venetian gondola, standing at the stern with a single oar.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Harebell

A wildflower with nodding blue bell-shaped flowers.

Headland

A high point of land jutting into the sea.

Helm

The wheel or tiller that steers a ship.

Helmsman

The person who steers a ship.

Heterogeneous

Made of unlike parts; mixed.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Inarticulate

Unable to express oneself clearly.

Indeterminate

Not clearly fixed or defined.

Infinitesimal

Extremely small.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Inscrutably

In a way that cannot be understood.

Intaglio

A design cut into the surface of a gem or stone.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Myriad

A countless number.

Neap tide

The tide with the smallest difference between high and low water, twice a month at the quarter moons.

Nether

Lower; under.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Palmer

A medieval pilgrim who brought back a palm frond from the Holy Land.

Persian

A person of Persia, now Iran.

Philatelist

A stamp collector.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Promontory

A high point of land jutting out into the sea.

Ptarmigan

A grouse of cold mountains and the far north that turns white in winter.

Punctilio

A fine point of etiquette; exactness in form.

Refraction

The bending of light as it passes from one medium to another.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Roseate

Rose-colored. Also hopeful or overly optimistic.

Sceptre

A staff carried by a ruler as a sign of power. Also spelled scepter.

Scimitar

A curved Eastern sword.

Sentinel

A guard or watchman.

Sepulchre

A tomb cut in rock or built of stone.

Seraglio

The women’s quarters of a Muslim palace; a harem.

Shah

The title of the king of Persia, now Iran.

Sheik

An Arab chief or elder.

Shot silk

Silk woven with threads of two colors, so it changes color in the light.

Sonorous

Deep and full in sound.

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard. Spar is also the name for certain shiny, easily split crystalline minerals, such as Iceland spar.

Spectre

A ghost.

Speculative

Thoughtful and wondering; based on guesswork.

Spindrift

Spray blown from the tops of waves.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Spume

Foam or froth on the sea.

Squall

A sudden, violent gust of wind, often with rain or snow.

Stygian

Of the river Styx in the Greek underworld; dark and gloomy.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women's right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women's Suffrage.

Transience

The state of passing away quickly.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Vicariously

Experienced through another person.

Vigil

A period of staying awake to keep watch, especially at the bedside of someone sick or dying.

Vortex

A whirlpool or whirlwind.

Wayfarer

A traveler, especially on foot.

Winding sheet

The cloth a corpse is wrapped in for burial.

Windjammer

A large square-rigged sailing ship.

Chapter 46

Summary

Mr. Spitzer comes to understand that Cousin Hannah had also been a secret mountain climber, perhaps the greatest ever known among ladies, of the Matterhorn, Mont Blanc, and mountains of consciousness, though she was ashamed of it and spoke of it only when dying. When she died, the room grew colder than the Arctic Alps. As her executor he takes her alpenhorn for his collection of instruments, and on the foggy beach he blows a few notes like a ghost calling his lost love. A ram steps out of the fog, and sheep follow him, and ever after lost men follow him through the grey cities. Her dying has brought him to reality and taught him the power of a dead love. He wanders the fog-bound city asking strangers whether they have seen her, and people take him for mad, until an old steeplejack lurches out of the fog and answers him in paradoxes: “I live because I am dead.” The chapter ends with Hannah’s last cry to the bright star of her love.

Characters present

Cousin Hannah · Joachim Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Identity and the Self · Love · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

Symbols: Birds · Clocks and Watches · Fog and Mist · Horses and Carriages · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Moon and Stars · Mountains · Music and Instruments · Pearls and Jewels · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Umbrella

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology

Allusions: Astronomy · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Judaism · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job · Women’s Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens by portraying Cousin Hannah not merely as a suffrage leader but as a “valiant wanderer” who climbed “formidable mountains and supernumerary peaks” beyond physical realms such as mountains “greater than mountains,” rising “Alp above Alp through consciousness” even after death. This metaphor suggests her spirit transcends earthly limits, linking her struggles and love to the eternal and the sublime. Her life is framed as an ascent beyond mortal boundaries, symbolizing a quest for immortal love and freedom.

- Mr. Spitzer, acting as Cousin Hannah's executor, finds and appropriates her alpenhorn, a heavy musical instrument twice her height. This alpenhorn is symbolic: though it cannot literally evoke the Alps in the lowlands, it serves as a poignant emblem of her spirit and the mountains she climbed. Mr. Spitzer reflects on how music arises from chaos and how the instruments of earth are linked to the heavenly realm, though none are truly "strung in paradise." This passage explores the tenuous relationship between art, memory, and transcendence.
- The novel muses on how ghosts in dreams never appear naked but are always clothed in some form implying that all of life and death is a form of "mask" or "clothing." This metaphor conveys the idea that identity, beauty, and existence are layered, elusive, and perhaps illusory. Mr. Spitzer's own music is described as a form of elegy or aubade that cannot quite awaken the dead but hints at the dreamlike quality of life and death.
- A deeply philosophical passage appears as Mr. Spitzer contemplates the "power of a dead beauty, a dead love," and the "sterility which begets... all beautiful things." He asserts that no one truly knows the present moment because it is always "freighted with the past," suggesting that beauty and existence are ghosts of themselves, transitory and elusive. The cloud over beauty is beauty itself, so the veil of mystery remains intact. This suggests an acceptance of ambiguity and the unknowable as essential to human experience.
- Despite her achievements, Cousin Hannah is described as being ashamed of her mountain-climbing accomplishments, preferring oblivion over fame. Mr. Spitzer reflects on how many famous people value a moment of oblivion more than lasting glory, as oblivion is paradoxically both what they flee from and what they seek. This passage reveals a tension between public success and private vulnerability, heroism and cowardice, and the human desire for both recognition and escape.
- A haunting voice from an old steeplejack (a tall, church-like figure) speaks to Mr. Spitzer, embodying contradictions like "I live because I am dead," "I love because I love not," and the idea that all who have loved have died and drowned. Time is depicted as a cloud crossing a clock face that tells no time. This passage powerfully captures the theme of existence as filled with paradox, where life and death, love and loss are inseparable, and where time itself is an illusion.
- After Cousin Hannah's death, Mr. Spitzer wanders the fog-bound city asking strangers if they have seen her, despite being perceived as mad. This quest symbolizes the human search for meaning, connection, and remembrance in a world of loss and forgetting. It also reflects on how memory is fragmented and how one can be simultaneously lost yet followed suggesting the persistence of influence beyond death.
- The chapter closes with Cousin Hannah's dying cry, calling for a "bright star of my love" to find the "lightless star," signaling the mysterious journey beyond death. The imagery of mountains resurrecting before "the last great cataclysm" and her love "going down" evokes a cosmic, cyclical view of life and death, blending mythic and personal dimensions.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “Never yet had he been present at a climax.” Why does Mr. Spitzer always come before or after?
- “The cloud upon the face of beauty was beauty itself. So never would he lift the cloud.” Why does Mr. Spitzer refuse to lift it?
- “For that of which she should have been proud, she was ashamed.” Why would Hannah hide her greatest achievement?

Characters

- Mr. Spitzer says Hannah “had brought him, by her dying, to reality.” What has he learned from her?
- The men who call Hannah “a charlatan, a mere poseur, a mountebank” forget “her motive which had been her love.” Does knowing her motive change her deeds?
- Who is the steeplejack, “tall as a church steeple,” who “fell the night she fell”?

Connections

- In Chapter 44 Hannah’s love was lost in the mountains. How does knowing she was a great climber change that story?
- Mr. Spitzer is “like an obsessed census-taker” who always finds “one missing,” as in Chapter 42. Who is the missing one now?
- The steeplejack says, “All who have loved have drowned.” Where else in the novel do lovers drown?

Reflection

- “It was oblivion from which they had fled, and yet it was oblivion toward which they fled.” Why might the famous long for oblivion?
- “For who had ever known the present moment?” Is the present always freighted with the past?
- Is a great deed lessened if no one remembers it?

Research: Characters

Cousin Hannah

- A complex figure; a suffragette, a mountain climber, a symbol of liberation and love’s endurance, “perhaps the greatest mountain-climber unknown to history, surely the

greatest ever known among ladies." She is proud yet ashamed of her achievements, embodying contradictions of strength and vulnerability. Her death is portrayed almost mythically, with imagery of frost, mountains, and alpenhorns signaling her passage to another realm.

Mr. Spitzer

- Witness and executor of Cousin Hannah's estate, an old musician who is deeply introspective and symbolic. He is both observer and participant, grappling with loss, memory, and the meaning of life and death. His inquiries after Hannah's death reveal his obsession and his quest for understanding the mysteries she embodied.

The Steeplejack

- A steeple jack is a skilled tradesperson who works at great heights, primarily on tall structures like church steeples, chimneys, and towers, to perform repairs, maintenance, or construction. The profession has historical roots in the maintenance of ecclesiastical buildings.
- This "old steeple-headed steeplejack or steeple jill" is the only one who remembers Hannah and says "that she was beautiful."

Research: Themes

Death and Immortality

See: Death and Mortality

- Cousin Hannah's death is described with vivid cold and frozen imagery, suggesting a transition into an eternal, timeless state, but one that still holds mystery and significance. There is an ongoing meditation on what it means to die and what survives beyond death, particularly love and memory.

Love Beyond Mortality

See: Death and Mortality · Love

- Hannah's message is that love transcends mortal bounds, aiming for an immortal love. This idea recurs as Mr. Spitzer contemplates the power and persistence of love even after death, and the paradox that those who have loved have also died, and vice versa.

The Mountain as a Symbol

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- Mountains symbolize challenges, spiritual ascension, and the unknown. Cousin Hannah is portrayed as an unparalleled mountain climber not just of physical peaks

like the Matterhorn or Mont Blanc, but of metaphorical mountains of consciousness and existence.

Memory and Oblivion

See: Memory and the Past

- The chapter addresses how history, fame, and memory are fleeting. Cousin Hannah, despite her great achievements, is largely forgotten by the world, illustrating the tension between individual legacy and collective memory.

Music and Silence

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Mr. Spitzer, a musician, reflects on music as a metaphor for life and death, where silence and sound intermingle. Music arises from chaos and holds a kind of ephemeral power, much like life itself.

Identity and Masks

See: Identity and the Self

- The motif of masks and clothing in dreams suggests that identity is always layered, never fully naked or transparent. Ghosts and memories are always clothed in some form, and this applies to living beings as well.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Alpenhorn

See: Music and Instruments

- Represents a call to lost love and memory; a connection to the mountains and the past. Its presence in a flat coastal landscape symbolizes the displacement of memory and the difficulty of preserving legacy in an unresponsive world.

Mountains and Snow

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter · Mountains

- Mountains stand for the ultimate challenges and heights of spirit and consciousness. Snow and ice symbolize purity, death, and timelessness, as well as the coldness and isolation that often accompany great achievements or sacrifices.

The Dead Moon

See: Moon and Stars

- A recurring symbol of deathless love and the eternal, especially in a world where stars have faded or fallen. It suggests a cosmic, timeless love that persists beyond human life.

Music and Bells

See: Music and Instruments

- Music, especially the unplayed or unheard music, represents the ineffable aspects of life and death. Bells ringing without clear cause evoke mystery, transition, and the presence of the unseen.

Fog and Darkness

See: Fog and Mist · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Fog represents uncertainty, loss, and the blurring of reality and memory. The drifting fog and shadows evoke the liminal space between life and death and the difficulty of grasping truth.

Research: Resources

- “that Troubadour with her flaming message”: See Jaufré Rudel and the troubadours in the Chapter 40 resources and the Troubadour’s love for the dead love in the Chapter 44 resources.
- “she would have won her laurels and her spurs”: A squire won his spurs when he was knighted for valor. At Crécy in 1346 Edward III is said to have refused to send help to his son the Black Prince: “let the boy win his spurs” (Froissart, Chronicles).
- “the mountains which were greater than mountains”: See Mountains.
- “that great Matterhorn”: Matterhorn is a mountain of the Alps on the border between Italy and Switzerland. Edward Whymper’s party first climbed it in 1865, and four of the seven died on the descent.
- “Mt. Rosa”: Monte Rosa is a massif of the Pennine Alps on the Swiss-Italian border. Its Dufourspitze is the highest summit in Switzerland.
- “Mt. Blanc, Moensch”: Mt. Blanc is the highest mountain in the Alps. Moensch, or Monch, is a mountain in the Bernese Alps. See Mont Blanc in the Chapter 44 resources.
- “Wetterhorn”: Wetterhorn is a peak in the Swiss Alps. Alfred Wills’s ascent in 1854 is often taken as the start of the golden age of alpinism.
- “rising Alp above Alp”: “Hills peep o’er hills, and Alps on Alps arise!” (Alexander Pope, An Essay on Criticism, 1711).
- “the same flowers may be found, white on white”: The same Arctic-alpine plants, such as mountain avens and moss campion, grow both in the far north and on the high Alps,

left behind on the mountaintops when the Ice Age glaciers withdrew. See Snow, Ice, and Winter.

- “like the asphodel in fields of paradise”: See the meadow of asphodel in the Chapter 42 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “the mirrors were rheumed with frost”: In Jewish mourning, and in many Victorian houses, the mirrors were covered after a death. See Judaism.
- “to play the ranz des vaches”: The ranz des vaches is the call of the Swiss herdsmen to their cattle. Rousseau wrote that it was forbidden to sing it near Swiss soldiers in foreign service, since it made them so homesick that they deserted or died (Dictionnaire de musique, 1768). Rossini set it in the overture to William Tell (1829). See Music and Instruments.
- “the alpenglow”: Alpenglow is the rosy light on high peaks just after sunset or before sunrise, when the valleys are already in shadow. See Mountains.
- “the smuggler Charon’s boat”: Charon ferries the dead across the Styx for the coin placed in the mouth of the dead. See Greek Mythology.
- “like statues upholding the rain-falling roofs”: Statues of women that hold up a roof are caryatids, as on the Porch of the Maidens of the Erechtheion in Athens.
- “all those lutes played by the angels of heaven”: Painters gave heaven the instruments of earth, as in the music-making angels of Fra Angelico’s Linaioli Triptych (1433). See Music and Instruments.
- “the enormous shadow of his black cape on the soughing fog”: A walker’s shadow thrown huge upon mist or fog, often ringed with a halo, is the Brocken spectre, named for the Harz mountain where it was first described. Coleridge’s rustic “Nor knows he makes the shadow he pursues!” (“Constancy to an Ideal Object,” 1828). See Fog and Mist and Romantic Poets.
- “ghosts have seldom or never appeared naked in men’s dreams”: Hamlet’s father appears “in complete steel” on the battlements and later “in his habit as he lived” (Hamlet 1.4, 3.4). See Shakespeare.
- “The great couturier has snipped his last thread.”: Atropos, the third of the Fates, cuts the thread of life. See Greek Mythology.
- “his aubade for the evening star”: Aubade is a morning love song or song/poem about lovers separating at dawn. John Donne’s “The Sun Rising” scolds the dawn: “Busy old fool, unruly sun” (1633).
    - Venus is both the morning star and the evening star, called Phosphorus and Hesperus by the Greeks. Gottlob Frege used the two names, one object with two senses, in “On Sense and Reference” (1892). See Astronomy.
- “the silver sheep’s bell which had once rung to the lost sheep”: “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it?” (Luke 15:4). See The Bible.

- “lost like the Dog star”: Sirius, the Dog Star, rises with the sun in late summer, the dog days. See “before the day of the dog,” below. See Moon and Stars.
- “a ram had stepped out of the fog”: “And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns” (Genesis 22:13). See Genesis.
- “he had been followed by men in the grey cities”: Like the Pied Piper, the musician is followed first by beasts and then by men. See the Chapter 6 resources. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “For who had ever known the present moment?”: Augustine found that the present has no extent: “the present hath no space” (Confessions 11.15, trans. E. B. Pusey, 1838). See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “The cloud upon the face of beauty was beauty itself.”: The fourteenth-century Cloud of Unknowing teaches that God is known not by thought but by love, through a cloud that is never lifted in this life: “By love may He be gotten and holden; but by thought never” (chapter 6).
- “If he knew not her omega, then how did he know her alpha?”: “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord” (Revelation 1:8). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “the age of Hugh De Capet”: Hugh Capet was King of the Franks from 987 to 996 and founded the Capetian dynasty.
- “remembered in no stud book of mountain-climbing”: The General Stud Book, begun by James Weatherby in 1791, records the pedigree of every English thoroughbred. See Horses and Carriages.
- “some old Roman emperor who had minted too many coins”: In the third century, emperors paying their armies debased the coinage until the silver “antoninianus” held less than five percent silver.
- “by no winged horse’s head or harp”: The silver coins of Corinth bore Pegasus, the winged horse, and Irish coins the harp. See Greek Mythology.
- “Alpine holy grass”: Holy grass, sweet with the scent of vanilla, was strewn before church doors on saints’ days in northern Europe.
- “surely the greatest ever known among ladies”: Real suffragists climbed too. Annie Smith Peck made the first ascent of Huascarán’s north peak in 1908 and planted a “VOTES FOR WOMEN” flag on Coropuna in Peru in 1911. Fanny Bullock Workman of Massachusetts was photographed in the Karakoram about 1912 holding a newspaper headed “Votes for Women.” See Women’s Suffrage and Mountains.
- “Oblivion was ever at the heart of fame.”: “But the iniquity of oblivion blindly scattereth her poppy, and deals with the memory of men without distinction to merit of perpetuity” (Thomas Browne, Hydriotaphia, or Urn-Burial, 1658, chapter 5).
- “her granite was but a façade”: See Woolf’s “granite-like solidity” in the Chapter 44 resources.

- “She was like a dead planet wandering.”: Planet comes from the Greek planētēs, wanderer, for the stars that moved among the fixed stars. See Astronomy.
- “the croakings of frogs”: The chorus of Aristophanes’s The Frogs (405 BC) sings “Brekekekex koax koax.”
- “before the day of the dog”: The Day of the Dog is a 1904 comic novel by George Barr McCutcheon, in which a Chicago lawyer, Crosby, sent to get the widow Mrs. Delancy to sign estate papers, is trapped with her in a barn by a bulldog named Swallow, and a romance follows. McCutcheon also wrote Brewster’s Millions (1902), which has been filmed many times.
    - “The cat will mew, and dog will have his day” (Hamlet 5.1). The dog days of late summer are named for Sirius, the Dog Star, which appears earlier in this chapter. See Shakespeare.
- “I am thine only love”: The phrase suggests a deep, exclusive bond or connection, likely representing the intense and often elusive nature of love in the novel. It could be interpreted as the voice of love itself speaking to a beloved, emphasizing that despite all the illusions, losses, and fragmented experiences of life, there remains one true and abiding love that transcends time and circumstance.
    - The voice is a sand grain: “Because of me there grew this great pearl.” A natural pearl grows when an oyster coats an irritant with nacre, more often a parasite than a grain of sand. See Pearls and Jewels.
- “apples of Hesperides”: The golden apples of the Hesperides, guarded by a dragon at the edge of the world, were Heracles’s eleventh labor. See Greek Mythology.
- “like the light-winged cranes”: Pliny wrote that cranes “ballast themselves with coarse sand” before crossing the Black Sea, choose a leader, and post sentinels that each hold “a little stone in its claw” (Natural History 10.30, trans. John Bostock and H. T. Riley, 1855). See Birds.
- “flying like a Chinaman’s cue”: The queue, a long braid, was forced on Han Chinese men by the Qing dynasty from 1645 as a sign of submission. “Chinaman” is now considered a slur.
- “go back for a lost leader”: “Just for a handful of silver he left us” (Robert Browning, “The Lost Leader,” 1845).
- “Have you seen my lady—or my lord?”: “I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth… The watchmen that go about the city found me: to whom I said, Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?” (Song of Solomon 3:2-3). See The Bible.
- “This is but the shadow of a man.”: “For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days upon earth are a shadow” (Job 8:9). See The Book of Job.
- “for time passes not, and only man passes”: See Austin Dobson’s “Time goes, you say? Ah no! / Alas, Time stays, we go” in the Chapter 12 resources.
- “an old steeple-headed steeplejack”: “Steeple jill” is Young’s joke on Jack and Jill.

- “I fell when stars fell from the clouds”: On the night of November 12-13, 1833, the Leonid meteor storm filled the American sky with tens of thousands of shooting stars, and it was long remembered as “the night the stars fell.” See Astronomy.
- “ladies scudding under white umbrellas”: See the white umbrellas of the spa in the Chapter 39 resources. See The Umbrella.
- “dead as the balloonist shrouded in the garden”: See Sophie Blanchard, who died when her balloon caught fire over Paris, in the Chapter 42 resources.
- “There is a negress in the belfry.”: The phrase plays on “bats in the belfry.” “Negress” is now considered offensive.
- “I live because I am dead”: The steeplejack’s line echoes the mystics:
  - Teresa of Ávila: “Vivo sin vivir en mí, / y tan alta vida espero, / que muero porque no muero,” “I live without living in myself, and I hope for so high a life that I die because I do not die.”
- “the surveyor with his plummet line”: “The Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand” (Amos 7:7). See The Bible.
- “Some were killed by a rain drop”: The steeplejack’s litany recalls Richard II: “let us sit upon the ground / And tell sad stories of the death of kings: / How some have been depos’d; some slain in war” (3.2). See the Chapter 3 resources. See Shakespeare.
- “Eternity was but a moment.”: “To see a World in a Grain of Sand, / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower, / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand, / And Eternity in an hour” (William Blake, “Auguries of Innocence,” about 1803). See Romantic Poets.
- “The great steeplechase is over.”: The first steeplechase was run in Ireland in 1752, from the church steeple at Buttevant to the steeple at Doneraile, by Cornelius O’Callaghan and Edmund Blake. Here it is run by the clock’s “tall jockey” and “short jockey.” See Horses and Carriages and Clocks and Watches.
- “much like the fly in the spider’s web”: “‘Will you walk into my parlour?’ said the Spider to the Fly” (Mary Howitt, “The Spider and the Fly,” 1829).
- “All was not over so long as there was one card out”: See the ace of spades and the ace of hearts in the Chapter 42 resources. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “he would have had his twin at his last hour”: To see one’s double was an omen of death. Shelley told of meeting his double weeks before he drowned in 1822.
- “Ah, bright star of my love”: This may refer to John Keats’s sonnet “Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art” (1819). See Romantic Poets.

Vocabulary

Acme

The highest point of something; the peak.

Alpenglow

The rosy light on high peaks just after sunset or before sunrise.

Alpenhorn

A long wooden horn of the Alps.

Ambivalence

Mixed or contradictory feelings.

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Asphodel

A lily-like flower that, in Greek myth, covers the meadows of the underworld where ordinary souls go after death.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Attrition

A wearing away by friction.

Ballast

Heavy material, such as stones, carried low in a ship to keep it steady.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Belfry

A bell tower, or the room in a tower where the bells hang.

Boreal

Of the north; from Boreas, the north wind.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Corruscating

Young’s spelling of coruscating, flashing or sparkling.

Coruscated

Sparkled; flashed.

Courtier

An attendant at a royal court.

Couturier

A designer and maker of fine clothes for women.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Eunuch

A man who has been castrated. Eunuchs were employed for centuries to guard harems and to serve as officials in royal courts in the Middle East, China, and Byzantium. See The eunuch (Ch 35).

Executor

The person named to carry out a will.

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Glow-worm

A beetle whose wingless female and larvae give off a greenish light.

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Larboard

The old word for the left side of a ship.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Mountebank

A swindling showman.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Paladin

One of Charlemagne’s twelve knights; any heroic champion.

Patriarchal

Of or ruled by fathers or men; venerable like a patriarch.

Peaked

Thin and pale, as from illness.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Poseur

One who puts on airs to impress.

Purlieus

Outskirts; haunts.

Renunciation

The act of giving something up.

Rheumed

Clouded or filmed, as eyes with rheum.

Scudding

Moving fast before the wind.

Soughing

Making a soft sighing or rushing sound, like wind in trees.

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Steeplechase

A horse race over fences, ditches, and water jumps, first run cross-country from one church steeple to another.

Steeplejack

One who climbs and repairs steeples and chimneys.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women’s right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called

themselves suffragists. See Women’s Suffrage.

Supernumerary

Extra; more than the number needed. In the theater, an extra with no lines.

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists’ dream of turning base metal into gold.

Undulating

Rising and falling in waves.

Vortex

A whirlpool or whirlwind.

Chapter 47

Content note: *This chapter mentions the suicide of Mr. Spitzer's twin brother, Peron.*

Summary

Mr. Spitzer remembers Cousin Hannah's last words, that the mountains moved, that her love lay white under the snow, and that if they could have had a child, "red as her blood, white as the snow," this great battle never would have taken place. Walking the foggy shore, he thinks of what he owes his dead twin, who robbed death of its terror and will be a "Welcoming Committee of One" on the other side, and he wonders which brother he is. He keeps a count of all things and finds that something is always missing: "Among all things possible, there was the rejected possibility." He dreams of music never to be played, fears marriage as he fears change, and is agonized by attributing consciousness to everything. He wonders whether Hannah was the bride or the bridegroom and whether her love was her skirt, for which her love had died in the mountains. Afraid to look on her dying face lest beauty return to it, he lays a skirt over her body, and as her attorney, closing her house before it is torn down, he decides it is better that lost things sink whole than drift scattered.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Cousin Hannah · Peron Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Duality and Doubles · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Love · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Butterflies and Moths · Clocks and Watches · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Moon and Stars · Mountains · Music and Instruments · Roses and Flowers · Silence and Deafness · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Plato and Platonism · Schopenhauer · Spinoza · Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory · Wittgenstein

Allusions: American Writers · Ecclesiastes · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Judaism · Music and Composers · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, Mr. Spitzer reflects that Cousin Hannah, like himself, “had deferred her life to the next life” and that her death blurs the boundary between life and afterlife. He questions whether their love and existence end or begin anew, pondering the symbolism of reveille or taps in bugle calls. This passage underscores the theme of death as a transition rather than an end, and the ambiguity surrounding the afterlife and memory.
- Mr. Spitzer’s relationship with his twin brother is a recurring motif. He muses on owing much to his brother, both financially and spiritually, and imagines his brother waiting across the divide of death as a “Welcoming Committee of One” on the other side. This reflects the intertwining of identity, memory, and fate, and how death and life are shared continuums rather than isolated events.
- Throughout the chapter, there is a pervasive sense of death as a profound mystery, “this shrouded mystery, it seemed to him, this veil of gossamer which none should lift,” emphasizing the inscrutability of death and the impossibility of fully comprehending it. Mr. Spitzer’s uncertainty about whether the suffrage captain was the bride or bridegroom, or had passed beyond recognition, highlights death’s ambiguity and impenetrability.
- Mr. Spitzer contemplates the interdependence of love and death, asserting “Death was ever this dying love,” and that transience is the essence of beauty and love. The mourner, like Mr. Spitzer himself, exists only to mourn, suggesting that love outlives life but is always shadowed by mortality. This passage poignantly links grief, memory, and the human condition.
- Mr. Spitzer is troubled by the limits of memory and identity. He questions whether he can truly know himself or others, acknowledging his own forgetfulness and the “factor missing” in all attempts to capture reality or the self. This theme emphasizes the fragility and partiality of human understanding.
- Music recurs as a metaphor for existence. Mr. Spitzer imagines “music written never to be played,” encompassing all sounds, silences, and lost notes, symbolizing life’s incompleteness and the ineffable nature of experience. Music embodies the complexity, beauty, and loss inherent in life and death.
- A striking symbolic image is the suffrage captain’s skirt, which Mr. Spitzer lays over her body. He speculates that “perhaps her love was her skirt hiding her great wound, her disappointment, her bleeding heart.” The skirt or veil represents both concealment and protection, underscoring the theme of hidden truths and the mysteries of love and death.
- Mr. Spitzer meditates on marriage as a metaphor for union, often equated with death or the end of possibility. He contrasts his own fear of commitment with his brother’s more reckless embrace of chance, reflecting on the paradox that marriage might

herald death or vice versa, and the loneliness of the single and the unmarried in life and beyond.

- Near the close of the chapter, Cousin Hannah is imagined as a wanderer, “crying at many gates... forever crying for the image of her love who had gone before her into the darkness.” This suggests that death does not end longing or quest; the dead carry “unfinished business” and infinite frustration, wandering through liminal spaces between life and death.
- Mr. Spitzer’s fear of change is a subtle but important passage. He fears the transformation that death brings, of beauty fading or returning briefly before complete dissolution, reflecting human anxiety about impermanence and loss.
- Lastly, there is the image of Mr. Spitzer as a keeper of old papers, lawsuits, and memories symbolizing human attempts to impose order and meaning on life and death, even as all eventually sink beneath the waves. This suggests the futility yet dignity of human effort in the face of mortality and oblivion.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “Among all things possible, there was the rejected possibility. And perhaps the rejected possibility was all there was.” What is the rejected possibility in Mr. Spitzer’s life?
- “Grief could never be expressed at the wrong time.” Why does Mr. Spitzer write his elegies too soon?
- “Better that they should exist submerged than that they should exist at the surface where all were lost.” Why would sinking be better than drifting?

Characters

- Mr. Spitzer owes his brother “far more than the promissory notes.” What does he owe him?
- “Was she the bridegroom? Was she the bride?” Why can Mr. Spitzer not decide?
- Mr. Spitzer lays a skirt over Hannah because “surely a lady should be skirted when she went to her death.” Is this a kindness or a judgment?

Connections

- In Chapter 44 Hannah’s love died going back for her skirt. Here Mr. Spitzer wonders if “her love was her skirt.” How has the skirt changed meaning?
- Mr. Spitzer fears beauty that grows old, and his brother loved the old, thinking they would grow young in death. Where else do the twins mirror each other?
- The great census-taker of Chapter 42 returns, and “there was always one soul missing.” Who is missing now?

Reflection

- “For more than life or death he feared change.” Is change more frightening than death?
- “The single were the lonely.” Is Mr. Spitzer’s loneliness a choice?
- “Should one be held accountable for one’s entire life or for one moment?” How would you judge a life?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- A meditative figure, a twin and a double, who embodies contemplation, loss, and the attempt to reconcile opposites (life/death, love/loss).
- His identity is fluid, reflecting confusion and multiplicity; he is both mourner and wanderer, seeker and lost soul.

Peron Spitzer

- A contrast to Mr. Spitzer, more impulsive, a gambler, who had a different view of love and death: he “had loved only the old, thinking that the old would be suddenly beautiful and young when she was dead.”
- His death catalyzed Mr. Spitzer’s deep reflections and mourning: Mr. Spitzer is grateful “for the fortunate error of his suicide,” which “had not been the end of wisdom but the beginning of wisdom.”
- “His brother had died young, but had he ever married?”

The Old Suffrage Captain (Cousin Hannah)

- A symbolic figure representing a lost love, death, and unresolved mystery.
- Her death and legacy inspire Mr. Spitzer’s reflections on love, mortality, and memory.
- Her “skirt” symbolizes her love, her wound, her identity veiled and hidden.

Research: Themes

Love and Death as Intertwined Realities

See: Death and Mortality · Duality and Doubles · Love

- Love is portrayed as transitory and dying, yet death is equated with a dark lover who embraces and consumes the beloved.
- The idea that death is not an end but a transformation or continuation, possibly into another life or state.

Memory, Identity, and Loss

See: Memory and the Past · Identity and the Self · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Mr. Spitzer struggles with memory and identity, feeling lost between two worlds, unable to anchor himself or find certainty.
- The elusive nature of memory and the impossibility of fully capturing or commemorating a lost love.

The Transient and Illusory Nature of Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- Images and forms blend into one another (fishes into flowers, walls into sands) highlighting the fluidity and impermanence of existence.
- The world is described as illusory, clothed by dreams and veils, with reality fragmented and difficult to grasp fully.

The Passage Between Life and Death

See: Death and Mortality

- Mr. Spitzer contemplates whether there is a boundary between life and death or if the two overlap or are one.
- The metaphor of voyaging between two shores or worlds both ephemeral and non-existent which emphasizes ambiguity and liminality.

The Role of Music and Silence

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Music is a metaphor for life and memory, incomplete and elusive, containing unplayed notes and unuttered words.
- Silence and the “music of the dead” symbolize absence, loss, and the unspeakable aspects of death and grief.

The Symbolism of Nature and Celestial Imagery

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- Frequent references to mountains, waves, stars, moons, clouds, snow, and sea creatures evoke the vastness and mystery of existence (throughout).
- These images underscore the themes of impermanence, transformation, and the cosmic scale of human experience.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Interplay of Memory and Forgetting

- Mr. Spitzer is caught in a tension between remembering and forgetting, with memory fragmented and unreliable.

Death as a Process, Not an Event

- Death is portrayed less as a definitive end and more as a transformation, continuous with life and love.

The Ambiguity of Identity and Time

See: Clocks and Watches

- Mr. Spitzer's reflections reveal confusion about who he is, when he is, and how identity persists or dissolves across time and death.

Symbolism of Clothing and Veils

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- The recurring motif of skirts, shrouds, and veils points to concealment, mystery, and the social/cultural framing of death and identity.

The Role of Nature and the Cosmos

- Nature and celestial bodies are not mere backdrops but active symbols representing forces of change, impermanence, and the unknown.

Symbolic Objects and Images

White Rose

See: Roses and Flowers

- Purity, love, and mourning.

Skirt/Shroud

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- The veil of death, love hidden, mystery of identity.

Mountains and Snow

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter · Mountains

- Death's tomb, purity, and coldness.

Music and Silence

See: Music and Instruments · Silence and Deafness

- Life’s complexity and death’s silence.

Stars, Moons, and Waves

See: The Sea and Water · Moon and Stars

- Cosmic cycles, impermanence, and spiritual journeying (throughout).

Research: Resources

- “red as her blood, white as the snow”: See Grimm’s “Little Snow-White” in the Chapter 45 resources. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “Do I hear the bugle crying reveille or taps?”: Taps, the bugle call played at military funerals, was arranged in 1862 by the Union general Daniel Butterfield at Harrison’s Landing, Virginia.
- “Good-night and good-morning”: There is an Arabic phrase for the “Good-night and good-morning”; see the Chapter 42 resources. “The lover and the loved” may refer to Rumi or Sufism that also have similar sayings.
  - seems to mirror mystical interpretations from Sufism and Christian Theology and signifies the ultimate unity and interconnectedness of love, the person experiencing love, and the object of that love. In Sufism, the phrase highlights the journey of the soul towards union with the divine. The lover seeks to merge with the Beloved and in that ultimate union the distinction between the two dissolves. In Christian Theology the Father can be seen as the Lover, the Son as the Beloved, and the Holy Spirit as the love that binds them: “Behold, then, there are three things: he that loves, and that which is loved, and love” (Augustine, On the Trinity 8.10.14, trans. Arthur West Haddan, 1873). See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “good-night, sweet prince”: “Good night, sweet prince, / And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest!” (Hamlet 5.2). See Shakespeare.
- “good-night, my lady”: may refer to “Goodnight, Ladies,” first printed as “Farewell Ladies” in 1847 and credited to Edwin Pearce Christy of the Christy Minstrels; the full text appeared in 1867.
- “God rest you merry, gentlemen”: The carol survives in a manuscript of the early 1650s and was printed on a broadside about 1760. “Rest” meant keep, so its historic meaning is “may God keep you merry, gentlemen,” or grant you peace and happiness. The phrase “rest you merry” appears in two Shakespeare plays, As You Like It and Romeo and Juliet, and a caroler sings the carol at Scrooge’s keyhole in Charles Dickens’s A Christmas Carol (1843).
- “some small Moses in his mollusk boat”: “And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes… and she laid it in the flags by the river’s brink”

(Exodus 2:3). Moses is an important prophet in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Druze faith, Baha'i faith and other Abrahamic religions. See Judaism and The Bible.

- "This tendency of an image to repeat an image": It refers to the idea that images, memories, or experiences tend to recur in life or in the mind, not always exactly the same but often with subtle differences or variations.
- "through which he had lived, moved, gathered weight": "For in him we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28). See The Bible.
- "Among all things possible, there was the rejected possibility": If one were to eliminate all mistakes or errors from life, one might also lose the essential "seed of truth" those mistakes contain. Thus, the rejected possibility is not merely an absence but a meaningful part of the whole: the unactualized potential that shapes reality and experience.
- "where the old spouters spouted like the whales": A spouter is a whaleman. Ishmael spends his first night in New Bedford at the Spouter-Inn (Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, 1851, chapter 3). See American Writers.
- "old Tritons blowing their ivory horns": Triton is a Greek god of the sea. See Triton's conch in the Chapter 42 resources and the Chapter 43 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- "satyrs like fawns": Satyr is a male nature spirit in Greek mythology. See the Chapter 43 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- "confiding centaurs": Centaur is a creature half human and half horse in Greek mythology. See Greek Mythology.
- "Perhaps this world was the Lost Atlantis": Atlantis is a fictional island mentioned in an allegory on the hubris of nations in Plato's Timaeus and Critias: "in a single day and night of misfortune… the island of Atlantis in like manner disappeared in the depths of the sea" (Timaeus 25d, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 1871). See Plato and Platonism.
- "not knowing that we were what we mourned": "It is the blight man was born for, / It is Margaret you mourn for" (Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Spring and Fall," written 1880, published 1918).
- "a pregnant woman swollen with many waters": This is an allusion to the last character introduced in the last part of the book, Esther Longtree. This "dead self" that "heard no heartbeat" suggests a profound emptiness or loss inside her, where life has failed to take hold or continue. It reflects Esther's tragic experience of repeatedly carrying pregnancies that do not result in living children, embodying both physical and emotional sorrow.
    - Young said that Esther Longtree "is the mother of us all, I would say, quoting Gertrude Stein" (Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, "A Conversation with Marguerite Young," Review of Contemporary Fiction 23, no. 1, Spring 2003 (1989 original)). See the Chapter 45 resources.
- "What could he do for that old bloomer girl": See Amelia Bloomer in the Chapter 42 resources. See Women's Suffrage and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.

- “an armada of white peacock butterflies”: White peacock butterflies are found in the southeastern United States, Central and South America. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “Depart, depart, be utterly pulverized”: Mr. Spitzer’s speech to the sea shell is an apostrophe, a figure of speech where a speaker or writer directly addresses someone or something that is not present or cannot respond.
- “sail on, sail on until thou hast reached some other shore”: The farewell to the sea shell may echo Longfellow’s “Thou, too, sail on, O Ship of State! / Sail on, O Union, strong and great!” (“The Building of the Ship,” 1849) and the refrain of Joaquin Miller’s “Columbus,” “Sail on! sail on! and on!” See American Writers.
- “mosaic emperors”: See the gold mosaics of Byzantium and Yeats in the Chapter 41 resources.
- “neither to stay nor to depart”: “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2). See Ecclesiastes.
- “Was she the bridegroom? Was she the bride?”: See Aristophanes’s myth in the Symposium in the Chapter 44 resources and “a secret woman, a bride” in the Chapter 42 resources. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “simultaneities”: Simultaneity, events happening at the same time, is not absolute, particularly for events at different locations. Einstein showed in 1905 that whether two distant events are simultaneous depends on the observer (“On the Electrodynamics of Moving Bodies”). See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory.
- “there was no Savior upon these waters”: When Peter sinks on the waters he cries, “Lord, save me. And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him” (Matthew 14:30-31). It underscores the stark reality that sometimes there is no rescue, no reprieve, no saving grace, only the merciless, indifferent “waters” that engulf all. See The Bible.
- “Death was that dark lover who drew her down”: See Death and the Maiden in the Chapter 33 resources. See Music and Composers.
- “music of things unutterable”: Another of philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s contributions was silence: “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent” (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus 7, trans. C. K. Ogden, 1922). Language has logical limits, and of things beyond them, such as metaphysical or ethical truths, one should be silent. Silence for him was a space for potential meaning and understanding, a recognition of the limits of language, and a way of acknowledging what lies beyond the grasp of words. Mr. Spitzer’s “music of things unutterable” echoes Wittgenstein. See Wittgenstein.
- “He heard the singing of a dead Troubadour”: See Jaufré Rudel and the troubadours in the Chapter 40 resources and the Troubadour’s love for the dead love in the Chapter 44 resources. The lady “never awakening from her enchanted sleep” recalls Sleeping Beauty. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.

- “I am the Ethiope”: “Ethiope” is Shakespeare’s word: Romeo sees Juliet hang “upon the cheek of night / Like a rich jewel in an Ethiope’s ear” (Romeo and Juliet 1.5), and in A Midsummer Night’s Dream Lysander insults the dark Hermia, “Away, you Ethiope!” (3.2). “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” (Jeremiah 13:23). See Shakespeare.
- “the Atlas moth containing its spirit in the cloud”: See the Atlas moth, among the largest moths in the world, in the Chapter 29 resources. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “the phoenix burning”: See the burning phoenix in the Chapter 43 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “the king with many crowns”: “His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns” (Revelation 19:12). See The Bible.
- “Should it include the road not taken or the road taken?”: “The Road Not Taken” (Robert Frost, 1916). This line invites reflection on how a life and a legacy are understood: are only the choices made to be honored, or also the possibilities forgone? And what bearing does this have on memory, identity, and the way a person makes sense of existence?
- “wedded before one is bedded”: Historical wedding traditions included a bedding ceremony in which newlyweds were publicly accompanied to their marital bed by wedding guests. It refers to the traditional or ideal sequence in marriage where the formal union (wedding) takes place before the couple begins their sexual life together (being bedded).
- “marriage was that great lottery”: “In our monogamous part of the world, to marry means to halve one’s rights and double one’s duties” (Arthur Schopenhauer, “On Women,” Parerga and Paralipomena, 1851). See Schopenhauer.
- “some old horse who had been ringed by the great horse-ringer”: A ringer is a horse raced under another horse’s name: “A horse that is taken through the country and trotted under a false name and pedigree is called a ‘ringer’” (Manitoba Free Press, 1882). Ringers were disguised with dye. In the 1920s and early 1930s the con man Peter Christian Barrie bleached and hennaed horses to pass them off as others, and at Hialeah in 1932 one horse’s dye began to fade. Hence the old horse “showing its true colors in a rain storm.”
- “when all which had been lost should be found”: “For this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found” (Luke 15:32), the parable of the Prodigal Son. See The Bible.
- “give up his assumption that all things which existed should be tangible”: Peron and Joachim as materialism and immaterialism. In philosophy, materialism says that everything that exists is fundamentally physical, composed of matter and energy. All phenomena, including consciousness, are ultimately reducible to physical processes. They point to the success of science in explaining the physical world and that consciousness can be explained by brain activity. Physicalism is similar in that everything can be explained by physics. Immaterialism believes there is an existence of entities or properties that are not physical, such as minds, consciousness, or

spiritual realms. Non-physical entities or properties exist alongside or instead of the material world. Idealists believe that only minds and their perceptions are real, while the material world is a construction of the mind. Peron symbolizes the external, material world with its pleasures, follies, and impermanence, while Joachim represents the internal, immaterial realm of thought, memory, and spiritual seeking. See Spinoza's mind and body as one in the Chapter 45 resources. See Spinoza and Peron Spitzer.

- "he was agonized by attributing consciousness to everything": This may refer to panpsychism, the view that mind, or something like mind, is a fundamental and widespread feature of reality, present in some form even in its most basic elements. It has roots in ancient Greek philosophy, in Thales, who held that "all things are full of gods" (Aristotle, On the Soul 1.5), and in Plato, and later in Spinoza, Leibniz, and Schopenhauer. Mr. Spitzer suffers because he senses consciousness not only in people but in clouds, stars, waves, palings, and weathervanes, so that the line between the living and the lifeless blurs and his own sense of self grows unstable. See Spinoza, Schopenhauer, and Plato and Platonism.
- "the lights of corpo santo": (holy body) is an archaic term referring to St. Elmo's fire, a weather phenomenon where luminous plasma is created by a corona discharge from pointed objects during electrical storms. St. Erasmus (St. Elmo) is the patron saint of sailors. Sailors sometimes viewed it as a good omen.
    - Melville calls them corpusants: in "The Candles" the three masts of the Pequod burn "like three gigantic wax tapers before an altar" (Moby-Dick, 1851, chapter 119). See American Writers.
- "this bella donna": Bella donna, "beautiful lady," is also deadly nightshade, whose drops Italian women used to widen their pupils. See the Chapter 38 resources.
- "The lapidarian was become the jewel": The lapidarian, the cutter of gems, becomes his jewel, and the mosaicist becomes his mosaic: the maker is lost in what he makes.
- "chasing her skirt as if it were a Holy Grail": The Holy Grail and Excalibur serve as potent metaphors for the suffrage captain's inner journey, her struggles, and the poignant tension between idealism and the limitations imposed by life and fate.
    - The Holy Grail is a treasure in Arthurian literature that has miraculous powers.
    - Excalibur is the legendary sword of King Arthur.
    - The golden fleece, in Greek mythology, is the fleece of the winged ram, Chrysomallos.
    - Jason's argosy is the ship Argo, in Greek mythology, that was built with the help of the gods so that Jason and the Argonauts could sail and retrieve the golden fleece. See Jason in the Chapter 42 resources.
- "the Stygian darkness unlighted by a star": Stygian means of the Styx, the river of the dead in the Greek underworld. See Charon in the Chapter 46 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- "void and without shape upon the waters of the darkness": "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God

moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2). See Genesis.

- “for more than life or death he feared change”: Mr. Spitzer fears change more than life or death. Change threatens not only the outer world but his identity, perception, and memory, already unsettled by his brother’s death and by living “between two worlds,” never anchored in either. What he dreads most is a loss of self, a transformation that might erase who he is, which is deeper than the finality of death. Here it is the fear of seeing the dying face change, “that beauty returning but for one moment before beauty crumbled into dust.”
- “should one be held accountable for one’s entire life”: It is a meditation on responsibility and identity: should a person be judged for a whole life or for one transforming moment beyond conscious control, memory, or desire? Such a moment may redefine a person in ways no one foresees, which makes judgment uncertain. Mr. Spitzer asks it of Hannah, who “perhaps at the last moment… suddenly believed in all she had denied.”
- “Should one moment of inestimable madness dethrone that king”: “O, let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven! / Keep me in temper; I would not be mad!” (King Lear 1.5). See Shakespeare.
- “Should the reprobate be pure as snow”: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18), and “If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch” (Job 9:30-31). See the ace of spades in the Chapter 42 resources. See The Bible, The Book of Job, and Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “crumbled into dust and ashes”: “Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27). See Genesis.
- “Night begot perhaps only the night”: In Hesiod, Night gives birth to her opposite: “From Chaos came forth Erebus and black Night; but of Night were born Aether and Day” (Theogony 123-124, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, 1914). See Greek Mythology.
- “writing almost as automatically as the sandpipers”: Automatic writing, words set down without conscious direction, was practiced by spiritualists and the Surrealists. Yeats built A Vision (1925) on the automatic writing of his wife, George, begun in 1917.
- “In the East where men wore skirts”: In much of Asia and the Middle East men wear wrapped or flowing garments: the sarong, the lungi, the dhoti, the thobe. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “Death was the Orient whether it was heaven or earth”: Orient comes from the Latin oriens, rising, for the east where the sun rises. Christian churches and graves were long laid out facing east, toward the rising sun and the hoped-for resurrection. For Mr. Spitzer death is that east, heaven and earth at once, where Hannah goes, “where men wore skirts.”
- “none had shrived this body”: To shrive is to hear a confession and grant absolution. Hannah dies unshriven.
- “the kingfisher’s eerie cry”: When Ceyx drowned, Alcyone and he were turned into kingfishers, and the calm days when they nest on the sea are the halcyon days (Ovid,

Metamorphoses 11). See the halcyon in the Chapter 43 resources. See Greek Mythology.

- “But time could not tell him the time”: Clocks and calendars mark time, but they cannot tell Mr. Spitzer where he stands in it. He consults “his broken watch… a watch with no numbers to the hours,” the sundial, the starfish, the kingfisher’s cry. His memory is fractured, and time has become ambiguous, perhaps cyclical, perhaps illusory: “To ask of time the time was like asking of the thief—Where is the jewel you stole?” See Clocks and Watches.
- “a great rajah’s jewel”: This is foreshadowing for a subplot later on in the book with Mr. Spitzer. See Chapter 54.
- “the Crusader’s sleeping wife bound by a girdle of iron”: See the chastity belt, largely a legend of later centuries, in the Chapter 31 resources.
- “There were many keys”: Keys in this chapter embody the human quest for understanding and the limits of that quest in the face of mortality, the unknown, and the mysteries of existence. See Keys, Doors, and Locks.
- “Better that her cruel lord should never have plowed this stony land”: “Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth” (Matthew 13:5). See The Bible.
- “oh, how he hated these urban changes”: Mr. Spitzer in general is a conservative character wanting to preserve tradition. Closing Hannah’s estate before the old house is torn down for new traffic, he laments streets that are no more and signposts vanished in the fog. The changes stand for a loss of the familiar, ordered world, the fading of old communities and landmarks, and his sense of disorientation. It is the same fear of change, and of the dislocation change brings.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Alderman

A member of a city council.

Ambivalence

Mixed or contradictory feelings.

Ambivalently

With mixed or contradictory feelings or meanings.

Anchorite

A hermit who lives shut away from the world for religious reasons.

Aperture

An opening.

Arcanum

A mysterious or specialized knowledge, language, or information accessible or possessed only by the initiate. From the Latin arcanus, hidden or closed. Plural: arcana.

Archaic

Very old; belonging to a much earlier time.

Argosy

A large merchant ship, or a fleet of them.

Artifice

Clever trickery, or the art of making things seem other than they are.

Athwart

Across, from side to side; also, against.

Bailiff

An officer of a court who keeps order and serves its writs.

Ballast

Heavy material, such as stones, carried low in a ship to keep it steady.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Barque

A sailing ship.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Billows

Great waves.

Brigand

A bandit of the hills.

Carousel

A merry-go-round. Earlier, a tournament in which horsemen performed exercises and displays.

Casket

A small, often ornate box for jewels or valuables. In American usage, also a coffin, so Young's "casket containing no jewel" carries both meanings.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Celluloid

An early plastic.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chivalry

The code of the medieval knight; courtesy and protection shown by a man toward a woman.

Circumambient

Surrounding on all sides.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Concatenated

Linked together in a chain.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Conscientious

Careful to do what is right; thorough.

Cordage

Ropes, especially the rigging of a ship.

Corruscating

Young's spelling of coruscating, flashing or sparkling.

Corsair

A pirate, or a pirate ship.

Coruscated

Sparkled; flashed.

Couturier

A designer and maker of fine clothes for women.

Crow's-nest

A lookout platform high on a ship's mast.

Crucible

A heat-resistant pot for melting metals. Figuratively, a severe test that changes a person.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Cupola

A small dome on a roof.

Deflowered

Robbed of virginity.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Diadem

A jeweled crown or headband worn as a sign of royalty.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Dissembling

Hiding one's true feelings.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Dubious

Doubtful.

Duplicity

Double-dealing.

Echoic

Echoing.

Effaced

Erased; wiped out.

Egregious

Outstandingly bad; flagrant.

Egregiously

Outstandingly; shockingly.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Empearled

Adorned with pearls, or having a pearly sheen.

Enamellist

One who works in enamel.

Ephemeral

Lasting a very short time.

Equivocal

Open to more than one interpretation; deliberately vague.

Estuary

The wide mouth of a river, where fresh water meets the tide.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Finis

The end.

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Flagstone

A flat paving stone.

Flotilla

A small fleet of boats or ships.

Flotsam

Wreckage or goods found floating on the sea.

Fluted

Marked with long rounded grooves, like a column.

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Glazier

One who sets glass in windows.

Glow-worm

A beetle whose wingless female and larvae give off a greenish light.

Gossamer

A fine film of cobweb; anything light and delicate.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Helmsman

The person who steers a ship.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Imperceptibly

So slowly or slightly as to go unnoticed.

Impoverished

Made poor.

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Inscrutably

In a way that cannot be understood.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Lapidarian

A cutter or polisher of gems.

Largo

In music, very slow and broad.

Litigant

A person engaged in a lawsuit.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Maidenhair

A delicate fern with fan-shaped leaflets on dark, hair-thin stalks.

Mantilla

A lace scarf worn over the head and shoulders.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Memento mori

A reminder of death, such as a skull.

Metamorphic

Having to do with a change of form. In geology, rock that heat and pressure have changed.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Minuscular

Tiny. Young's form of minuscule.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Mosaicist

A maker of mosaics.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Nadir

The lowest point.

Nag

An old or worn-out horse.

Nautilus

A sea creature with a spiral shell. The paper nautilus is a small octopus whose female makes a thin, papery shell.

Nocturne

A dreamy piece of music suggesting the night.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Palimpsest

A parchment scraped and written over, the old writing still faintly visible.

Palings

Pointed wooden stakes, or a fence made of them.

Palpitation

A rapid, pounding heartbeat.

Paradox

A statement or situation that seems to contradict itself and yet may be true.

Peaked

Thin and pale, as from illness.

Periwinkle

A small edible sea snail.

Phaeton

A light, open, four-wheeled carriage; also a name for some seashells.

Phantasm

A ghostly figure or illusion of the mind.

Phosphorescent

Glowing faintly in the dark.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Porous

Full of tiny holes that let water through.

Porphyry

A hard purple-red rock with embedded crystals, prized by Roman emperors.

Portfolio

A flat case for carrying loose papers and documents.

Pristine

Fresh and pure, as if new.

Protracted

Drawn out.

Pulverized

Ground to powder.

Pumice

A light, porous, grey volcanic stone.

Purblind

Partly blind; dim-sighted.

Quavering

Trembling, as a voice.

Remorseless

Without pity; relentless.

Reprobate

A person beyond hope of salvation; an unprincipled person.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Reveille

The bugle call that wakes soldiers in the morning.

Roseate

Rose-colored. Also hopeful or overly optimistic.

Sand dollar

A flat, round sea urchin whose white skeleton is found on beaches.

Sarcophagus

A stone coffin, often carved, placed above ground. The plural is sarcophagi.

Sequin

A small shining disk sewn on clothing; first the zecchino, a Venetian gold coin.

Shah

The title of the king of Persia, now Iran.

Shingle

A beach of small, rounded stones.

Shrive

To hear confession and grant absolution.

Sleight of hand

Skillful tricks done with the hands, such as a magician’s.

Sloop

A sailboat with one mast.

Somnolence

Sleepiness; drowsiness.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Soughing

Making a soft sighing or rushing sound, like wind in trees.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Spruce

An evergreen tree of northern forests.

Steeplejack

One who climbs and repairs steeples and chimneys.

Storm lamp

A lantern shielded against the wind.

Stygian

Of the river Styx in the Greek underworld; dark and gloomy.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women's right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women's Suffrage.

Transience

The state of passing away quickly.

Transmogrify

To change into something strange.

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists' dream of turning base metal into gold.

Tremolo

A rapid trembling repetition of a note.

Triton

A sea god of Greek myth, half man and half fish, who blows a conch shell.

True-lover's knot

A knot of two interlaced loops, a token of lasting love.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Undertow

A current beneath the surface that pulls back out to sea.

Undulating

Rising and falling in waves.

Usufruct

The right to use and enjoy another’s property.

Vagrant

Wandering, with no settled home.

Vaporous

Full of mist or vapor.

Viceroy

One who rules a province as the deputy of a king.

Voluminous

Large, full, or great in volume.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Wentletrap

A sea snail whose shell winds like a spiral staircase.

Windlass

A winch for hauling or hoisting.

Wraith

A ghost; a faint, pale shape.

Zenith

The highest point.

Chapter 48

Content note: *This chapter mentions the suicide of Mr. Spitzer's twin brother, Peron.*

Summary

Alone in Cousin Hannah's empty house before dawn, Mr. Spitzer, a messenger in the world of the dead acting in his self-appointed legal office, sorts her papers and boxes and fumbles with the forty keys she kept in her bed, among which there is no master key. The lights have gone out, and he lights matches, though he has always been afraid of catching fire. He remembers Peron, who burned like the brightest star and lit match after match, tempting fate long before his apparent suicide. All things happen twice to Mr. Spitzer, perhaps even his death and his love, and he wonders whether one may live for years with a love who died long ago, as with a stranger. He cannot find the way out of the house of windows and doors, and he hopes the watchman will not take him for a thief. He wonders whether the lamplighter is also the one who puts out the light, as the evening star and the morning star are one, and is angry that anyone else might take his place. He doubts that he is a lawyer or a musician, imagines himself a stowaway asleep in a ship that went down long ago, and decides it is better not to know the unknowable. Noticing a lost silver button and his threadbare cape, he asks whether the boundary lines between life and death are fixed, or whether he might cross them backward as well as forward.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · Cousin Hannah

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Fate and Chance · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Identity and the Self · Light and Darkness · Love · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · The Search for Meaning

Symbols: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Birds · Clocks and Watches · Dogs · Fire · Fireflies · Horses and Carriages · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · Music and Instruments · The House · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Epicureanism · Hinduism · Kant and Hegel · Plato and Platonism · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres · William James and Pragmatism · Wittgenstein

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Ecclesiastes · Edgar Allan Poe · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, Mr. Spitzer is depicted as possibly the last or the first messenger in the realm beyond life. He performs duties in an old house filled with mysterious sounds and shadows, symbolizing the liminal space between worlds. This passage introduces the central figure and mood of the chapter, emphasizing themes of unfinished business, lost meaning, and the persistence of music and memory beyond death. The imagery of musical litigation, black notes missing from the score, and echoes fading but haunting him evokes the elusive nature of meaning after death.
- Mr. Spitzer contemplates many trunks and boxes, keys jangled around a suffragette's bed, and the absence of a master key to unlock all secrets. This passage symbolizes the mysteries of death, memory, and identity as locked away, fragmented, and inaccessible. Mr. Spitzer's fumbling with keys and longing for an "arrowsmith" to pierce the dead heart reflects his desire to unlock what is hidden or to find a way through the barrier of death.
- Mr. Spitzer is cautious, afraid of burning or sudden incandescence, while his brother is described as burning brightly, lighting matches, and tempting fate, even symbolizing a reckless embrace of life and death. This contrast explores different attitudes towards mortality: the careful, deliberate acceptance versus the flamboyant, perhaps accidental, surrender to death. It also reflects on consciousness before and after death, and the idea that death may happen twice or that love might transcend death.
- Mr. Spitzer reflects on the idea that all things happen twice to him, including death and love. He ponders lost possibilities, the ephemeral nature of consciousness, and the fading of meaning, suggesting a cyclical or layered experience of time, where past and future blur and overlap. This philosophical meditation highlights the elusive nature of existence and memory.
- The chapter delves into the notion that in long relationships, one might live with a "dead love" or a "stranger" better than the living love itself. The passage contemplates betrayal, death within life, and the persistence of ghosts as the memories and shadows of past emotions and identities. This complex emotional insight into love and loss deepens the psychological dimension of the chapter.
- The old, high-shouldered house full of windows and doors that are barred or locked becomes a metaphor for the afterlife or the unknown beyond death. His inability to find the exit despite knowing the entrance symbolizes the difficulty of crossing from one state of being to another, the uncertainty of what lies beyond life.
- Throughout the chapter, there are recurring motifs of stars fading, moonlight, dawn, and darkness. Mr. Spitzer reflects on the egocentric nature of stars, the creation of space, and the vast abyss swallowing moons and suns. These cosmic images underscore the insignificance and mystery of life and death in the grand scale of the universe, and the paradox of light and darkness existing together.

- Mr. Spitzer muses on whether consciousness can record its own fading, the nature of the bridge between life and death, and the unknowability of one's own end. He contemplates if life and death are two points with no journey between, or if time itself is a construct. This deep inquiry is central to the chapter's exploration of mortality and existence.
- Mr. Spitzer imagines himself as the lamplighter who lights and extinguishes stars, feeling angry that someone else might take his place in this cosmic duty. This passage illustrates his struggle with identity, purpose, and the loneliness of his role in the cosmos, as well as the fading of stars as a metaphor for fading life.
- Mr. Spitzer doubts his own identity and profession, feeling like an old gambler or a musician, uncertain if he is truly the person he believes himself to be. He is haunted by the idea of being a stowaway, a hidden passenger who has sunk without awareness. This passage captures the existential uncertainty and fragmented self that permeate the chapter.
- Towards the end, Mr. Spitzer notices the loss of silver buttons and the threadbare state of his coat, symbolizing his gradual loss of wholeness, identity, and connection to the living world. The imagery of his torn cape and star shining through holes evokes vulnerability and the fragile boundary between presence and absence.
- The chapter closes with Mr. Spitzer's questioning of the fixed boundaries between life and death, wondering if he can move forward or backward across these lines, and whether standing still might mean living by dying or dying by living. This passage encapsulates the chapter's overarching theme of the fluidity and mystery surrounding existence and mortality.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "Perhaps the greatest music was that which had no meaning." What would music without meaning be?
- "The exit could not be the entrance, surely." Why can Mr. Spitzer find his way into the house but not out?
- "The creation was not the stars." What does Mr. Spitzer mean when he says the abyss was the creation?

Characters

- Peron "had burned like the brightest star," and Mr. Spitzer "had always been afraid to light matches." What does each brother's relation to fire say about him?
- Peron was never "so flamboyant as when his horse had lost," and "He sorrowed when he won." Why would a man rejoice in losing?

- Cousin Hannah kept forty keys in bed with her, and “among them all, no master key.” What was she guarding?

Connections

- In Chapter 47 Mr. Spitzer said “good-night, sweet prince.” Here he practices saying good-morning. What has changed?
- Mr. Spitzer wonders whether he and his brother are “one and the same.” Where else in the novel do twins or doubles merge?
- Mr. Spitzer doubts he practices law, and his music is never played. What is his true profession?

Reflection

- “Man could not see his own end, for he passed beyond his end.” Can anyone know his own death?
- “It seemed better not to know that which was unknowable.” Is it?
- “Though one had lived with one’s love for years, it was many years before one recognized that long ago his love had died.” Can a person live with a stranger without knowing it?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer (Joachim)

- The central figure, a messenger or lawyer in the world of the dead, who reflects deeply on existence, identity, and the transition between life and death. He embodies uncertainty, introspection, and the search for meaning.
- He is “but this unemployed lawyer who had come to make a last account tentative as all things must be, to sum up all which had been missing, all which had never been.”

Peron Spitzer

- Contrasts with Mr. Spitzer by his flamboyance and willingness to burn, for he “had burned like the brightest star burning in the wind,” symbolizing a different approach to life and death. His early death and vibrant life are a foil to Mr. Spitzer’s cautious and contemplative nature.
- “Long before his apparent suicide, he had tempted fate in many ways of which he was unconscious even at his brightest moments.”
- “Never was he so flamboyant as when his horse had lost… He sorrowed when he won.”

Cousin Hannah, the Old Suffragette

- A figure who carried keys from suffrage journeys, symbolic of struggles for freedom and the unlocking of mysteries.
- She kept the forty keys “in bed with her that none might find her hiding place, nesting place—for even the wounded must seek a nesting place.”

Research: Themes

Life and Death as Continuum

See: Death and Mortality

- Mr. Spitzer contemplates the blurred boundaries between life and death, suggesting that consciousness may exist before and after death, and that these states may not be as distinct as commonly believed.
- The concept that death is not a definitive end but part of a continuous experience, where events happen twice or existence folds back on itself.
- The metaphor of the “bridge” between life and death that may not physically exist but is experienced as passage or transition.

Memory, Lost Meaning, and the Music of Existence

See: Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence · The Search for Meaning

- The chapter frequently references music as a metaphor for life’s meaning and its transient, often elusive nature. Missing notes, echoes, and lost music symbolize forgotten memories or lost meaning in life and death.
- The idea that the greatest music might be that which has no clear meaning, symbolizing the ineffability of existence.

Identity and Self-Consciousness

See: Identity and the Self

- Mr. Spitzer questions the nature of identity, whether the self remains unchanged after death, and how one can recognize oneself or others beyond life.
- The possibility that he and his brother might be one and the same or that identity is fragmented and uncertain.

Fate, Chance, and the Gambler’s Paradox

See: Fate and Chance

- The motif of gambling and chance recurs, reflecting life’s unpredictability and the paradox of winning through losing or losing through never winning.

- Mr. Spitzer sees himself as an inadvertent gambler who may have won greater stakes beyond earthly understanding.

The Role of the Messenger or Guide

- Mr. Spitzer appears as a liminal figure, a messenger “in the world of the dead,” akin to a lamplighter or to the ferryman guiding souls between realms.
- His role is both active and passive, involving opening and closing doors, unlocking mysteries, and confronting the unknown.

Light, Darkness, and the Celestial Imagery

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Light and Darkness

- Extensive use of celestial imagery: stars, moonlight, dawn, dusk, the morning and evening star.
- Light often symbolizes consciousness, life, and hope, while darkness suggests death, mystery, and the unknown.
- The fading stars symbolize the impermanence of life and the universe.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Music and the Score

See: Music and Instruments

- Life as a musical composition with missing notes and punctuations representing lost meanings and experiences.

Keys and Locks

See: Keys, Doors, and Locks

- Symbolize access to hidden knowledge or secrets of existence; the absence of a master key reflects the mystery of death.

Matches and Fire

See: Fire

- Fire represents life, energy, and destruction. Mr. Spitzer’s fear of lighting matches contrasts with his brother’s flamboyant use of fire, symbolizing different attitudes toward life and death.

Stars and Celestial Bodies

See: Moon and Stars

- Represent identity, fate, and the cosmic order; their fading suggests mortality and the ephemeral nature of existence.

Mirrors and Reflections

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- Question identity and self-recognition, blurring the line between reality and illusion.

The House

See: The House

- A metaphor for the realm between life and death or consciousness; its doors and windows are mysterious passageways.

Research: Resources

- “Perhaps the greatest music was that which had no meaning”: “All art constantly aspires towards the condition of music” (Walter Pater, “The School of Giorgione,” The Renaissance, 1873), the art in which form and meaning cannot be told apart. See Music and Composers.
- “left by the long-whiskered pack rat”: The pack rat, or trade rat, is said to drop what it carries when it finds something shinier to take, leaving the one in place of the other: “for certainly he had taken something away.” See the pack rat in Chapter 62. See The Pack Rat.
- “forty keys with which to open forty trunks”: In Perrault’s “Bluebeard” (1697), a husband gives his wife the keys to every room, forbids one small key, and keeps the bodies of his former wives behind its door. Here the keys belong to the wife, who fought for those “imprisoned by their cruel husbands and lords.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Keys, Doors, and Locks.
- “an arrowsmith to make that arrow which should reach this heart”: Cupid carries two arrows, one tipped with gold to kindle love and one with lead to put it to flight (Ovid, Metamorphoses 1). See Greek Mythology and Love.
- “had gone through the door of the sun”: In the Upanishads the wise “depart free from passion through the sun to where that immortal Person dwells whose nature is imperishable” (Mundaka Upanishad 1.2.11, trans. F. Max Müller, 1884). The Sanskrit is sūrya-dvāreṇa, “by the door of the sun.” Those who return to rebirth go by the path of the moon (Chandogya Upanishad 5.10). Peron goes by the sun, Mr. Spitzer by the moon. See Hinduism.
- “bright Peron who had lighted match after match”: John Walker of Stockton-on-Tees sold the first friction matches in 1827, and Samuel Jones of London sold copies from 1829 as “Lucifers,” light-bearers, which gave off a sulphurous smoke when struck. See Lamps, Candles, and Light.

- “after he had consulted his broken watch”: See “his broken watch… a watch with no numbers to the hours” in the Chapter 47 resources. See Clocks and Watches.
- “He was always posting, trotting, gaiting”: These are the paces of a riding horse. Posting is rising and falling with the trot; the rack and the slow single-foot are the extra gaits of the five-gaited American Saddlebred. See Horses and Carriages.
- “much like the effect preceding the cause”: The White Queen lives backward: “There’s the King’s Messenger. He’s in prison now, being punished: and the trial doesn’t even begin till next Wednesday: and of course the crime comes last of all,” and “It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards” (Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking-Glass, 1871, chapter 5). See Alice in Wonderland.
- “when bridge music quivered like the harp”: “O harp and altar, of the fury fused, / (How could mere toil align thy choiring strings!)” (Hart Crane, “To Brooklyn Bridge,” The Bridge, 1930). The bridge returns as a harp later in the chapter: “no harp, no bridge, no wind plucking the strings.” See American Writers.
- “all these little deaths which were like love”: La petite mort, “the little death,” is the French phrase for the swoon of love. See Love.
- “out, out of this life”: “Out, out, brief candle! / Life’s but a walking shadow” (Macbeth 5.5). Mr. Spitzer speaks it with a match burning in his hand. See Shakespeare and Lamps, Candles, and Light.
- “like Stanley, find his Livingston”: Sir Henry Morton Stanley was a Welsh-American journalist and explorer of Central Africa. Sent by the New York Herald to find the missionary David Livingstone, he found him at Ujiji on Lake Tanganyika in November 1871 and reported greeting him, “Dr. Livingstone, I presume?” (How I Found Livingstone, 1872). The pages of Stanley’s diary for that meeting were torn out, and his biographer Tim Jeal doubts the words were said (Stanley: The Impossible Life of Africa’s Greatest Explorer, 2007). David Livingstone was an explorer of Africa and one of the most popular British heroes of the Victorian Era. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “Did the house expand”: “What a curious feeling!” said Alice; “I must be shutting up like a telescope” (Lewis Carroll, Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, 1865, chapter 1). Like Alice, Mr. Spitzer is in a house of doors and keyholes, and later “Perhaps he had passed through a keyhole.” See Alice in Wonderland.
- “Must the poles be reversed?”: See the reversals of the earth’s magnetic poles in the Chapter 42 resources.
- “infinitely small, infinitely divisible”: Zeno’s paradoxes turn on the infinitely divisible. See the Zeno entry in the Chapter 38 resources.
- “through clouds of eye witnesses”: “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight” (Hebrews 12:1). See The Bible.
- “goose barnacles”: Goose barnacles were long believed to hatch into barnacle geese, since no one had seen the geese nest; Gerald of Wales reported it in his Topographia Hibernica (about 1188), and the barnacle goose is named for the belief. See Birds.

- “the wingless female glow-worm”: The female glow-worm of Europe (Lampyris noctiluca) cannot fly; she climbs a stem at night and glows to call the winged male, who barely glows at all. See Fireflies.
- “perhaps the pilot star when there was no pilot”: “For tho’ from out our bourne of Time and Place / The flood may bear me far, / I hope to see my Pilot face to face / When I have crost the bar” (Alfred Tennyson, “Crossing the Bar,” 1889). See Romantic Poets.
- “tents like the tents of Arabs”: “And the cares, that infest the day, / Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs, / And as silently steal away” (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Day Is Done,” 1844). See American Writers.
- “a customs officer at an empty port”: Hawthorne was surveyor of the Salem Custom House from 1846 to 1849 and wrote of its idle wharves in “The Custom-House,” his introduction to The Scarlet Letter (1850). Melville was a customs inspector in New York from 1866 to 1885. See American Writers.
- “Man could not see his own end, for he passed beyond his end”: No one can witness his own death, because by the time death comes the self has already passed beyond it. Epicurus: “when we are, death is not come, and, when death is come, we are not” (Letter to Menoeceus, in Diogenes Laertius 10.125, trans. R. D. Hicks, 1925). Wittgenstein: “Death is not an event of life. Death is not lived through” (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus 6.4311, trans. C. K. Ogden, 1922). See Epicureanism and Wittgenstein.
- “with his mind forever divided among possibilities”: In Hegel’s philosophy, negation is not simply a denial or opposition, but a dynamic and constructive force driving the development of concepts and reality. It is a key aspect of his dialectical method, where a concept (thesis) generates its opposite (antithesis), and the resolution of this opposition (synthesis) leads to a more advanced understanding. The triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis is closer to Fichte’s language than to Hegel’s, who seldom used it; it was popularized by Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus (Gustav E. Mueller, “The Hegel Legend of ‘Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis,’” Journal of the History of Ideas 19, no. 3, 1958). This process of negation, or “negativity,” is essential for overcoming limitations and contradictions in thought and experience. See Kant and Hegel.
- “Consciousness was ever that which was sporadic, fluttering, not constant even in this life, just as sustained attention was impossible”: Consciousness here is intermittent, flickering rather than flowing, never a steady light even in waking life. William James described it instead as a stream: “It is nothing jointed; it flows” (The Principles of Psychology, 1890, chapter 9). Yet he agreed about attention: “There is no such thing as voluntary attention sustained for more than a few seconds at a time” (chapter 11). For Mr. Spitzer one note held too long becomes two notes, a note and its echo. Experience is always partial, and complete, sustained clarity may belong only to the dead, “perhaps not even then.” See William James and Pragmatism.
- “Perhaps there was only the bridge”: “There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning” (Thornton Wilder, The

Bridge of San Luis Rey, 1927). In Zoroastrian belief the dead cross the Chinvat Bridge, wide for the righteous and narrow as a blade for the wicked. See Love.

- “drawing all things unto themselves”: “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me” (John 12:32). See The Bible.
- “holes in ice swallowing the sled”: Sir John Franklin’s expedition of 1845 in search of the Northwest Passage was lost when its ships, Erebus and Terror, were locked in the ice; all 129 men died. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “The mother of creation was this great abyss”: “Verily at the first Chaos came to be” (Hesiod, Theogony 116, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, 1914), and “darkness was upon the face of the deep” (Genesis 1:2). See Hesiod’s Night in the Chapter 47 resources. See Greek Mythology and Genesis.
- “Orion flying as if it were a bird”: The Pleiades flee the hunter Orion across the sky: “when the Pleiades plunge into the misty sea to escape Orion’s rude strength” (Hesiod, Works and Days 619-620, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, 1914). The Greeks heard in their name peleiades, doves, and told that they were turned into doves to escape him. See Greek Mythology and Astronomy.
- “certainly not by those who were the living, for they were dead”: “Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead” (Matthew 8:22). See The Bible.
- “a golden-footed honey bee buzzing inside him”: The Greeks pictured souls as bees; Porphyry wrote that the ancients called souls bees (On the Cave of the Nymphs, trans. Thomas Taylor, 1823). See Greek Mythology.
- “Was he who was the lamp-lighter also he who put out the light”: Robert Louis Stevenson’s child watches Leerie: “For we are very lucky, with a lamp before the door, / And Leerie stops to light it as he lights so many more” (“The Lamplighter,” A Child’s Garden of Verses, 1885). In The Little Prince (1943) Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s lamplighter lights his lamp and puts it out once a minute on a planet that turns once a minute, saying good morning and good evening (chapter 14). See Lamps, Candles, and Light.
- “much as the evening star and the morning star”: Both “stars” are the planet Venus, seen in the east before sunrise and in the west after sunset. The Greeks called the morning star Phosphorus and the evening star Hesperus; Pythagoras or Parmenides is credited with seeing that they are one (Diogenes Laertius 8.14, 9.23), and the philosopher Gottlob Frege used the pair to show that two names may name one thing (“On Sense and Reference,” 1892). See Astronomy.
- “good-night, sweet prince and lady”: See “good-night, sweet prince” and “good-night, my lady” in the Chapter 47 resources. See Shakespeare.
- “He had gone down in darkness and in whirlwind”: The reverse of Elijah’s ascent: “and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11). See The Bible.
- “His star had fallen, never again to rise”: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!” (Isaiah 14:12). Lucifer, Latin for “light-bearer,” is the morning star, the planet Venus, which the Greeks called Phosphorus and which heralds the dawn.

The verse was addressed to the king of Babylon, but Christian tradition, reading it in Jerome's Latin, made Lucifer a name for Satan, the angel who fell from heaven. See The Bible and Angels, Devils, and Myth.

- "for this life was a long rehearsal of music for the silence": Life is a rehearsal, a practice, for the silence of death. The "music" is the experience of a life, passing and temporary; the "silence" is death, where all of it ceases, and which "could surely not answer or reproach." Socrates says that "the true philosophers, Simmias, are always occupied in the practice of dying" (Plato, Phaedo 67e, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 1871), and Montaigne titled an essay "That to philosophize is to learn to die" (Essays 1.20, 1580). Hamlet's last words are "the rest is silence" (5.2). See Plato and Platonism and Shakespeare.
- "the municipal watchman who passed down the long street of the lights going out": On the eve of the First World War the British foreign secretary Edward Grey watched the lamps being lit in St. James's Park and said, "The lamps are going out all over Europe; we shall not see them lit again in our life-time" (Grey, Twenty-Five Years, 1892-1916, 1925). See Lamps, Candles, and Light.
- "the old lamplighter with his trembling ladder of dreams": "And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it" (Genesis 28:12). See Genesis.
- "the ferryman who ferried the souls of the dead": See Charon in the Chapter 46 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- "he who knew rhombs, circles, semicircles": Mr. Spitzer knows the geometry of things, rhombs, circles, boxes within boxes, octahedrons, and the eclipses of light by darkness and darkness by light: the nested, overlapping forms of a reality both ordered and hidden. He calls them "the forms of a divine nature." In Plato's Timaeus the elements are built of regular solids, air of the octahedron (55-56), and Galileo wrote that the book of the universe "is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures" (The Assayer, 1623, trans. Stillman Drake, 1957). See Plato and Platonism.
- "a small pharaoh in his tomb or boat": The pharaoh was buried with a boat to sail with the sun through the underworld. In 1954 the cedar ship of Khufu, 143 feet long, was found dismantled in a sealed pit beside the Great Pyramid. See Ancient Egypt.
- "under the lighthouse it is darkest": The Japanese proverb tōdai moto kurashi, "it is dark at the foot of the lighthouse," means that what is nearest is hardest to see; the tōdai was first an oil-lamp stand.
- "having mistaken the lighthouse for the star": Birds migrating at night are drawn to lighthouse beams and strike the glass, and keepers long recorded the dead birds found at the foot of the tower in the morning. See Birds.
- "he was not the practitioner of Blackstone": A practitioner of Blackstone is a lawyer. Sir William Blackstone was an English jurist, judge and Tory politician of the eighteenth century, most noted for his Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765-1769), an influential treatise on the common law in four volumes covering the rights of persons,

the rights of things, private wrongs and public wrongs. The Commentaries were the leading work on English law and shaped the American legal system. Blackstone's ratio is his statement that "it is better that ten guilty persons escape, than that one innocent suffer" (Commentaries, Book 4, chapter 27). Benjamin Franklin raised it to "a hundred guilty Persons" (letter to Benjamin Vaughan, March 14, 1785), and John Adams, who had studied Blackstone, argued that "it's of more importance to community, that innocence should be protected, than it is, that guilt should be punished; for guilt and crimes are so frequent in the world, that all of them cannot be punished," and that if innocence itself is condemned, "virtue itself, is no security" (closing argument, Boston Massacre trials, December 1770). Blackstone appears again in Chapter 55, where Mr. Spitzer might "never have practiced law, never have consulted Blackstone." See the Chapter 55 resources. See Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.

- "cases in chancery": The suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce in the Court of Chancery runs for generations in Charles Dickens's Bleak House (1853) until the costs have eaten the whole estate.
- "laws of undiscovered countries": "The undiscover'd country from whose bourn / No traveller returns" (Hamlet 3.1) is death. See Shakespeare.
- "the unheard music of this waning planet": The music of the spheres, the harmony Pythagoras heard in the turning planets, is music no living ear can hear. "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter" (John Keats, "Ode on a Grecian Urn," 1819). See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres and Romantic Poets.
- "the phoenix stars": See the burning phoenix in the Chapter 43 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- "casting their lights like diamond horseshoes": The Diamond Horseshoe was the ring of boxes at the Metropolitan Opera House, opened in 1883, named for the jewels of the wealthy families who held them.
- "island universes": In 1755 Immanuel Kant proposed that the nebulae were whole systems of stars like the Milky Way (Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens). The phrase "island universe" came later, from Ormsby MacKnight Mitchel's 1846 translation of Johann Heinrich von Mädler's Weltinsel in The Sidereal Messenger. See Kant and Hegel and Astronomy.
- "neither spade nor heart nor diamond nor club": The four French suits date from fifteenth-century France. See the ace of spades and the ace of hearts in the Chapter 42 resources. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- "this dread henbane of human life": The ghost of Hamlet's father was poisoned "With juice of cursed hebenon in a vial, / And in the porches of mine ears did pour / The leperous distilment" (Hamlet 1.5); hebenon is often read as henbane. See Shakespeare.
- "Perhaps he was the stowaway": "But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep" (Jonah 1:5). See The Bible.

- “the portmanteau personality carrying another soul within his soul”: Portmanteau is a large trunk or suitcase opening into two halves, or a word blending the sounds and combining the meanings of two others, a sense Lewis Carroll gave it: “You see it’s like a portmanteau—there are two meanings packed up into one word” (Through the Looking-Glass, 1871, chapter 6). See Alice in Wonderland and Twins and Doubles.
- “had he lost his soul, his little man, his miniature”: Medieval art often shows the soul leaving the dying body as a small naked figure, a little man, from the mouth. See the homunculus in the Chapter 35 resources.
- “in the midst of raging war, a small neutral country”: Switzerland’s permanent neutrality was recognized by the powers at Paris on November 20, 1815, and it stayed neutral through both world wars.
- “It seemed better not to know that which was unknowable”: Mr. Spitzer chooses humility before mystery: to try to grasp the ultimate things, death and what follows it, may be futile or even harmful, and it is better to live without the burden of complete understanding. Keats called this negative capability, “when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason” (letter to George and Tom Keats, December 1817). “For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow” (Ecclesiastes 1:18). See Romantic Poets and Ecclesiastes.
- “only by losing life did one win life”: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matthew 16:25). See The Bible.
- “heart shells and bishop’s mitres”: The bishop’s mitre (Mitra mitra) is a tall, red-spotted cone of a sea shell shaped like a bishop’s hat; heart shells are cockles shaped like a heart.
- “like the undertaker’s suit which has no back”: Burial clothes are often cut open down the back so that they can be fitted on the body lying down.
- “like the moon which turns but one side to earth”: The moon turns once on its axis in the same time it takes to circle the earth, so the same face always looks toward the earth; its far side was first photographed by the Soviet Luna 3 in 1959. See Astronomy.
- “circling earth with passenger birds”: Passenger pigeons once flew over North America in flocks of billions; the last, Martha, died at the Cincinnati Zoo on September 1, 1914. See Martha the Passenger Pigeon.
- “Perhaps he was translated”: “By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death” (Hebrews 11:5); to be translated is to be carried to heaven without dying. “Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! thou art translated” (A Midsummer Night’s Dream 3.1). See The Bible and Shakespeare.
- “He was the dog barking at the Dog star in the cloud”: The Dog star is Sirius in the constellation, Canis Major, the Greater Dog. Homer calls Sirius the dog of Orion, the brightest of stars but a sign of evil (Iliad 22.26-31). See Homer’s Epics and Dogs.
- “like the lute in the whirlpool”: Poe’s “The Fall of the House of Usher” (1839) opens with lines from Béranger: “Son cœur est un luth suspendu; / Sitôt qu’on le touche il

résonne," his heart is a hanging lute; as soon as it is touched, it sounds. See Edgar Allan Poe.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Amulet

A charm worn against evil.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Bindlestiff

A hobo who carries his belongings in a bundle.

Brigand

A bandit of the hills.

Canter

A horse's easy three-beat gait, between a trot and a gallop.

Capacious

Roomy; able to hold much.

Carousel

A merry-go-round. Earlier, a tournament in which horsemen performed exercises and displays.

Casket

A small, often ornate box for jewels or valuables. In American usage, also a coffin, so Young's "casket containing no jewel" carries both meanings.

Cavalier

A horseman or gallant gentleman; also offhand and disdainful.

Chancery

A court of equity, as distinct from a court of common law; in England, the Lord Chancellor's court.

Conformation

The shape and proportions of an animal’s body, especially a horse’s.

Contraband

Forbidden; smuggled.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Domino

A loose hooded cloak worn with a half mask at a masquerade.

Dominoes

A game played with small oblong tiles marked with spots.

Dubiety

Doubt; a feeling of uncertainty.

Eaves

The edges of a roof that overhang the walls.

Empearled

Adorned with pearls, or having a pearly sheen.

Euchre

A card game for four players, for which the joker was first added to the deck.

Fanlight

A half-round window, often ribbed like a fan, over a door.

Flagstone

A flat paving stone.

Glow-worm

A beetle whose wingless female and larvae give off a greenish light.

Gossamer

A fine film of cobweb; anything light and delicate.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Henbane

A foul-smelling, poisonous plant of the nightshade family.

Hermetical

Sealed airtight; also secret or occult, from Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary father of alchemy.

Incandescence

The giving off of light by something heated until it glows.

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Inscrutably

In a way that cannot be understood.

Keel and list

To keel over is to capsize, with the keel, the ship's backbone along the bottom, turning upward. To list is to lean to one side, usually from water taken on.

Leeward

On the side sheltered from the wind.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Marsh light

A will-o'-the-wisp, a flickering light over marshes from burning marsh gas.

Mitre

The tall pointed hat of a bishop.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Moonstone

A milky, pearly-blue gemstone.

Nacreous

Like mother-of-pearl; iridescent.

Nebula

A cloud of gas and dust in space; once any hazy patch of light among the stars, including galaxies.

Nocturnal

Of or happening in the night.

Octahedron

A solid figure with eight faces.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Palsy

Paralysis or uncontrollable trembling.

Phaeton

A light, open, four-wheeled carriage; also a name for some seashells.

Pigeoncote

A house for doves or pigeons, standing alone or built into a house; pigeons kept there were once an important source of food.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Preternatural

Beyond what is natural.

Problematical

Doubtful; hard to settle.

Rhomb

A rhombus, a parallelogram with four equal sides.

Sarcophagus

A stone coffin, often carved, placed above ground. The plural is sarcophagi.

Sentinel

A guard or watchman.

Sloop

A sailboat with one mast.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Spruce

An evergreen tree of northern forests.

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women's right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women's Suffrage.

Sulphurous

Of sulphur; hellish.

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Threadbare

Worn so thin the threads show.

Torpid

Sluggish; inactive.

Tort

A wrongful act, other than a breach of contract, for which one may sue.

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists' dream of turning base metal into gold.

Transom

A small window above a door, often hinged to open.

Treble

The highest part in music.

Vainglorious

Excessively proud and boastful.

Vicissitude

A change of fortune, usually for the worse.

Wayfarer

A traveler, especially on foot.

Wentletrap

A sea snail whose shell winds like a spiral staircase.

Widow walk

A railed platform on a coastal roof, from which to watch for ships.

Widow’s walk

A railed rooftop platform on a coastal house, said to be where wives watched for ships.

Wrack

Wreck or ruin, as in “wrack and ruin.”

Chapter 49

Summary

In a frozen cosmos where ice covers the rivers, the boats, the archer, and the constellations, Mr. Spitzer lives when he is dead and wakes only when he sleeps. He weeps for others who do not weep for him, and above all for Martha, the last passenger pigeon, whose death he dates to September 14, 1919, “in a war-torn world” (an earlier edition reads 1918; she died September 1, 1914). He arrived too late to see her alive, rode all night on the train that carried her body to Washington, and begged the old caretaker of the Washington Museum to set a mirror before her so that she would not know she was alone; the caretaker refused, saying she had no soul and that it was the incapacity to be deceived which caused extinction. Mr. Spitzer would have indicted America before the Senate for what it had done to the pigeons and to the Indians, but he would have been threatened with the Federal pen. He remembers meeting an old sailor, the sole survivor of a shipwreck, and telling him that the greatest shipwreck is to sink when there is no storm. He comes to trust only the false, the blind, and the deaf, all who have lost, and walking through the rain among the pigeons he cannot tell whether he is one or two, or which brother he is.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Martha the Passenger Pigeon · Peron Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Identity and the Self · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Fireflies · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · Music and Instruments · Shadows · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Aristotle · Augustine and Christian Theology · Buddhism · Descartes and Dualism · Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) · Hinduism · Kant and Hegel · Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Plato and Platonism · Spinoza · Taoism and Zhuangzi · The Problem of Universals · Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory · William James and Pragmatism

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Angels and Archangels · Astronomy · Deafness and Sign Language · Don Quixote · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer’s Epics · Judaism · Music and Composers · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Sir Walter Raleigh · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- Mr. Spitzer experiences a profound disorientation where he “was disoriented by his great experience of living when he was dead, waking only when he was sleeping, sleeping in a watery grave or in an ice hole.” This passage encapsulates the paradoxical state of existence and non-existence, blurring the boundaries between life and death, wakefulness and sleep.
- The imagery of landscapes and continents being lost or carried away like feathers or lace handkerchiefs symbolizes the transient, fragile, and mutable nature of reality itself.
- Mr. Spitzer contemplates vast cosmic elements: “Ice had frozen so hard that it was like a dome or like the shell of an egg… Ice was frozen into shapes of frozen roofs over the winding rivers and the seas and the lakes… ice piled up like weird spires and minarets and bell towers.” This grand imagery conveys a frozen, timeless cosmos, a metaphor for stasis, death, or suspended animation of existence.
- The passage also reflects on the impossibility of finding solid ground or stable meaning in a world dominated by illusions and transformations.
- Mr. Spitzer mourns the death of Martha, the last passenger pigeon, noting the poignant historical moment: “Martha, who expired September 14, at one o’clock in the afternoon just as the clock was tolling one, 1918, A.D., at the Cincinnati zoo” (Young’s date; Martha died September 1, 1914). This event symbolizes the extinction of a species and, metaphorically, the loss of innocence, beauty, and connection to nature.
- His grief for Martha becomes a symbol for his own loneliness and the universal sorrow at loss and disappearance: “He wept for others who wept not for him.”
- The novel frequently questions the nature of the self: “He knew not whether he was himself or an image contained within an image… one of whom no unitary statement could be made.” This reflects a fragmented identity, the multiplicity of selves, or even the illusion of a stable self.
- The motif of doubling and mirrored selves recurs: “how often he had nearly collided with himself though this would seem impossible.” This evokes existential ambiguity and the fluidity of personal identity across time and space.
- Mr. Spitzer embraces a paradoxical philosophy: So he had come “to trust only the false… For why… should he trust the truth which had already failed him if the false would never fail.” This reflects a deep skepticism about knowledge, reality, and the reliability of perception or memory.
- The passage suggests that constancy is found only in inconstancy, and that faith in truth is always tentative and fraught.
- The chapter emphasizes the unreliability and fragmentation of memory: “His memory… had omitted so much, perhaps the whole content of mortal life, of certain death.”

- Time is portrayed as fluid, uncertain, and perhaps even illusory: “Perhaps there was no time… What calendar keeps the sea of the months flowing into the months…?.”
- Reality is likened to a dream or a fog: “the fog concealed the barnacle, the rose, the wing, the star… obliterated the obvious differences between the living and the dead.”
- Mr. Spitzer reflects on the interrelatedness of life’s opposites: “He died through sickness, died through health… died through happiness which should have saved him, died through sorrow, sorrow by which he lived, died by not dying, died by living, lived by dying.”
- Love is depicted as immortal and paradoxical: “when love lived, it died—but having died, it lived and could not die.”
- The text repeatedly returns to Mr. Spitzer’s profound loneliness and his longing for understanding and communion: “He trusted those who had lost… all those who were dispossessed and wandering through the storm of years as he was. They drew him nearest to the city. They were all his loves because he could not love or could love only by indirection.”
- His existential isolation is underscored by the metaphor of walking “through the rain of the city where the rain of the city drummed upon the dark or golden porches and roofs” and feeling himself “oblivious to them.”
- Water, ice, and the sea are pervasive symbols throughout the chapter, representing both life and death, fluidity and stasis, memory and oblivion: He was like a shipwreck, “his hull broken… paying out more water than the seas contained.” The rising waters symbolize overwhelming forces beyond control and the engulfing nature of death and oblivion.
- Near the end, Mr. Spitzer is described as “the living lighthouse at that one moment when he saw his light, moment when he was dying… his own light shining, shining from him.” This image captures the simultaneous presence of life and death, light and darkness, as well as the enduring, though fragile, spark of consciousness amid cosmic dissolution.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “There was nothing he feared so much as the light of the sun.” Why does Mr. Spitzer live by fog and shadow?
- “Greatest shipwreck is this… to sink when there is no storm.” What is a shipwreck in calm water?
- Mr. Spitzer’s paradox is “to trust only the false.” How can falsehood be more faithful than truth?

Characters

- The old caretaker says “It was this incapacity to be deceived which caused extinction.” Why does Mr. Spitzer want a mirror placed before Martha?
- Mr. Spitzer would indict America for “what America had done to passenger pigeons… and had done to Indians in their lonely tepees.” Why does he join the two?
- “He trusted all persons suffering some fatal defect.” Why are the blind and the deaf his loves?

Connections

- Young dates Martha’s death to 1918, “in a war-torn world,” though she died in 1914. Why might the date move to the last year of the war?
- In Chapter 48 Mr. Spitzer imagined himself a stowaway on a ship that went down; here he is the shipwreck itself. How has the image changed?
- “He did not know which brother he was, and this was the crux of his mystery.” How does this chapter answer Chapter 48’s question of whether the twins are one and the same?

Reflection

- “Rarely had there been known in the annals of time the date of the death of the last member of an entire species.” What does it mean to be the last of one’s kind?
- “Perhaps perfect silence was the perfection of love.” Is it?
- “He was forgotten now, so should he be remembered then?” What makes a life remembered?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- A complex figure symbolizing the human struggle with mortality, memory, and meaning.
- Described metaphorically as a shipwreck, a shadow, a lighthouse, a phantom, and a musician whose music is unheard.
- His physical ailments (e.g., irregular pulse, short breath) parallel his metaphysical disintegration and confusion.
- He functions as a “mourner” and witness to extinction, loss, and the fading of worlds.
- Mr. Spitzer’s paradoxical existence of alive yet dead, remembering yet forgetting makes him a liminal, almost mythical figure.

The Old Caretaker

- Represents skepticism, finality, and the harsh reality of extinction.
- His views on Martha the passenger pigeon emphasize the finality of death and the absence of spiritual continuation.
- “It was this incapacity to be deceived which caused extinction, the old caretaker had announced.”

Peron Spitzer

- “His brother could never have accepted an ineluctable reality such as Mr. Spitzer feared. His brother had thought that there was something he could do to change things, to make for greater hope or greater hopelessness.”
- “They were born together.” Mr. Spitzer “did not know which brother he was, and this was the crux of his mystery.”

Martha (Passenger Pigeon)

- Symbolizes lost beauty, extinction, and irretrievable loss.
- Her death is mourned as the death of a species, a cosmic event, and a personal loss for Mr. Spitzer.

Research: Themes

Life, Death, and Immortality

See: Death and Mortality

- Mr. Spitzer’s state blurs the boundary between living and dead. He lived “when he was dead, waking only when he was sleeping.”
- Death is portrayed as a paradox: he “died at his zenith because he was at his nadir, died at his nadir because he was at his zenith.”
- The text questions the reality of death and life, suggesting both may be illusions: “He knew there was no death because there was no life.”
- The theme of immortality is paradoxical, with Mr. Spitzer’s spirit existing in a liminal state, neither fully present nor gone.

Memory and Forgetfulness

See: Memory and the Past

- Mr. Spitzer struggles with remembering and forgetting, his past and identity constantly shifting.

- His “forgetfulness veiling his forgetfulness” and “oblivion hiding behind his oblivion” illustrate layers of fading consciousness.
- He questions the reliability of memory, pondering if he ever truly lived or if life was just a “mistaken dream.”

Identity and Self-Perception

See: Identity and the Self

- There is a profound ambiguity regarding Mr. Spitzer’s identity, “He knew not whether he was himself or an image contained within an image.”
- The motif of doubling, shadows, and reflections recurs, contributing to his fragmented self-understanding.
- He often quarrels with himself or his shadow, suggesting an internal conflict and fractured self.

The Natural World and Extinction

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- The extinction of the passenger pigeon, Martha, serves as a poignant symbol of loss and mourning.
- Nature is depicted as vast, mystical, and fragile all subject to decay and disappearance.
- The natural world mirrors the human condition as being both transient, vulnerable, and caught in cycles of life and death.

The Cosmic and the Mystical

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- The cosmos, stars, and celestial imagery permeate the text, emphasizing vastness, mystery, and the unknowable.
- Mr. Spitzer imagines his existence woven into universal patterns, yet feels lost and disoriented within them.
- The narrative contemplates the idea of multiple dimensions, alternate realities, and the eternal recurrence of life and death.

Isolation and Connection

See: Isolation and Connection

- Despite being surrounded by crowds, Mr. Spitzer experiences profound solitude and alienation.
- His relationships are ambiguous since he mourns lost loves, mourns a lost species, and even quarrels with his own shadow.

- The idea of failed communication and the search for understanding pervade, especially in his interactions with the blind and deaf.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Water and Ice

See: The Sea and Water · Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Recurring images of frozen waters, ice domes, and watery graves symbolize stasis, death, and the frozen moment between life and death.
- Water also represents fluidity, dream states, and the passage between worlds.

Stars and Celestial Bodies

See: Moon and Stars

- Stars represent memory, the soul, and cosmic order, yet are also fading, crumbling, or melting snowflakes.
- The interplay of light and shadow among stars mirrors the ambiguities of life and death.

Shadows and Reflections

See: Mirrors and Reflections · Shadows

- Shadows emphasize duality, absence, and the elusive nature of identity.
- Reflections question reality versus illusion, with Mr. Spitzer sometimes chasing shadows or reflections rather than reality.

Birds (Pigeons, Blackbirds, Fireflies)

See: Birds · Fireflies

- Birds symbolize life, freedom, and the passage of souls.
- The extinction of the passenger pigeon is a metaphor for loss and the fragility of existence.
- Fireflies and moths symbolize faint, fragile light, hope, memory, or the soul’s flicker.

Music

See: Music and Instruments

- Music is a metaphor for existence, memory, and communication.
- Mr. Spitzer’s music is “unspoken,” “unheard,” and a “barcarolle” rocking on waves, symbolizing the elusive nature of his life and thoughts.

Research: Resources

- “It was never reveille in this windy world”: Reveille is a signal sounded especially on a bugle or drum to wake personnel in the armed forces. The old drummer drums taps instead; see Taps in the Chapter 47 resources.
- “perhaps only one grace note”: A grace note is a musical ornament, a brief note that precedes and embellishes the main note in a musical passage. See Music and Composers.
- “my mother’s coach”: See the coach of Part One and its driver. See The Black Coachman and Catherine Cartwheel.
- “butterfly which had seemed one butterfly but was always two butterflies conjoining”: The two butterflies that seem one are the twins in little, “one with its image.” See Zhuangzi’s butterfly, below. See Taoism and Zhuangzi.
- “fringe-topped surrey lumbering under Alpha and the long-necked horses flying under Omega”: A surrey is a light four-wheeled, two-seated carriage; the fringe-topped surrey recalls Rodgers and Hammerstein’s “The Surrey with the Fringe on Top” (Oklahoma!, 1943). Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, so the slow, earthly surrey lumbers under the beginning while the horses fly under the end: a journey from the beginning to the end, from the earthly to the cosmic.
    - Alpha and Omega in the New Testament is used as a Christian symbol. “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord” (Revelation 1:8); it means that Christ has existed for all eternity and that God is eternal. See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
    - Among the frozen stars that follow, the surrey may also be the Wain, the old English name for the Big Dipper seen as a wagon, driven by the herdsman Boötes, whose brightest star is Arcturus.
- “Ice had formed over Arcturus”: The ice covers the constellations one by one. See Astronomy.
    - Arcturus is the brightest star in the northern constellation of Boötes.
    - The Great Ram with its long horn is the constellation Aries, the ram of the golden fleece (see the Chapter 47 resources), and the many-stringed Lyre is Lyra, the lyre Mercury (Hermes) made from a tortoise shell. A ram is also one of Mercury’s symbols. See Greek Mythology.
    - The Huntsman with his glittering belt may refer to the Orion constellation. See Orion in the Chapter 48 resources.
    - The Dog Star is another name for the brightest star in the night sky, Sirius. See the Chapter 48 resources.
    - The Little Goat is another name for Capella, the brightest star in the constellation Auriga. In mythology, Capella depicted the goat Amalthea that suckled Zeus.

    - The Wild Swan is the Cygnus constellation in the northern hemisphere which includes the Northern Cross. Zeus came to Leda as a swan.
    - The polar stars are Polaris in the north and Sigma Octantis, Polaris Australis, in the south.
    - The sub-polar stars or Circumpolar stars never set below the horizon and are always visible because of the proximity to the polar stars.
- “the twelve Apostles in their long white robes and the thirteenth Apostle”: The twelve Apostles are Jesus’s apostles. The thirteenth Apostle may refer to Judas Iscariot, who was replaced after his suicide when lots were drawn and Matthias was chosen (Acts 1:23-26). Paul, called apart from the Twelve, is often named the thirteenth apostle, and Mary Magdalene was called “the apostle to the apostles.” The emperor Constantine had himself buried among memorials to the Twelve in his Church of the Holy Apostles and was called the thirteenth apostle. See The Bible.
- “the wine dark sea”: Homer’s sea is oinops pontos, “wine-faced,” the wine-dark sea, in the Iliad and the Odyssey. See Homer’s Epics.
- “the archer with the arrow in his breast”: may refer to Eros or Cupid who both shot gold-tipped arrows to make gods and humans fall in love. The archer may also be Sagittarius among the frozen stars, or Cupid, who in Apuleius says he “wounded myself with my own weapon” when he fell in love with Psyche (The Golden Ass, book 5). See Greek Mythology.
- “the cat miaowed”: “Miaow” is the older spelling of the cat’s cry; earlier forms miaow, miau, and meaw date from the 1630s, and “meow” is recorded from 1842 (Online Etymology Dictionary). It is miau in Spanish and German and miaou in French. Cats in Ancient Egypt were called mau, after their cry. See Ancient Egypt.
- “as if the sea gave up its dead”: “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it” (Revelation 20:13). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “He died because of a road not taken”: “The Road Not Taken” (Robert Frost, 1916). The road returns throughout the chapter, in “the way taken and the way not taken” and “a road many-branching like a chandelier.” See the Chapter 47 resources. See American Writers.
- “a many-forking road like Mr. Chandelier”: See Mr. Chandelier and his many-branched lights. See Mr. Chandelier.
- “Aurora Borealis and Aurora Australis”: Aurora Borealis and Aurora Australis are the lights visible in high northern and southern latitudes (Northern and Southern lights). See Astronomy.
- “a minority representing a majority, a hidden majority like those sleeping in the churchyard”: Mr. Spitzer is the self-appointed advocate of unpopular and overlooked causes. He speaks for those society does not openly support or acknowledge, who may be a great silent majority, the marginalized, ignored, and forgotten, like the dead in the churchyard who lie without public recognition. No one chose or asked him; he took

the role from conviction. Later in the chapter he would present his indictment to the Senate for the passenger pigeons and the Indians. See Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.

- “His was this barcarolle heard not by the singer”: A barcarolle is a Venetian gondolier’s song in a rocking rhythm, like Offenbach’s Barcarolle in The Tales of Hoffmann (1881); he “had rocked them on the waves.” See Music and Composers.
- “whether Ursa Major or Ursa Minor”: Ursa Major and Ursa Minor are constellations in the northern sky also known as Great Bear and Little Bear. Zeus set the nymph Callisto and her son Arcas among the stars as the two bears (Ovid, Metamorphoses 2). See Astronomy and Greek Mythology.
- “the great archangel Uriel”: Uriel, “God is my light,” is an archangel of Jewish and Christian tradition, named in 1 Enoch and in the Apocrypha: “the angel that was sent unto me, whose name was Uriel, gave me an answer” (2 Esdras 4:1). He represents knowledge and wisdom. See Angels and Archangels.
- “But why should any man weep if the heavens wept for him?”: In the Bible God grieves and Jesus weeps: “it grieved him at his heart” (Genesis 6:6); “Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears” (Jeremiah 9:1); “Jesus wept” (John 11:35). In the Book of Moses of the Latter-day Saints, “the God of heaven looked upon the residue of the people, and he wept” (Moses 7:28). The Quran says of Pharaoh’s drowned people, “And the heaven and the earth wept not for them” (44:29, trans. Marmaduke Pickthall, 1930), and the Egyptians said the Nile rose with the tears of Isis for Osiris (Pausanias, Description of Greece 10.32.18). See The Bible, Judaism, and Ancient Egypt.
- “He wept for others who wept not for him”: “Daughters of Jerusalem, weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children” (Luke 23:28). To weep for himself seems an excess to Mr. Spitzer, who is already “dead or dying to this world, this world dying,” so he turns his sorrow outward to others who do not mourn him in return: a solitary, unreciprocated mourner and witness caught between life and death. See The Bible.
- “Halloo, halloo! Is there anybody at home?”: “Halloo!” is the cry used to urge on dogs in a hunt. Mr. Spitzer knocking at empty houses recalls Walter de la Mare’s “The Listeners” (1912): “‘Is there anybody there?’ said the Traveller, / Knocking on the moonlit door.”
- “Is thy light shining, or hast thy spirit departed upon the evening wind?”: “Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick… Let your light so shine before men” (Matthew 5:15-16). Mr. Spitzer asks whether the inner light, the vital spirit, still shines or has already departed upon the evening wind, the approach of darkness and death. See The Bible.
- “the golden spokes of light”: See Young’s wheel, Miss MacIntosh at the hub and the characters as “the spokes,” in the Chapter 43 resources.
- “There was nothing he feared so much as the light of the sun”: The prisoner led out of Plato’s cave is dazzled and pained by the sun (Republic 7, 515e-516b), and La Rochefoucauld wrote that “Neither the sun nor death can be looked at steadily”

(Maxims 26, 1665). “For life was itself this indirection”: “Tell all the truth but tell it slant — / Success in Circuit lies” (Emily Dickinson, written about 1868, published 1945). See Plato and Platonism and American Writers.

- “the griffin with its wings of gold”: Griffins were said to guard the gold of the far north (Herodotus 3.116). “The smallest worm will turn being trodden on” (Henry VI, Part 3, 2.2), but this worm never turned. See Greek Mythology and Shakespeare.
- “the mermaid giving milk to her young”: Manatees and dugongs, which nurse their young at the breast, are often named as a source of mermaid legends. Columbus saw three “mermaids” off Hispaniola in January 1493 and wrote that they “were not so beautiful as they are painted.” See The Sea and Water.
- “He knew not whether he was himself or an image contained within an image”: Mr. Spitzer cannot tell the true self from its reflections or copies; he may be a reflection or shadow within layers of perception, “like a boatman in a boat or an image without, a ripple, a stir.”
- “he being many countries, many times, many dimensions”: “Do I contradict myself? / Very well then I contradict myself, / (I am large, I contain multitudes.)” (Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” 1855). See American Writers.
- “one of whom no unitary statement could be made”: The problem of universals in philosophy concerns the nature and existence of universals, qualities or properties that can be shared by multiple particular things, and how they relate to particulars. In this chapter, there are multiple reflections on identity, existence, perception, and the nature of reality that offer a profound literary meditation of this “Problem.” See The Problem of Universals, Aristotle, and Buddhism.
    - Problem of Universals: The problem of universals is an ancient question from metaphysics that has inspired a range of philosophical topics and disputes. “Should the properties an object has in common with other objects, such as color and shape, be considered to exist beyond those objects? And if a property exists separately from objects, what is the nature of that existence?” The problem of universals relates to various inquiries closely related to metaphysics, logic, and epistemology, as far back as Plato and Aristotle, in efforts to define the mental connections a human makes when they understand a property such as shape or color to be the same in nonidentical objects. Universals are qualities or relations found in two or more entities. As an example, if all cup holders are circular in some way, circularity may be considered a universal property of cup holders. Further, if two daughters can be considered female offspring of Frank, the qualities of being female, offspring, and of Frank, are universal properties of the two daughters. Many properties can be universal: being human, red, male or female, liquid or solid, big or small, etc. Philosophers agree that human beings can talk and think about universals, but disagree on whether universals exist in reality beyond mere thought and speech. (Wikipedia)
    - There are many philosophical positions regarding universals (also found in Indian and Buddhist philosophy): Platonic realism is the view that universals or forms in

this sense, are the causal explanation behind the notion of what things exactly are which is that universals are real entities existing independent of particulars. Aristotelian realism is the rejection of extreme realism. This position establishes the view of a universal as being that of the quality within a thing and every other thing individual to it which is that universals are real entities, but their existence is dependent on the particulars that exemplify them. Anti-realism is the objection to both positions. Anti-realism is divided into two subcategories; (1) Nominalism and (2) Conceptualism. (Wikipedia)

- Realism: Realists tend to argue that universals must be posited as distinct entities in order to account for various phenomena. A common realist argument said to be found in Plato's writings, is that universals are required for certain general words to have meaning and for the sentences in which they occur to be true or false. Take the sentence "Djivan Gasparyan is a musician" for instance. The realist may claim that this sentence is only meaningful and expresses a truth because there is an individual, Djivan Gasparyan, who possesses a certain quality: musicianship. Therefore, it is assumed that the property is a universal which is distinct from the particular individual who has the property. (Wikipedia)
- Nominalism: Nominalists assert that only individuals or particulars exist and deny that universals are real. Four major forms of nominalism are predicate nominalism, resemblance nominalism, trope nominalism, and conceptualism. One with a nominalist view claims that one predicates the same property of/to multiple entities, but argues that the entities only share a name and do not have a real quality in common.Nominalists often argue this view by claiming that nominalism can account for all the relevant phenomena, and therefore, by Occam's razor, and its principle of simplicity,nominalism is preferable, since it posits fewer entities. Different variants and versions of nominalism have been endorsed or defended by many. (Wikipedia)
- Conceptualism: Conceptualism is a position that is meshed between realism and nominalism. Conceptualists believe that universals can indeed be real, but only existing as concepts within the mind. Conceptualists argue that the "concept" of universals are not mere "inventions but are reflections of similarities among particular things themselves." For example, the concept of 'man' ultimately reflects a similarity amongst Socrates and Kant. (Wikipedia)
- Taking "beauty" as example, each of these positions will state the following. Platonic realism: Beauty is a property that exists in an ideal form independently of any mind or description. Aristotelian realism: Beauty is a property that exists only when beautiful things exist. Conceptualism: Beauty is a property constructed in the mind, so exists only in descriptions of things. (Wikipedia)
- Porphyry of Tyre was a Neoplatonic philosopher born in Tyre, Roman Phoenicia during Roman rule. He edited and published the Enneads, the only collection of the work of Plotinus, his teacher. He wrote original works in the Greek language on a wide variety of topics, ranging from music theory to Homer. His Isagoge or Introduction, an introduction to logic and philosophy, was the standard textbook on logic throughout the Middle Ages in its Latin and Arabic translations. Porphyry was,

and still is, also well-known for his anti-Christian polemics. Through works such as Philosophy from Oracles and Against the Christians (which was banned by Constantine the Great), he was involved in a controversy with early Christians. Important works and philosophy attributed to him. His Isagoge set the question for the Middle Ages, whether genera and species exist in reality or only in the mind. (Wikipedia) See Plato and Platonism.

- William James: Though James certainly agreed with Peirce and against Berkeley that general ideas exist as a psychological fact, he was a nominalist in his ontology: “From every point of view, the overwhelming and portentous character ascribed to universal conceptions is surprising. Why, from Plato and Aristotle, philosophers should have vied with each other in scorn of the knowledge of the particular and in adoration of that of the general, is hard to understand, seeing that the more adorable knowledge ought to be that of the more adorable things and that the things of worth are all concretes and singulars. The only value of universal characters is that they help us, by reasoning, to know new truths about individual things.” (William James, The Principles of Psychology, 1890, chapter 12). There are at least three ways in which a realist might try to answer James’ challenge of explaining the reason why universal conceptions are more lofty than those of particulars: the moral-political answer, the mathematical-scientific answer, and the anti-paradoxical answer. Each has contemporary or near-contemporary advocates. (Wikipedia) See William James and Pragmatism.
- Charles Sanders Peirce was an American scientist, mathematician, logician, and philosopher who is sometimes known as “the father of pragmatism.” According to philosopher Paul Weiss, Peirce was “the most original and versatile of America’s philosophers and America’s greatest logician.” Bertrand Russell wrote “he was one of the most original minds of the later nineteenth century and certainly the greatest American thinker ever.” Pragmatism as a philosophical movement originated in 1872 in discussions in The Metaphysical Club among Peirce, William James, Chauncey Wright, John Fiske, Francis Ellingwood Abbot, and lawyers Nicholas St. John Green and Joseph Bangs Warner (1848-1923). He outlined four methods, ordered from least to most successful in achieving a secure fixation of belief: tenacity, sticking to one’s first belief; authority; the a priori method, which settles on “what is agreeable to reason”; and the method of science, the only one that tests, criticizes, corrects, and improves itself (“The Fixation of Belief,” 1877) (Wikipedia)
- Peter Abelard, the twelfth-century philosopher who argued the problem of universals against his teachers Roscellinus and William of Champeaux, is in the Chapter 52 resources, with Héloïse and their letters. See Descartes and Dualism, Kant and Hegel, and Spinoza.
- Roscellinus was born in Compiègne, France. Little is known of his life, and knowledge of his doctrines is mainly derived from Anselm and Abelard. He studied at Soissons and Reims, was afterwards attached to the cathedral of Chartres and became canon of Compiègne. As a monk of Compiègne, he was teaching as early as 1087. He had contact with Lanfranc, Anselm, and St. Ivo of Chartres.

Roscellinus's exposition of Nominalist doctrines, and especially his application to the dogma of the Trinity, attracted broad attention. He maintained that the three persons of the Trinity were not referred to as three substances or Gods only by convention, arguing that if they were really one substance then God the Father and the Holy Spirit would have become incarnate along with God the Son. Roscellinus cited Lanfranc and Anselm in support of this doctrine. According to Otto of Freisingen, Roscellinus "was the first in our times to institute the theory of words," but the chronicler of the "Historia Francia" mentions before him a "magister Johannes," whose personality is much discussed and who has not yet been definitively identified. The "sententia vocum" was one of the anti-realist solutions of the problem of universals accepted in the early Middle Ages. In accordance with a dichotomy set out by Porphyry, the first medieval philosophers regarded genera and species either as things or as having no existence. The philosophers described this using terminology drawn from Boethius, referring to such abstract concepts as either things or words. Nominalists held that only the individual exists and that universals are merely words. (Wikipedia)

    - In Roscellinus's theory, the universal is merely an emission of sound, in conformity with Boethius' definition. Because Roscellinus did not discuss the philosophical concepts of genus and species, he is sometimes considered a pseudo-nominalist, or a moderate realist. However, because of his position as the first medieval philosopher to challenge medieval Realism, he has also been invoked as a forefather of modernity. Roscellinus was also taken to task by Anselm and Abelard for the less clear idea which he gave of the whole and of composite substance. According to Anselm, he maintained that colour does not exist independently of the horse which serves as its support and that the wisdom of the soul is not outside of the soul which is wise. (Wikipedia)
    - In this chapter Mr. Spitzer lives the problem of universals rather than explaining it. He is "many countries, many times, many dimensions," with no unitary self; there is "no stone which was not a cloud"; music "was ever approximate and not actual," and "none should live to hear its completion"; signs and gestures have "many and indeterminate meanings." The imagery leans toward nominalism or conceptualism, with universals as shadows and reflections, yet a mystical unity remains: "He lived between the golden spokes of light. He lived between the spokes of darkness." Young does not solve the problem; she builds a world where its terms dissolve. For more, see The Problem of Universals, Platonism and nominalism in the Chapter 2 resources, Abelard, Roscellinus, and William of Champeaux in the Chapter 52 resources, and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- "the place where all good pigeons go when they die": "Good Americans, when they die, go to Paris," as Thomas Gold Appleton said, quoted by Oliver Wendell Holmes in The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table (1858). See American Writers.
- "the last passenger pigeon known to earth": Martha died at the Cincinnati Zoo on the afternoon of September 1, 1914, a month after the First World War began, alone since her last companions died in 1910. Young gives the date as September 14, 1919 (1918

in an earlier edition), at one o'clock. Mr. Spitzer mourns her as the last of her kind: once something is lost, whether a species, a person, or a moment, it cannot be recovered, and mourning for her is mourning for all that is irretrievably gone. Aldo Leopold wrote for the monument to the pigeon at Wyalusing State Park in Wisconsin: "We have erected a monument to commemorate the funeral of a species. It symbolizes our sorrow" ("On a Monument to the Pigeon," 1947). See Martha the Passenger Pigeon and Birds.

  - Mr. Spitzer cried when he thought of the last passenger pigeon named Martha. It was named after First Lady Martha Washington. Records have her dying at the Cincinnati zoo at one o'clock in 1914. It is still on display and is a symbol of the threat of extinction.
  - The passenger pigeon or wild pigeon is an extinct species of pigeon that was endemic to North America. Its common name is derived from the French word passager, meaning to pass by, due to its migratory habits. Passenger pigeons were hunted by Native Americans, but hunting intensified after the arrival of Europeans, particularly in the 19th century. Pigeon meat was commercialized as cheap food, resulting in hunting on a massive scale for many decades. There were several other factors contributing to the decline and subsequent extinction of the species, including shrinking of the large breeding populations necessary for preservation of the species and widespread deforestation, which destroyed its habitat. A slow decline between about 1800 and 1870 was followed by a rapid decline between 1870 and 1890. The last confirmed wild bird is thought to have been shot in 1901. The last captive birds were divided in three groups around the turn of the 20th century, some of which were photographed alive. Martha, thought to be the last passenger pigeon, died on September 1, 1914, at the Cincinnati Zoo. The eradication of the species is a notable example of anthropogenic extinction or extinction of species directly due to human activity. (Wikipedia)
  - Pigeons embody the fragile boundary between life and death, presence and absence, and the haunting nature of what has vanished but is not forgotten.

- "trapped by nets like the fishes of the sea": Netters lured whole flocks with a captive pigeon tied to a perch or stool, the origin, it is said, of "stool pigeon." At the last great nesting near Petoskey, Michigan, in 1878, hunters killed an estimated 50,000 birds a day for nearly five months, netting, shooting, and smothering them with burning sulfur, and shipped them to city markets. See Birds.
- "The great key-maker had thrown away the key": See Cousin Hannah's forty keys and "no master key" in the Chapter 48 resources. See Keys, Doors, and Locks.
- "The great candle-snuffer had snuffed out this flame": See "out, out of this life" and Macbeth's "brief candle" in the Chapter 48 resources. See Lamps, Candles, and Light.
- "She was embalmed and put upon a train to be sent to Washington": Mr. Spitzer says Martha was embalmed, but her body was frozen in about 300 pounds of ice and sent by fast train to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, where it was made into a

taxidermy mount and an anatomical specimen; the mount has been displayed there and lent to other museums. See Martha the Passenger Pigeon.

- “only an old night porter riding with her”: Pullman sleeping-car porters were almost all Black men, many of them formerly enslaved or the sons of the enslaved; passengers called every porter “George,” after George Pullman, and they worked long hours for low pay and tips until they organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters under A. Philip Randolph in 1925. “Black as the ace of spades” was a common racist simile; see the ace of spades in the Chapter 42 resources. See Society, Class, and Race and Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “How precious then was life”: Life is a brief, precious moment, and much that sustains it, the dreamer and the dream, may be “illegal” in the grand scheme of things. Political authority, legal systems, and the great powers oppress, limit, and destroy individual lives, as they destroyed the pigeons. The passage holds both the preciousness of life in its fragility and the dreamlike quality of existence itself. See Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.
- “Should not the slayer be the slain?”: “If the red slayer think he slays, / Or if the slain think he is slain, / They know not well the subtle ways / I keep, and pass, and turn again” (Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Brahma,” 1857), after the Bhagavad Gita 2.19. See American Writers and Hinduism.
- “If there were no pigeons, could there be people”: Here pigeons stand for life, presence, and continuity, bound up with dawn and twilight, the passage between night and day, life and death. The mottled “pigeon-colored dawn” is complex and uncertain rather than a clear moment, and “He had lost all sense of the hour”: his time is fractured like his identity, and even the dawn is indistinct to him. See Birds.
- “several times passing Lincoln’s Monument”: The Lincoln Memorial was begun in 1914 and dedicated in 1922, so in 1914 there was no monument yet to pass. Grant’s Tomb (1897) and Cleopatra’s Needle (set up in Central Park in 1881) are in New York, not Washington.
- “a Roman head”: The coin left unpaid for the staring cab-driver is the ferryman’s fare; see Charon in the Chapter 46 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “he had come to the Washington Museum”: Martha, the last known passenger pigeon, died at the Cincinnati Zoo on September 1, 1914. Her body was frozen in a block of ice and sent to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, where she was mounted and displayed, so Mr. Spitzer’s visit is a pilgrimage to her remains.
- “She had surely died without benefit of clergy”: Benefit of clergy was the medieval privilege by which clergy accused of crimes were tried in church courts; “without benefit of clergy” came to mean without the rites of the church. Rudyard Kipling took it for a story title (1890).
- “had no soul, the old caretaker said”: John James Audubon painted a pair of passenger pigeons for The Birds of America (plate 62, 1827-1838), and Mark Catesby before him in The Natural History of Carolina, Florida and the Bahama Islands (1731-1743). See Birds.

- “for Martha was no more, and Mark was no more”: Mark is Martha’s mate, for “it took two to make a bargain”; her last companions at the Cincinnati Zoo died in 1910. It may also refer to Mark Catesby, who painted pictures of animals including the passenger pigeon, for Mr. Spitzer asks, “What good did Mark ever do… for all the pigeons.” See Martha the Passenger Pigeon.
- “three trinitarian minutes”: The old caretaker times Martha’s death to “three minutes after one… three trinitarian minutes. Father, Mother, Son.” The Christian Trinity is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; Young puts Mother in the Spirit’s place, joining the sacred triad to family, birth, death, and spiritual passage. See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “She is melted in the fiery furnace of man’s disbelief”: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were cast “into the midst of the burning fiery furnace” and walked out unharmed (Daniel 3:23-27). Martha is not spared. See The Bible.
- “These dying species multiplied not like the fishes of the sea”: “I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore” (Genesis 22:17). See Genesis.
- “whistle all the way from here to Labrador”: The Labrador duck, last recorded in 1878, was the first North American bird known to go extinct after European settlement. See Birds.
- “not even watery Venus”: Under its unbroken clouds Venus was long imagined as a warm, wet world; Svante Arrhenius pictured it as swamp and jungle (The Destinies of the Stars, 1918). Mariner 2 found its surface scorching hot in December 1962. See Astronomy.
- “the dove of God like that which flew up through Mary’s skirts”: The Holy Spirit descends “in a bodily shape like a dove” (Luke 3:22), and in paintings of the Annunciation a dove brings the conception to Mary. See the three trinitarian minutes, above. See The Bible and Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “only the female endures”: “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:27); Mr. Spitzer’s “female and female created He them” rewrites it. Women are often depicted as enduring various forms of hardship, including prolonged stress and instability, without succumbing to their circumstances. Some believe that societal expectations and responsibilities, like caregiving, can contribute to women developing a strong ability to persevere through difficulties. This concept is reflected in literature and cultural narratives, where women are often portrayed as resilient characters who face challenges with strength and fortitude. While men often dominate in shorter, more intense endurance events, women demonstrate strong performance in longer distances, particularly ultra-endurance activities. This is partly attributed to potential physiological advantages, such as efficient fat utilization and greater fatigue resistance in women during prolonged exercise. Psychological factors like strong mental resilience and consistent pacing strategies are also believed to contribute to women’s success in these events. It is important to acknowledge that the experiences of

endurance and resilience differ based on individual circumstances and intersectional factors like race and culture. For instance, Black women in horror narratives are described as “Enduring Women” (Kinitra D. Brooks, “The Importance of Neglected Intersections: Race and Gender in Contemporary Zombie Texts and Theories,” African American Review 47, no. 4, 2014) who face different and more persistent threats than the traditional “Final Girl” (Carol J. Clover, Men, Women, and Chain Saws, 1992), highlighting the complexities of navigating misogynoir and societal challenges. It is crucial to recognize the importance of understanding resilience within the context of women’s lived experiences and the societal factors that influence their well-being. See Genesis and Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- “Every Martha must have her Mary”: “Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part” (Luke 10:41-42); the sisters of Lazarus appear again in John 11. Martha is associated with active service and worldly duties, Mary with contemplative devotion and the inner life. For every Martha bearing the burdens of the world there is a Mary who embodies grace and hope; here Mary is “that snow-white pigeon with the red-rose breast who used to come to her through miles of clouds.” The pairing holds loss, maternal suffering, spiritual yearning, and the interplay of outer and inner life. See The Bible.
- “had done to Indians in their lonely tepees”: The United States has never been held legally to account for genocidal acts against its Indigenous peoples, though many historians and academics describe the Mystic massacre (1637), the Trail of Tears (1838-1839), the Sand Creek Massacre (1864), and the Mendocino War (1859) as genocidal. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz states that U.S. history, as well as inherited Indigenous trauma, cannot be understood without dealing with the genocide the United States committed against Indigenous peoples (An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States, 2014). From the colonial period through the founding of the United States and into the twentieth century, it entailed torture, terror, sexual abuse, massacres, systematic military occupations, removals of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral territories, the forced removal of Native American children to military-like boarding schools, allotment, and a policy of termination. During Pontiac’s War, General Jeffery Amherst wrote to Colonel Henry Bouquet, “You will Do well to try to Innoculate the Indians by means of Blanketts, as well as to try Every other method that can serve to Extirpate this Execrable Race” (July 16, 1763), part of a broader genocidal attitude displayed toward Native Americans during the colonization of the Americas. Under the Indian Vaccination Act of 1832, Secretary of War Lewis Cass ordered that no surgeon be sent higher up the Missouri than the Mandans, leaving the upper Missouri nations unvaccinated, and when smallpox swept the northern plains in 1837 it killed thousands of Mandans, Hidatsas, Arikaras, Assiniboines, Crees, and Blackfeet (J. Diane Pearson, “Lewis Cass and the Politics of Disease: The Indian Vaccination Act of 1832,” Wicazo Sa Review 18, no. 2, 2003). The United States has to date undertaken no truth commission and built no memorial for the genocide of Indigenous people, and it does not acknowledge or compensate for the historical violence of westward expansion. American museums such as the Smithsonian Institution do not dedicate a section to the genocide; in 2013 the National Congress of American Indians passed a resolution

to create a space for a National American Indian Holocaust Museum inside the Smithsonian, but it was ignored (Wikipedia). After the Family Planning Services and Population Research Act of 1970, the Indian Health Service sterilized thousands of Native American women, many without informed consent: a 1976 General Accounting Office report found 3,406 sterilizations in just four of its twelve areas from 1973 to 1976, and by some estimates a quarter or more of Native American women of childbearing age were sterilized (Jane Lawrence, “The Indian Health Service and the Sterilization of Native American Women,” American Indian Quarterly 24, no. 3, 2000). In 1977 Marie Sanchez, chief tribal judge on the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation, told a United Nations conference on the Indigenous peoples of the Americas in Geneva that Native American women suffered involuntary sterilization, which she equated with modern genocide. See Society, Class, and Race.

- “the whooping crane and the lute bird”: By 1941 only about twenty whooping cranes were left in the world, the wild flock wintering at Aransas on the Texas coast. The lute bird may be the lyrebird of Australia, named for the lyre shape of the male’s tail and famous for imitating any sound. See Birds.
- “would have been threatened with the Federal pen”: The Federal pen is the federal penitentiary. For “giving a voice to all those beauties which never should have been expressed,” the old pigeon lobbyist would be accused of anarchy and sedition. In 2013 the programmer and activist Aaron Swartz, facing federal charges that carried up to thirty-five years in prison for downloading academic articles, died by suicide. The “beauties” are the elusive, perhaps forbidden, aspects of life and art, hidden truths and deep emotions beyond ordinary perception or social acceptance; to expose them would bring punishment from legal or governmental authority, the power of law enforcement or censorship to suppress such revelations. See Suicide in History and Literature and Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.
- “Boston, the Great Hub”: “The Hub” is a nickname derived from Oliver Wendell Holmes’s “Boston State-House is the hub of the solar system” (The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table, 1858). See American Writers.
- “He heard a bell tolling far inland”: Mr. Spitzer hears a bell tolling. “And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee” (John Donne, Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, Meditation 17, 1624).
- “trust only the blind”: “In the Country of the Blind the One-eyed Man is King,” the proverb H. G. Wells turned inside out in “The Country of the Blind” (1904), where the sighted man is the one who cannot find his way.
- “in that realm the father carried the young”: Among seahorses the male carries the eggs in a brood pouch and gives birth to the young.
- “the fisherman was caught in his net”: It is a metaphor reflecting the idea of being trapped by one’s own actions or fate. Here, the fisherman, who is usually the one capturing fish with a net, ironically becomes the one ensnared in his own net, symbolizing a reversal of roles or the inevitability of being caught by the consequences of one’s own deeds. “For man also knoweth not his time: as the fishes that are taken in

an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time" (Ecclesiastes 9:12).

- "chessmen who had walked on squares of black and gold": See the life-sized chessmen of Through the Looking-Glass in the Chapter 13 resources. See Alice in Wonderland.
- "the Pleiades flying like birds": See Orion and the Pleiades in the Chapter 48 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- "the black eunuch and the white": In the Ottoman palace the harem was guarded by Black eunuchs under the Kızlar Ağası, their chief, and the outer palace by white eunuchs. See Society, Class, and Race.
- "the black coachman in his pearl-lined grave": See The Black Coachman. See The Black Coachman.
- "the star might be drawn by the moth": Young reverses Shelley: "The desire of the moth for the star, / Of the night for the morrow" (Percy Bysshe Shelley, "One word is too often profaned," 1824). See Romantic Poets and Butterflies and Moths.
- "as if he, too, had been to Holy Lands": Pilgrims came home with shells on their hats, the scallop badge of St. James at Santiago de Compostela: "Give me my Scallop shell of quiet, / My staffe of Faith to walke upon" (Sir Walter Ralegh, "The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage," 1604). See Sir Walter Raleigh.
- "I am that man who was always on his way to a wedding and came to a funeral": Coleridge's Ancient Mariner stops one of three on their way to a wedding feast to tell of the ship whose crew all died but him: "Alone, alone, all, all alone, / Alone on a wide wide sea!" ("The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," 1798). Here the old sailor is the sole survivor and Mr. Spitzer the guest. See Romantic Poets.
- "You drown in your own drowning": This conversation mirrors the tales of the Tavern landlord in the later chapters.
- "how shall I perceive there what was not perceived here?": Mr. Spitzer seems to be struggling with the philosophical question, if a tree falls in a forest, which asks about the possibility of unperceived existence. Can something exist without being perceived by consciousness? Can the unobserved world function the same as the observed world? There is a division between perception of an object and how an object really is. What does existence mean and what is the difference between perception and reality? George Berkeley held that for things to exist is for them to be perceived, esse est percipi (A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, 1710, section 3), and the riddle took its familiar form in a physics textbook: "When a tree falls in a lonely forest, and no animal is near by to hear it, does it make a sound?" (Charles Riborg Mann and George Ransom Twiss, Physics, 1910). See Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume).
- "It is possible that we are illusions in the light-streaked fog": Human beings, their identities and experiences, may be insubstantial and transient, like shapes seen in a fog lit only for a moment by streaks of light. The fog is the ambiguity surrounding

existence: perceptions, memories, and realities are not fixed but shifting and elusive, and what seems substantial may be ephemeral or constructed by the mind.

- “Often he could be heard talking to himself”: Mr. Spitzer is exhibiting two psychological issues: 1) internalized conflict which often involves rehearsing disagreements, replaying past interactions, or formulating responses to potential future arguments. This can stem from unresolved conflicts, a need to feel in control, or a tendency to project negative feelings onto others. These mental arguments can be a way to process emotions, prepare for potential conflicts, or even act out suppressed anger or frustration. 2) self-talk is a common and often beneficial behavior as a form of cognitive processing, aiding in problem-solving, decision-making, and memory recall. It can also be a way to regulate emotions, manage stress, and even practice social interactions. Both, of course, taken to excess, could be a mental health condition.
- “For why, as he might often ask himself, should he trust the truth”: This passage encapsulates Mr. Spitzer’s existential uncertainty and the paradoxes he faces: the instability of what is usually trusted (truth, constancy, solidity) and the endurance of what is usually mistrusted (falsehood, change, fragility).
- “Why should he suppose his musical murmur should remember him when he was gone?”: Mr. Spitzer doubts he will be remembered after death, since he already feels forgotten in life. His “musical murmur” is his life’s work and presence, subtle, ephemeral, barely noticed, and he expects to be forgotten after death as before.
- “the dream of the dream”: Zhuangzi’s “Butterfly Dream” is a famous philosophical anecdote about a dream where the philosopher Zhuangzi transforms into a butterfly and then questions whether he is now a man who dreamed of being a butterfly or a butterfly dreaming he is a man. “Once upon a time, I, Chuang Tzŭ, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, to all intents and purposes a butterfly… Now I do not know whether I was then a man dreaming I was a butterfly, or whether I am now a butterfly, dreaming I am a man” (Chuang Tzŭ, trans. Herbert A. Giles, 1889, chapter 2). See Taoism and Zhuangzi.
    - Relativity of Reality: The story suggests that the distinction between dreaming and waking reality might not be as clear-cut as it seems.
    - The Fluidity of Self: It questions the fixed nature of identity, implying that the self might be more fluid and transformative than it is usually taken to be.
    - The Unity of All Things: Some interpretations connect the story to the Daoist concept of the “Transformation of Things,” suggesting that all things are interconnected and constantly changing.
    - Beyond Duality: The story can be seen as an invitation to transcend dualistic thinking (e.g., self versus other, dream versus reality) and embrace a more holistic view of existence.
- “Their yesterday was a pointing backward over the shoulder”: Young seems to use actual ASL sign language gestures but some seem to have changed over time. In American Sign Language time runs along the body: the past is signed behind, over the shoulder, and the future ahead. See Deafness and Sign Language.

- “What cenotaph was there for him”: Mozart was buried in 1791 in a common grave at St. Marx in Vienna whose place was soon lost; a memorial stands near the likely spot, and a monument was raised to him in Vienna’s Central Cemetery in 1891. See Music and Composers.
- “the porphyry clouds”: Porphyry, from the Greek porphyra, purple, is an igneous rock with large crystals set in a fine-grained matrix, the mark of two-stage cooling. The purple porphyry of Egypt was prized by Rome and Byzantium for imperial sculpture and architecture, since purple was the color of royalty, and a Byzantine emperor’s child born in the palace’s porphyry chamber was porphyrogenitus, “born in the purple.” See Porphyry of Tyre, above. See Ancient Egypt.
- “he had seen the other side of the tapestry”: “Translating from one language into another… is like looking at Flemish tapestries on the wrong side; for though the figures are visible, they are full of threads that make them indistinct” (Miguel de Cervantes, Don Quixote, Part II, chapter 62, trans. John Ormsby, 1885). The chapter ends with Mr. Spitzer as the weaver woven into his own tapestry. See Don Quixote.
- “He was this old fan-tail fanning his tail”: Darwin bred fancy pigeons and opened On the Origin of Species (1859) with them: the fantail with thirty or forty tail feathers spread upright and the pouter with its swollen crop. Mr. Spitzer is “pouter-breasted” too. See Birds.
- “or perhaps he was the third”: “Who is the third who walks always beside you? / When I count, there are only you and I together” (T. S. Eliot, The Waste Land, 1922). See Peron Spitzer.
- “the turf meets the surf”: Del Mar racetrack, founded by Bing Crosby with William Quigley, opened on July 3, 1937; “Where the Turf Meets the Surf,” written in 1938 by James Monaco and Johnny Burke with Crosby, is still played at the track.
- “Venus shell”: In Botticelli’s The Birth of Venus (about 1485) the goddess rises from the sea standing on a scallop shell; “Was he rising from the sea, or was he sinking?” See Greek Mythology.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Adventitious

Happening by chance; not essential or built in.

Ambivalence

Mixed or contradictory feelings.

Ambivalently

With mixed or contradictory feelings or meanings.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Aperture

An opening.

Archaic

Very old; belonging to a much earlier time.

Argosy

A large merchant ship, or a fleet of them.

Artifice

Clever trickery, or the art of making things seem other than they are.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Barcarolle

A Venetian gondolier’s song, or music in its gentle rocking rhythm.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Bellwether

The lead sheep of a flock, which wears a bell.

Billows

Great waves.

Bisect

To cut or divide into two parts.

Carousel

A merry-go-round. Earlier, a tournament in which horsemen performed exercises and displays.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Cenotaph

An empty tomb or monument to someone buried elsewhere.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Conformation

The shape and proportions of an animal’s body, especially a horse’s.

Covert

Hidden; secret.

Crepuscular

Of twilight; dim.

Crinoline

A stiff petticoat or hooped frame worn to spread a skirt.

Crucible

A heat-resistant pot for melting metals. Figuratively, a severe test that changes a person.

Cul-de-sac

A dead end.

Curdled

Thickened into lumps, like soured milk.

Delusive

Misleading; giving a false impression.

Denizen

An inhabitant of a place.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Distilled

Purified or concentrated, as by boiling and condensing.

Dubiety

Doubt; a feeling of uncertainty.

Dubious

Doubtful.

Egregious

Outstandingly bad; flagrant.

Egregiously

Outstandingly; shockingly.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Empyrean

The highest heaven, the realm of pure fire or light.

Enceinte

Pregnant.

Erratically

Unpredictably; irregularly.

Eunuch

A man who has been castrated. Eunuchs were employed for centuries to guard harems and to serve as officials in royal courts in the Middle East, China, and Byzantium. See The eunuch (Ch 35).

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Fitful

Starting and stopping; irregular.

Flotilla

A small fleet of boats or ships.

Fluted

Marked with long rounded grooves, like a column.

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Forecastle

The forward part of a ship below the deck, where the crew lived. Pronounced “FOHK-sul.”

Galleon

A large, many-decked sailing ship of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Gauze

A thin, transparent fabric.

Glow-worm

A beetle whose wingless female and larvae give off a greenish light.

Gossamer

A fine film of cobweb; anything light and delicate.

Griffin

A mythical beast with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.

Habitué

A regular visitor to a place.

Halloo

A shout to urge on hounds.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Inarticulate

Unable to express oneself clearly.

Incandescence

The giving off of light by something heated until it glows.

Incorruptible

Not subject to decay or to bribery.

Indeterminate

Not clearly fixed or defined.

Ineluctable

Not to be escaped or avoided.

Infrangible

Unbreakable; not to be violated.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Intermittent

Stopping and starting.

Interstices

Small gaps or spaces between things.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Jinrikisha

A rickshaw, a light two-wheeled hooded carriage drawn by one or more people.

Jitney

A small bus or car carrying passengers for a low fare.

Larboard

The old word for the left side of a ship.

Leeward

On the side sheltered from the wind.

Legato

In music, smooth and connected, without breaks between notes.

Lodestone

A naturally magnetic stone; anything that draws or attracts.

Lumbering

Moving heavily and clumsily.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Marauding

Roaming in search of plunder.

Mica

A mineral that splits into thin, shiny, nearly transparent sheets and makes rock glitter.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Mitre

The tall pointed hat of a bishop.

Molt

To shed hair or feathers.

Monsoon

A seasonal wind in South Asia that brings months of heavy rain.

Moonstone

A milky, pearly-blue gemstone.

Mortice

A hole cut to receive a tenon in joining wood; also spelled mortise.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Nadir

The lowest point.

Nautilus

A sea creature with a spiral shell. The paper nautilus is a small octopus whose female makes a thin, papery shell.

Nebula

A cloud of gas and dust in space; once any hazy patch of light among the stars, including galaxies.

Nocturnal

Of or happening in the night.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Obtuse

Slow to understand.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Palings

Pointed wooden stakes, or a fence made of them.

Palpable

Able to be touched or felt; plain to see.

Palpitation

A rapid, pounding heartbeat.

Paradox

A statement or situation that seems to contradict itself and yet may be true.

Peaked

Thin and pale, as from illness.

Peccadillo

A small, trifling sin.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Pirouetting

Spinning on one foot, as in ballet.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Plumed

Decorated with feathers.

Porphyry

A hard purple-red rock with embedded crystals, prized by Roman emperors.

Pouter

A breed of pigeon that puffs out its crop.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Presentiment

An intuitive feeling that something is about to happen.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Pristine

Fresh and pure, as if new.

Purlieus

Outskirts; haunts.

Refraction

The bending of light as it passes from one medium to another.

Refulgent

Shining brightly; radiant.

Requiem

A Mass or song for the dead.

Reveille

The bugle call that wakes soldiers in the morning.

Riparian

Of or on the bank of a river or stream.

Saffron

Orange-yellow, the color of the spice.

Sea nettle

A stinging jellyfish.

Sedition

Speech or action inciting rebellion against the state.

Sequester

To set apart or hold in safekeeping.

Sequin

A small shining disk sewn on clothing; first the zecchino, a Venetian gold coin.

Seraglio

The women’s quarters of a Muslim palace; a harem.

Sheik

An Arab chief or elder.

Shrive

To hear confession and grant absolution.

Sleight of hand

Skillful tricks done with the hands, such as a magician’s.

Somnolence

Sleepiness; drowsiness.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Sonorous

Deep and full in sound.

Soughing

Making a soft sighing or rushing sound, like wind in trees.

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard. Spar is also the name for certain shiny, easily split crystalline minerals, such as Iceland spar.

Spectre

A ghost.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Staccato

In music, short and detached, each note cut off from the next.

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Steeplechase

A horse race over fences, ditches, and water jumps, first run cross-country from one church steeple to another.

Striated

Marked with thin parallel lines or bands.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women’s right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women’s Suffrage.

Sulky

A light two-wheeled cart for one driver, used in harness racing.

Surrey

A light four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with two seats, often with a fringed canopy on top.

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Tempera

Paint made with egg yolk, or a picture painted with it.

Tenement

A crowded, run-down apartment building.

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Terra firma

Solid ground.

Threnody

A song or poem of lament for the dead.

Tonnage

The size or carrying capacity of a ship.

Torpid

Sluggish; inactive.

Torpor

A sluggish, heavy, half-asleep state.

Transfixed

Pierced through; held motionless.

True bill

An indictment approved by a grand jury.

Tryst

An appointed meeting, as of lovers.

Tumult

A loud, confused uproar.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Undulatory

Moving in waves.

Untenable

Impossible to defend, hold, or live in.

Vestments

Robes or garments, especially ceremonial ones.

Vivacity

Liveliness.

Wayfarer

A traveler, especially on foot.

Weathercock

A weathervane shaped like a rooster; also, a person who changes with every wind.

Wraith

A ghost; a faint, pale shape.

Zenith

The highest point.

Chapter 50

Summary

Everything seems off key and out of course to Mr. Spitzer, the universe tacking like the wild white snow bird and every room doubling, so that when he sees two golden chairs in the clouds he does not know which is the dream. He steps lightly, breathes softly, and pauses before every door lest it open on the void, for he believes he is living his life after death and may be the one dreamer who dreams not. It was not from the opium lady, “the invalid lady flourishing on the enchantment of nightshade,” who waits for him as for his dead self and mistakes life for death, that he learned that all that happened happened only once. Life is a moment’s fading luminosity, and he is not the Holy Writ but the flyleaf stuck between the testaments, ground between the zenith stone and the nadir stone, leaving no water-mark, no signature, no name. His little firefly is his key of gold and perhaps all there is. He walks like the tide, advancing as he retreats. He learned much from the old suffragette captain, for whom the hyphen in her name was more important than the two names it joined; she died before he came, and for her he wrote this nocturne.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Cousin Hannah

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Society, Class, and Race · The Search for Meaning

Symbols: Butterflies and Moths · Fireflies · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · The Sea and Water · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Descartes and Dualism · Heraclitus and Flux · Hinduism · Plato and Platonism · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres · Taoism and Zhuangzi

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Exploration and the Poles · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Music and Composers · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · The Bible · Women’s Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with Mr. Spitzer lamenting how “everything seemed off key and out of course,” and how the universe “tack[ed] like the wild white snow bird away from central fires of jewels.” This passage introduces the core theme of disorientation and

the impossibility of fixed maps or certainties in this universe. The imagery of drifting moons, vanished stars, and shifting mirrors sets the tone for a world where nothing is stable or fully knowable.

- Mr. Spitzer contemplates seeing “two golden chairs in the clouds” and not knowing which is real or if both are illusions. This metaphor reflects his deeper fear of indistinguishable realities and the collapse of boundaries between dream and reality, self and other. His caution about touching the “strings of the constellation Lyre” for fear of interacting with imaginary elements highlights his existential uncertainty.
- A significant passage is Mr. Spitzer’s reflection that he is living his “after-life, his life after death,” questioning when he had ever lived before death. He is cautious and uncertain, “continually checking, rechecking” his impressions as he navigates this liminal state. His wildness and caution are balanced by his awareness that he may be the one who “dreamed not,” forced to live by the dreams of others, symbolizing a profound detachment from conventional experience and identity.
- Although Mr. Spitzer spends much time with the opium lady, he did not learn from her the sense of mortality or the failure of the sensorium (his perception). She is “the invalid lady flourishing on the enchantment of nightshade,” who lived so immersed in imagination that she blurred the lines between life and death, day and night. Her failure to distinguish these states contrasts with Mr. Spitzer’s heightened awareness of the ephemeral nature of existence.
- Mr. Spitzer recognizes that “all that happened happened only once” and that life is a “moment’s fading luminosity.” He mourns the impossibility of going back, the non-recurrence of events, and the uniqueness of every moment. This awareness adds a tragic beauty and pathos to life’s fleeting nature. The metaphor of a train derailed in grass or a star derailed captures his sense of displacement and loss.
- The chapter explores places that are neither: land nor water, one nor the other, ambiguous or undefined regions. This reflects existential ambiguity and the difficulty of defining states of being, identity, or even reality itself. Mr. Spitzer identifies with these liminal spaces, drifting and lost like sailors or farmers swallowed by the earth.
- Mr. Spitzer sees himself as a “mere flyleaf stuck between two passages or testaments,” not the main text of life or death but a transient, fragile presence. The imagery of silver and gold illuminations shining through him like candle flames evokes a faint spiritual light, but ultimately one that is transient and delicate. He reflects on the absence of any lasting mark or memory of his passage, emphasizing mortality and the erasure of individual existence.
- Among all the vast and complex imagery, the motif of the “little firefly” stands out as Mr. Spitzer’s “key of gold,” his soul, and the light he reads by. This small light represents the essence of life or consciousness amid the vast silence and uncertainty. It suggests that perhaps all that remains or matters is this fragile inner light.
- Mr. Spitzer’s movement is described as a tide advancing and retreating, embodying hesitation, uncertainty, and the interplay of opposites. This rhythm of contradictory

motion captures the existential tension he experiences, the constant questioning and the inability to find firm ground or certainty.

- Towards the end, Mr. Spitzer recalls lessons from an old suffragette captain whose hyphenated name symbolizes the joining of opposites and the importance of connection (“the hyphen was all”). Her life was solitary, and her death represented a pause in a broken melody, suggesting unresolved narratives and the persistence of longing or unfinished business beyond death.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “He was often at a loss when he saw two golden chairs in the clouds to know in which chair to sit.” Why is choosing a chair so dangerous?
- Mr. Spitzer is “not the Holy Writ but was the mere flyleaf stuck between two passages or testaments.” What does it mean to live between the testaments?
- “His little firefly was his key of gold.” What is the firefly?

Characters

- “Perhaps among dreamers he was the one person who dreamed not.” How can someone who dreams not live “by the dreams of others”?
- The opium lady “waited for him as for his dead self whom she had loved or thought she loved.” Who does she think Mr. Spitzer is?
- For the old suffragette captain “the hyphen was all.” What does the hyphen join?

Connections

- In Chapter 49 Mr. Spitzer could not tell whether he was one or two. Here “he feared that one should be one.” Why is being one more frightening?
- Mr. Spitzer places Hannah “with her head pointing North and her feet pointing South.” How does this echo the poles and reversals of earlier chapters?
- The chapter closes: “But Palestrina awakened not.” Why end on a composer beside a sleeping tree frog?

Reflection

- “All that happened happened only once.” Does this make life more precious or more terrible?
- “Because he took so much for granted, it might seem that he took nothing for granted.” Is caution a form of faith?

- “There would be no star of this world in memory of him.” What would you want to leave behind?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- Mr. Spitzer is a liminal figure, caught between life and death, reality and dream, certainty and doubt.
- He exhibits caution born of experience, aware of the fragility of perception and existence, yet he also harbors a “wildness” that contrasts with his cautiousness.
- His relationship with other characters reveals his search for meaning through others’ dreams and experiences, though he himself “dreamed not.”
- His journey is symbolic of human consciousness confronting mortality and the unknown beyond.

Catherine Cartwheel

- The opium lady “waited for him as for his dead self whom she had loved or thought she loved,” and “she had always lived by such indirections and evasions that she would never know when he was gone.”

Cousin Hannah

- The old suffragette captain, “for whom the hyphen was more important than the two names it joined… for the hyphen was all.”
- “So solitary her life had been. How could death be different or provide any great change for her? Her mind had died before her heart had died.”

Research: Themes

The Fluidity and Ambiguity of Reality and Identity

See: Illusion and Reality · Identity and the Self

- Mr. Spitzer experiences a world where “everything seemed off key and out of course” and where familiar structures (rooms, stars, chairs) multiply or dissolve, making it impossible to distinguish reality from dream or hallucination.
- The doubling of images and uncertainty about which chair to sit on symbolize the instability of identity and the multiplicity of existence. The text questions whether one can trust the senses or even oneself: “one chair might be only the dream, and one might be real.”

Death and the Afterlife as Continuums, Not Endings

See: Death and Mortality

- The text portrays death not as a final cessation but as a passage to another form of existence or consciousness. Mr. Spitzer's "life after death" is a realm where time, space, and form are mutable and indistinct.
- There is a tension between the desire for continuity (to find a "way-station" or star where love and identity persist) and the fear of absolute dissolution ("he feared that one should be one, both the dream and the reality").

The Limits of Knowledge and Perception

See: The Search for Meaning

- Mr. Spitzer is cautious, "continually checking, rechecking, altering his impressions," recognizing that perceptions themselves alter and deceive.
- The text explores the idea that some beings or states ("cells which knew not death or life") may exist beyond human comprehension.

The Transience and Uniqueness of Life

- Life is portrayed as a fleeting moment, a "moment's fading luminosity," never repeating or returning ("there was nothing twice the same").
- This impermanence imbues life with pathos and beauty, likened to snowflakes melting or fireflies flickering.

Philosophical and Existential Questions

See: The Search for Meaning

- What is reality if perceptions and identities are unstable or illusory?
- Is death an end or a transformation?
- Can one separate the self from the dream or the other?
- What is the nature of time and experience if moments never repeat and life is a singular event?
- How does one live in the face of uncertainty and impermanence?

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Stars and Moons

See: Moon and Stars

- Represent shifting phases of identity and reality, the unreachable or illusory nature of truth ("locked moons with tangled horns," "vanished stars").

Mirrors and Prisms

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- Symbols of reflection and distortion, suggesting fragmented perception and the multiplicity of selves.

Fireflies and Light

See: Fireflies · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Recurring symbols of the soul or consciousness, fragile and transient, yet illuminating the darkness.

Doors and Thresholds

See: Keys, Doors, and Locks

- Emblems of transition and uncertainty, with repeated imagery of doors opening, closing, or leading to voids.

Water and Tides

See: The Sea and Water

- Represent flux, the movement between life and death, progress and retreat, echoing the ebb and flow of existence.

Research: Resources

- “where the snowflakes whirled big as cartwheels”: The snowflakes are “big as cartwheels,” and later the fire medusas are “big as cart wheels”: Young plays on the Cartwheel name of Vera and her mother. See Catherine Cartwheel and Vera Cartwheel.
- “trembling mirages piling up like mountainous waves”: The castles that appear and vanish over the water recall the Fata Morgana, the mirage of towers and castles seen above the Strait of Messina and named for Morgan le Fay. See The Sea and Water.
- “the same in his end as in his beginning”: “In my beginning is my end,” and “In my end is my beginning” (T. S. Eliot, “East Coker,” 1940), after the motto of Mary, Queen of Scots, En ma fin est mon commencement.
- “prisms breaking mirrors which should have looked upon eternity”: “Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass, / Stains the white radiance of Eternity” (Percy Bysshe Shelley, Adonais, stanza 52, 1821). See Romantic Poets and Mirrors and Reflections.
- “One might disappear like the Water Carrier”: The chairs vanish like constellations at dawn. See Astronomy and Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.

    - The Water Carrier is the constellation Aquarius. The water carrier is Ganymede, cupbearer to Zeus.
    - Cassiopeia’s Golden Chair or Cassiopeia’s chair is a constellation in the northern sky. The vain queen Cassiopeia was set among the stars on her throne.
    - The Crib is Praesepe, the Manger, the Beehive Cluster in Cancer; the Virgin is the constellation Virgo.
    - The Hair of Berenice is an ancient group of stars in the northern sky. Queen Berenice II of Egypt cut off her hair as an offering for her husband’s safe return from war, and the astronomer Conon declared it had been set among the stars (Callimachus, “The Lock of Berenice,” translated by Catullus, poem 66).
    - The constellation Lyre or Lyra is a small one in the northern sky. It is the lyre of Orpheus; see Lyra in the Chapter 49 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “a lyre without strings”: The Chinese poet Tao Yuanming (365-427) kept a qin without strings and would stroke it when he drank, saying that one who understood the instrument had no need of the sound of its strings (Book of Jin, biography of Tao Qian). See Taoism and Zhuangzi.
- “or dice without markings”: “I, at any rate, am convinced that He is not playing at dice” (Albert Einstein, letter to Max Born, December 4, 1926, in The Born-Einstein Letters, trans. Irene Born, 1971).
- “a dog without a bark”: “The dog did nothing in the night-time.” “That was the curious incident,” remarked Sherlock Holmes (Arthur Conan Doyle, “Silver Blaze,” 1892).
- “Should a demoniac butterfly appear”: A demoniac butterfly may refer to a restricted demon or grass demon butterfly found in Asia. The Greek psyche means both soul and butterfly, and the butterfly rising from the fire is the soul leaving the body. See Butterflies and Moths and Greek Mythology.
- “His breath was his spirit”: Spirit comes from the Latin spiritus, breath. “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7). See Genesis.
- “dream dreamed by another dreamer”: A dream dreamed by another dreamer points to multiple levels of perception and existence where the boundaries between dream and reality blur. Tweedledee tells Alice that the Red King is dreaming her: “You’d be nowhere. Why, you’re only a sort of thing in his dream!” (Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking-Glass, 1871, chapter 4). See Zhuangzi’s butterfly in the Chapter 49 resources. See Alice in Wonderland and Taoism and Zhuangzi.
- “never again would he leave his calling card”: Victorian callers left engraved cards on a silver tray in the hall; a card with a corner turned down meant one had come in person.
- “the Golden Horn”: The Golden Horn is a major waterway and an inlet of the Bosphorus in Istanbul, Turkey. The schooners round it to reach the opium lady’s bedside. See Catherine Cartwheel.
- “she saw the human-sized blackbird at the door”: See the human-sized blackbird of Weissenbach’s dreams in the Chapter 33 resources. See Catherine Cartwheel.

- “Come in, Blackamoor”: Blackamoor is an old, racist English word for a Black African. Figures of Black servants in livery and turbans, called blackamoors, were fashionable decorations in European and American houses; the opium lady greets the human-sized blackbird with it. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “the invalid lady flourishing on the enchantment of nightshade”: Nightshade is belladonna; see “this bella donna” in the Chapter 47 resources.
- “the lighthouse dolphin flashing its dying colors”: “Parting day / Dies like the dolphin, whom each pang imbues / With a new colour as it gasps away, / The last still loveliest” (Lord Byron, Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, canto 4, stanza 29, 1818). The dolphin fish changes color as it dies. See Romantic Poets.
- “butterfly was sequestered like this mourning cloak”: The mourning cloak butterfly, dark with a pale border, sleeps through the winter as an adult hidden in bark and crevices. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “There was no twin star to this”: The twin star is the lost brother; see Peron, who “would not live” beyond Mr. Spitzer. See Twins and Doubles.
- “threads wrapped around a spindle”: In Plato’s myth of Er the heavens turn on the Spindle of Necessity, and “on the upper surface of each circle is a siren, who goes round with them, hymning a single tone or note. The eight together form one harmony” (Republic 10, 617b, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 1871). See Plato and Platonism and Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres.
- “the door of truth which was covered with a golden disc”: “The door of the True is covered with a golden disk. Open that, O Pûshan, that we may see the nature of the True” (Isa Upanishad 15, trans. F. Max Müller, 1879). See Hinduism and Keys, Doors, and Locks.
- “the ambient surrey top with its fringes”: See the fringe-topped surrey in the Chapter 49 resources.
- “perhaps the poles themselves had flown”: A geographic pole is either of the two points where Earth’s axis of rotation meets its surface, the North Pole in the Arctic Ocean and the South Pole in Antarctica. The poles wander by a few meters over a few years, partly from the Chandler wobble, a free oscillation with a period of about 433 days, but for maps they are taken as fixed, the points where the lines of longitude meet. (Wikipedia) See the reversals of the magnetic poles in the Chapter 42 resources. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “an empire enduring a thousand years”: The Nazis called their state the Thousand-Year Reich; it lasted twelve years, 1933 to 1945. In Revelation the saints reign with Christ “a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “the blind astronomer”: Galileo, who first turned the telescope on the heavens in 1609, was blind by 1638. See Astronomy.
- “a flying sand grain might grow to be a star”: See Blake’s “To see a World in a Grain of Sand” in the Chapter 46 resources. See Romantic Poets.

- “begot this pearl with the light burning within”: A pearl forms when an oyster coats an irritant with layer upon layer of nacre; the grain of sand of legend is rarely the cause, more often a parasite or a bit of tissue. “The kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it” (Matthew 13:45-46). See The Bible.
- “there was neither starboard nor larboard”: Larboard, the left side of a ship, was replaced by “port” because it was too easily confused with starboard; the Royal Navy made the change official in 1844. See The Sea and Water.
- “false signal lights luring him out of his depths”: Wreckers of Cornish legend were said to show false lights on the cliffs to lure ships onto the rocks for plunder. See The Sea and Water.
- “to know that there was nothing twice the same”: Young reverses Heraclitus, “The way up and the way down is one and the same,” here “the way up was not the way down,” and follows him in “You cannot step twice into the same rivers; for fresh waters are ever flowing in upon you” (Heraclitus, fragments 69 and 41, in John Burnet, Early Greek Philosophy, 1892). T. S. Eliot set the first as an epigraph to “Burnt Norton” (1936). See Heraclitus and Flux.
- “many pages of the book of life had been transparent”: “And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life” (Revelation 20:12). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “old, skull-faced surrey-driver”: See The Black Coachman.
- “that earth which swallows the horse and the rider”: “The horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea” (Exodus 15:1), and “the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up” (Numbers 16:32). See The Bible.
- “many an old mariner chartlessly drifting over the body of his sleeping wife”: “O my America! my new-found-land” (John Donne, Elegy 19, “To His Mistress Going to Bed,” written in the 1590s, published 1669), the lover’s body mapped as a new world.
- “the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper”: See Ursa Major and Ursa Minor in the Chapter 49 resources. See Astronomy.
- “bird never to break through the shell of night”: In Hermann Hesse’s Demian (1919) the bird must fight its way out of the egg, which is the world, in order to be born.
- “not even the book of death”: The Egyptian Book of the Dead, the Book of Coming Forth by Day, was a collection of spells written on papyrus and buried with the dead from about 1550 BCE to guide them through the underworld. See Ancient Egypt.
- “a handkerchief dropped from the hand of God”: “Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord, / A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt” (Walt Whitman, “Song of Myself,” section 6, Leaves of Grass). See American Writers.
- “a light upon the water”: “Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind” (Psalm 104:3). See The Bible and The Sea and Water.

- “the mere flyleaf stuck between two passages or testaments”: In the King James Bible of 1611 the Apocrypha, books such as 2 Esdras that are outside the Hebrew canon, were printed between the Old and New Testaments; Mr. Spitzer, who “was not of this margin, canon, text” but “the apocryphal firefly,” is that leaf between. See The Bible.
    - Holy Writ is a synonym for the Bible.
- “between the patriarch and the cloud or water bird”: “Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground” (Genesis 8:8). See Genesis and The Bible.
- “stuck between the millstone above him and the millstone below him”: “No man shall take the nether or the upper millstone to pledge: for he taketh a man’s life to pledge” (Deuteronomy 24:6), and “Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small” (Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “Retribution,” 1846). See The Bible and American Writers.
- “fleets of nautiluses turning their sails”: “This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign, / Sails the unshadowed main” (Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Chambered Nautilus,” 1858), the shell built “chamber after chamber,” as Young writes here. See American Writers.
- “no minaret which had written him spiral after spiral”: The spiral minaret of the Great Mosque of Samarra in Iraq, the Malwiya, built between 848 and 852, winds upward in a single ramp.
- “no water-mark, no signature, no name”: Keats asked that his grave bear no name, only “Here lies One Whose Name was writ in Water” (Protestant Cemetery, Rome, 1821). See Romantic Poets.
- “His little firefly was his key of gold”: See the firefly lamplighter in the Chapter 48 resources. See Fireflies, Lamps, Candles, and Light, and Keys, Doors, and Locks.
- “the great huntsman passing at the far zenith of the glassy sky”: Orion hunts with his two dogs, Canis Major and Canis Minor; see the frozen constellations in the Chapter 49 resources. See Astronomy and Greek Mythology.
- “those gleaming cells which knew not death or life”: Mr. Spitzer imagines the smallest units of life existing beyond the human definitions of living and dead, not knowing or aware of them. “Perhaps no messages had ever arrived”: they may be cut off from any experience that would mark them as alive or dead in a conscious sense. Life and death may be limited concepts, and existence at a deeper level may transcend them.
    - There is an actual case. Henrietta Lacks, a Black woman treated for cervical cancer at Johns Hopkins in 1951, had cells taken without her knowledge or consent; they became HeLa, the first immortal human cell line and an important source of medical data. Neither she nor her family was compensated, and the family did not learn of the cell line until the 1970s (Rebecca Skloot, The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks, 2010). Its use for medical research and for commercial purposes continues to raise concerns about privacy and patients’ rights; in 2023 her estate settled a lawsuit against a company that had sold the cells. See Society, Class, and Race.

- “like the scarlet pimpernels folding at the first approach of rain”: The scarlet pimpernel closes its flowers when the sky clouds over, so it was called the poor man’s weatherglass. Baroness Orczy took it for the sign of her hidden hero in The Scarlet Pimpernel (1905).
- “sea urchins who knew not whether they lived or were dead”: The sea urchins stand for creatures caught between life, death, and sleep, uncertain of their own condition, and for the mutual ignorance of all beings: even if the urchins know their state, humans cannot know it, nor can the urchins know what humans understand. Much of existence is enveloped in layers of unknowing; “Perhaps all human beings were also mystified, even as Mr. Spitzer was.”
    - It is hard to tell whether a sea urchin is dead or alive, and the red sea urchin may live 200 years. Scientists now hold that humans are not the only beings with the neurological substrates that generate consciousness: “Non-human animals, including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess these neurological substrates” (The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, 2012).
    - Dualism was defended by Descartes who believed that the mind and body were separate and only humans had a mind. Many modern philosophers maintain that the mind is not separate from the body. See Descartes and Dualism.
- “perhaps at that very time she had lost her love”: The phrase conveys Cousin Hannah’s experience of losing the actual love or connection she once had, yet still being defined or constrained by the formal tie that remains: a poignant reflection on the nature of identity, love, and loss in the story. See Cousin Hannah.
    - Hyphenated double surnames began among the British aristocracy as a way to keep a family name and inheritance alive when there was no male heir, and spread to the Victorian upper middle class. In the United States wives took their husbands’ names; the suffragist Lucy Stone kept her own at her marriage in 1855, and the Lucy Stone League, founded by Ruth Hale in 1921, urged women to do the same. Second-wave feminists of the 1960s and 1970s made the hyphenated name a common choice, and states removed barriers to keeping a birth name on passports, bank accounts, and other documents. For the old suffragette captain “the hyphen was all.” (Wikipedia) See Women’s Suffrage.
- “without paying a toll”: See Charon’s fare in the Chapter 46 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “So he had written this nocturne”: The Irish composer John Field published the first nocturnes in 1812, and Chopin made the form his own. Near its end, the chapter turns from this night music to the music no one will hear, and closes on Palestrina. See Music and Composers.
- “and Palestrina should not be more beautiful than the spotted tree frog”: The chapter ends: “and Palestrina should not be more beautiful than the spotted tree frog, shrivelled and small, sleeping in a tree hollow. For he would awaken. But Palestrina awakened not.” Mr. Spitzer’s sympathies go to “musicians whose works would never

be played although the music which passed into oblivion as when the snow fell on the roof or the rain flooded old porches was more beautiful than any which should be heard.” Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c. 1525-1594) was the Italian composer of late Renaissance sacred music, best known for his Masses for the Roman Catholic Church. The tree frog asleep in its hollow will wake in spring. The great composer will not. See Music and Composers.

- Felix Mendelssohn placed him in the pantheon of the greatest musicians, writing, “I always get upset when some praise only Beethoven, others only Palestrina and still others only Mozart or Bach. All four of them, I say, or none at all.” (Wikipedia)

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Ambient

Surrounding.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Apocryphal

Of doubtful truth.

Argosy

A large merchant ship, or a fleet of them.

Attrition

A wearing away by friction.

Bellwether

The lead sheep of a flock, which wears a bell.

Blackamoor

An old term for a Black African or any dark-skinned person, common in European art and in decorative figures of Black servants. It is now considered offensive.

Casket

A small, often ornate box for jewels or valuables. In American usage, also a coffin, so Young’s “casket containing no jewel” carries both meanings.

Cockscomb

The red crest of a rooster; also a jester’s cap, or a garden flower shaped like a crest.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Conformation

The shape and proportions of an animal’s body, especially a horse’s.

Demoniac

Wild and frenzied, as if possessed by a demon.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Dubious

Doubtful.

Effaced

Erased; wiped out.

Emmet

An ant.

Filament

A fine thread or fiber.

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Flagstone

A flat paving stone.

Fluted

Marked with long rounded grooves, like a column.

Gentian

A plant with deep blue trumpet-shaped flowers.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Holy Writ

The Bible; sacred scripture.

Illimitable

Without limits; boundless.

Imperceptibly

So slowly or slightly as to go unnoticed.

Lagoon

A stretch of shallow water separated from the sea by a reef or sandbar.

Larboard

The old word for the left side of a ship.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Moondial

A dial that tells the time by the shadow cast by moonlight.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Nadir

The lowest point.

Nautilus

A sea creature with a spiral shell. The paper nautilus is a small octopus whose female makes a thin, papery shell.

Nocturne

A dreamy piece of music suggesting the night.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Penumbra

The partly shaded outer region of a shadow cast by an opaque object.

Phantasmal

Ghostly; like a phantom or an illusion.

Pinion

A bird’s wing, or the outer part of it.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Presentiment

An intuitive feeling that something is about to happen.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Pulverized

Ground to powder.

Quail

A small, plump ground bird hunted as game.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Seine

To fish with a large hanging net.

Sensorium

The whole of a person’s senses; the seat of sensation in the brain.

Sequester

To set apart or hold in safekeeping.

Sequestered

Set apart; hidden away.

Sequin

A small shining disk sewn on clothing; first the zecchino, a Venetian gold coin.

Sidereal

Of or measured by the stars.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Spurious

False.

Staggy

Like a stag; rangy and long-legged.

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women’s right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women’s Suffrage.

Surrey

A light four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with two seats, often with a fringed canopy on top.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Zenith

The highest point.

Chapter 51

Summary

Puffing along the shore with his mantle growing around him, Mr. Spitzer cannot tell whether he is the conductor lifting his baton, the lamp-lighter, or the oarsman striking light from the waves of darkness. He is the doctor who has lost his patient, the lawyer who has lost his client, lawyer to a starfish, a dead coachman, and the moon in the cloud, and the old postman knocking at every door. He fears being right more than being wrong, removes the stones from a road and puts one back lest he change rivers in their course, and trusts the past more than the future. He signs illegal documents as if they were legal and stamps wills with the wrong seals, once with the seal of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, while Mr. Mouse gnaws his lawsuits and eats his chords. Respecting other people's mirages because he is a mirage himself, he meets a lady whose twirling zodiac umbrella moves time, an old woman who thinks she is a bird cage, deaf music critics who hear every error, two pianists who play in perfect time only when a thousand miles apart, and an old woman who believed she was a reindeer and was found with a golden arrow through her breast. He lives by mourning the death of the deathless one, and he concludes that the dream of life, like that of death, must ever contain the unrealized, else all would be complete.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Cousin Hannah · Joachim Spitzer · Mr. Mouse · Peron Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Music, Sound, and Silence · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · Society, Class, and Race

Symbols: Butterflies and Moths · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Horses and Carriages · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Moon and Stars · Music and Instruments · The Umbrella · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Aristotle · Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Augustine and Christian Theology · Buddhism · Descartes and Dualism · Existentialism · Freud and Jung · Hinduism · Plato and Platonism · Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory · William James and Pragmatism

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Deafness and Sign Language · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · Judaism · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Civil War

Key passages

From the research

- The opening imagery describes Mr. Spitzer's mantle seeming "to grow older as he grew older" and winding "like the shell of mother-of-pearl around his consciousness, unconsciousness," setting a tone of his blurred existence between awareness and oblivion. The moon shining at his back and the sunlight dashing into his "dead face" symbolize this liminal state. His uncertainty about whether he is the conductor, the lamp-lighter, or the oarsman striking waves of darkness conveys his fragmented identity and roles in the cosmic or metaphysical order.
- Mr. Spitzer is depicted as a musician whose music is "ever of the silence flowing under the sound of accidental or incidental music," and as the "spectre dreaming upon the spectre," stressing the ephemeral, elusive quality of his existence and work. The analogy of being a "lawyer for a starfish" or a "lawyer for a dead coachman" or a musician who "struck two chords together with one motion of his dead, jeweled hand" suggests his role as an intermediary between the living and the dead, the real and the unreal.
- The chapter extensively explores the blurring of selfhood, with Mr. Spitzer unable to distinguish between being the subject or object, the key or the lock, the spark or the flame. This is encapsulated in the lines: "He did not know whether he was the trumpeter or the trumpeter's cry, the cry or the echo." The theme that "life had ever been a minority" and the idea that reality might be a dream or illusion, where distinctions between living and dead, real and unreal, are uncertain, pervade the text.
- Mr. Spitzer's existence is described as a product of error, a flaw in creation that "had permitted this creation," with references to a "missing keyboard" or "a string missing in the harp of God," symbolizing cosmic imperfection and his own role as a flawed instrument of fate. The passage about his stamping documents with the seal of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad by mistake, and the consequences of these errors, highlights his confusion and the absurdity of legal and worldly order in this shadowy realm.
- The chapter suggests that all dreamers share "one great dream informing all dreamers and all dreams, one great dreamer dreaming through us," emphasizing the unity and indistinct boundaries of consciousness. The encounter with a woman carrying an umbrella painted with zodiac signs, whose twirling supposedly controls time, symbolizes the fragile and mutable nature of reality and temporality in Mr. Spitzer's world.
- Mr. Spitzer mourns his brother's death, yet the brother is "deathless," and his own life is extended by this mourning. The paradox that "the greatest happiness might come through the sorrow of waiting" and that happiness and death are intertwined is poignantly expressed.

- Various animals and objects are used symbolically: starfish, butterflies, fireflies, moths, dragonflies, snow geese, and reindeer; each representing facets of identity, transformation, illusion, or memory. The old woman who believed she was a reindeer and was found with a golden arrow through her breast dramatizes the merging of identity and myth, fear and fate.
- He is “the doctor who had lost his patient,” (echoes Old Doc from the beginning of the story) “the lawyer who had lost his client,” and the “old postman going his rounds,” a figure lost in time and space, trying to uphold order in a realm of chaos and oblivion.
- The chapter closes on Mr. Spitzer’s ambiguous state, living “by mourning the death of the deathless one,” and his realization that “there was no threshold between world and world,” symbolizing his liminal existence.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “A flaw in the creation had permitted this creation.” How can a flaw be the reason anything exists?
- “He had made of a dead kite-flyer his premise, of a muted bell-ringer his theory, of an old lamp-lighter his love.” What is Mr. Spitzer’s philosophy?
- “His effort to go straight had made him crooked.” Why does every straight road turn circular for him?

Characters

- Mr. Mouse gnaws Mr. Spitzer’s lawsuits and symphonies, and yet “the greatest impresario was the mouse.” Is the mouse his enemy or his collaborator?
- Mr. Spitzer “would remove every stone from a road” and then put a stone back. What does his caution protect?
- The old woman who believed she was a reindeer “was found in bed with a golden arrow driven through her breast.” What does her fate say about illusions that come true?

Connections

- In Chapter 50 Mr. Spitzer feared “that one should be one.” Here he “might have dropped dead if he had discovered… that his brother lived.” Why is success what he fears?
- The opium lady travels the world by night with a black coachman whose face she has never seen. Where have the coachman and the night journeys appeared before?
- Mr. Spitzer stamps wills with the seal of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad and imagines a world of all trains that have passed away. How do trains and stations carry the dead

through the novel?

Reflection

- “In most lives, three minutes of happiness seemed perhaps all there might be.” Is that too little, or enough?
- “He had learned to respect other people’s mirages.” Should one?
- “For the dream of life, even like that of death, must ever contain within it an element of the unrealized.” Is what remains unrealized a loss?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- A liminal figure: Neither fully alive nor dead, trapped between worlds.
- A dreamer and a witness: He records wills and testaments but struggles to understand his own life and identity.
- A solitary figure: Despite his loneliness, he interacts with many others’ illusions and dreams.
- A man of paradox: His existence is filled with contradictions: he lives by dying, acts as a lawyer for the dead, and is a musician who cannot play.

Mr. Mouse

- Mr. Mouse is presented as a figure who actively disrupts order and control, particularly in relation to Mr. Spitzer. He gnaws on legal documents, musical manuscripts, and other important papers in Mr. Spitzer’s possession. This suggests that Mr. Mouse embodies a force that undermines the very foundations of Mr. Spitzer’s world: law, art, and history.
- The mouse’s actions are described in chaotic terms: “jumbling symphonies,” “eating all his chords,” and “torn his music to ribbons.” This reinforces the idea that Mr. Mouse represents a force of disorder and chaos that is actively working to dismantle Mr. Spitzer’s carefully constructed world.
- Despite his destructive tendencies, Mr. Mouse is also portrayed as a kind of “impresario.” He shakes the Great Dipper of stars, pouring out new and accidental constellations. This suggests that Mr. Mouse is not simply a destructive force, but also a creative one, capable of generating new and unexpected forms of order.
- This duality of destruction and creation is a key aspect of Mr. Mouse’s character. He tears down the old, but in doing so, he makes way for the new. He is a force of change, even if that change is initially disruptive.
- It is possible to interpret Mr. Mouse as an aspect of Mr. Spitzer’s own psyche. The mouse’s actions could be seen as a manifestation of Mr. Spitzer’s subconscious

desires or fears. The fact that Mr. Spitzer “opposed to Mr. Mouse’s will his will” suggests an internal conflict between order and chaos within Mr. Spitzer himself.
- The description of Mr. Mouse sleeping on a bed made of scraps of old lawsuits and wearing the papers lining Mr. Spitzer’s hat further supports the idea that Mr. Mouse is closely connected to Mr. Spitzer’s inner world.

Research: Themes

Illusion and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- Mr. Spitzer exists in a liminal state where reality and illusion blur. The text repeatedly questions what is real and what is false, suggesting that all experiences might be dreamlike or illusory.
- The motif of mirrors, shadows, and reflections emphasizes the uncertainty of identity and perception.
- The idea that life and death, subject and object, love and loss are intertwined illusions challenges the reader to reconsider fixed realities.

Life, Death, and Immortality

See: Death and Mortality

- The chapter meditates on death not as an end but as a continuation or transformation, death and life flow into each other.
- Mr. Spitzer acts as a lawyer or doctor to the dead, a figure who navigates the borderland between the living and the dead, the conscious and unconscious.
- His existence is marked by paradoxes: he is dead yet alive, the dreamer and the dreamed, the musician and the silent instrument.

Identity and Multiplicity

See: Identity and the Self

- Mr. Spitzer is described as a man of many parts, many identities, reflecting a fragmented self that cannot be pinned down to a single essence.
- There are references to his “dead twin,” suggesting a duality or multiplicity of selves.
- His confusion over who he is (lawyer, doctor, musician, lamp-lighter) which symbolizes the fluidity and elusiveness of identity.

The Role of the Lawyer and the Musician

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Mr. Spitzer’s profession as a lawyer handling wills and testaments serves as a metaphor for dealing with endings, legacies, and the passage from life to death.
- He is also a musician, but one whose music is silent, unplayed, or forgotten, symbolizing unrealized potential and the fragmentation of harmony in life.
- The blending of these roles points to the complex interplay between order (law) and chaos (music, dreams).

The Cosmos and Nature as Metaphor

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- The imagery of stars, moons, seas, waves, and skies recurs throughout, symbolizing the vastness and mystery of existence, and Mr. Spitzer’s small but luminous place within it.
- Natural elements like sand, shells, fireflies, and snowflakes are used to reflect fragility, ephemerality, and the beauty of fleeting moments.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Mantle and Cape

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Mr. Spitzer’s mantle or cape is described as growing with him, winding like mother-of-pearl around his consciousness and unconsciousness, symbolizing the weight of existence and the intertwining of life and death.

The Baton / Lamp-lighter’s Pole

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light · Music and Instruments

- The baton he lifts symbolizes control and orchestration, but he doubts whether he is a conductor or merely a lamp-lighter or oarsman, indicating his ambivalence about his role in the universe.

The Star / Moon / Light

See: Moon and Stars · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Light and celestial bodies symbolize knowledge, life, and death. Mr. Spitzer is associated with a “supernumerary star,” a star beyond the normal count, symbolizing his unique, marginal existence.

The Mouse

- The mouse gnawing on legal and musical papers represents decay, destruction, and the futility of human endeavors against time and oblivion.

The Umbrella with Zodiac Signs

See: The Umbrella

- Represents fate, time, and cosmic cycles, as well as the interconnectedness of personal destiny with universal forces.

Research: Resources

- “the hounds of Nimrod barking through clouds”: “He was a mighty hunter before the LORD” (Genesis 10:9). A nimrod is now a skillful hunter, or, in later American slang, an inept person. The huntsman of the stars is Orion; see the Chapter 49 resources. See The Bible and Astronomy.
- “a restless suffrage rider”: Cousin Hannah, “who had always mistaken him for another.” See Cousin Hannah.
- “like the sweepings of the arms of the great semaphores”: A semaphore is an apparatus that sends visual signals over distance with flags or mechanical arms, used at sea and on railways; Claude Chappe’s semaphore towers carried messages across France from 1794.
- “lawyer for a dead coachman”: See The Black Coachman, and the fringe-topped surrey in the Chapter 49 resources. See The Black Coachman.
- “this old postman going his rounds through all inclemencies”: “Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds,” carved on the New York General Post Office in 1914, adapts Herodotus on the Persian mounted couriers (Histories 8.98).
- “the withering of the flower before the blooming of the flower”: Effect before cause, like the White Queen’s messenger punished before the crime; see the Chapter 48 resources. See Alice in Wonderland.
- “times when bells rang under water”: Dunwich, once a great port on the Suffolk coast, was swallowed by the sea church by church, and legend says its bells can still be heard ringing beneath the waves.
- “the gambler had become the celestial musician”: The gambler is Peron and the musician Joachim; see Peron Spitzer. See Peron Spitzer.
- “he would remove every stone from a road for fear the next wayfarer might be hurt”: Ganesha is the most popular and well known Hindu deity who is the Remover of Obstacles. There are many quotes from Moliere to Zen sayings that remind people that overcoming obstacles is part of life. See Hinduism.
- “he might change rivers in their course”: Mr. Spitzer’s fear is the butterfly effect of chaos theory: small, subtle causes yielding large, unpredictable consequences in a complex, interwoven reality. Chaos theory studies systems, like weather or ecosystems, so sensitive to their starting conditions that a tiny change can lead to vastly different outcomes, though underlying patterns, feedback loops, and self-

organization remain (Wikipedia). The meteorologist Edward Lorenz named the effect in a 1972 talk, “Predictability: Does the Flap of a Butterfly’s Wings in Brazil Set Off a Tornado in Texas?” Ray Bradbury had already imagined it in “A Sound of Thunder” (1952), where a time traveler steps on a butterfly and changes history. “For the chaos had its pattern.” See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory and Order, Chaos, and Discipline.

- “ferried by a Charon of sea shells”: Charon is the ferryman of Hades in Greek mythology; he returns later in the chapter, reaching “with his oar upon the darkening waters.” See Charon in the Chapter 46 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “the prisms of Mr. Chandelier”: See Mr. Chandelier. See Mr. Chandelier.
- “more hieroglyphs to the alphabet of reality”: Egyptian hieroglyphs could not be read until Jean-François Champollion deciphered them from the Rosetta Stone in 1822. See Ancient Egypt.
- “Was life a legal fiction”: A legal fiction is something the law assumes to be true for its purposes though it may not be literally true. Mr. Spitzer asks whether life itself is such a fiction, taken on faith but unprovable either way. The imaginary house with its ivory porches no waves should ever reach is a fragile, beautiful, perhaps illusory construct, complete-seeming but isolated and fading, “its lights already lost.” What seems real and substantial may be a delicate illusion that cannot withstand change and mortality. See Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.
- “scattering clouds of ink like the ink of the squid”: Squid and octopus release ink in blobs held together by mucus, pseudomorphs, that keep roughly the shape of the animal and draw a predator’s attack while the animal escapes.
- “scattering sand over his paper from a ram’s horn”: Before blotting paper came into wide use in the nineteenth century, writers dried wet ink by sprinkling sand from a pounce pot or sander.
- “great windhovers sleeping on the wing”: The windhover is the kestrel, which hangs on the wind; “I caught this morning morning’s minion, kingdom of daylight’s dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon” (Gerard Manley Hopkins, “The Windhover,” written 1877, published 1918). See Hopkins in the Chapter 47 resources.
- “glimmering hedgerow of stars all must jump”: See the steeplechase in the Chapter 46 resources. See Horses and Carriages.
- “some old lazar with his tinkling bell”: Lepers in the Middle Ages had to warn of their approach with a bell or clapper; lazar comes from the beggar Lazarus, “full of sores” (Luke 16:20). See The Bible.
- “the very king of castaways wearing a paper crown”: “I was lord of the whole manor; or if I pleased, I might call myself king or emperor over the whole country which I had possession of” (Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, 1719).
- “an almost weightless grain of musk”: Musk is so lasting a scent that the Empress Josephine’s rooms at Malmaison were said to smell of it long after her death.

- “a resurrecting groundhog who had not noticed the presence of his shadow”: By folk belief, if the groundhog sees his shadow on February 2 there will be six more weeks of winter, and if he does not, an early spring; the Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, Groundhog Day began in 1887.
- “his circular eye which seemed to turn in his forehead”: The third-eye is a mystical and esoteric concept of a speculative invisible eye in the middle of the forehead which has perception beyond ordinary sight. In Hindu tradition it is the ajna chakra between the brows, and the third eye of Shiva burns with the fire of destruction. See Hinduism.
- “He listened with the cherub’s ear and heard an elfin horn”: “O sweet and far from cliff and scar / The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!” (Alfred Tennyson, “The splendour falls,” The Princess, 1850).
- “a dolphin’s skin should have been his clothing”: See Byron’s dying dolphin in the Chapter 50 resources. See Romantic Poets.
- “the coal packs in the Milky Way”: The Coalsack is a dark nebula in the Southern Cross, a cloud of dust that blots out the stars behind it; there are smaller dark lanes all along the Milky Way. See Astronomy.
- “Did not the live coal burn upon his lips”: “Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand… And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away” (Isaiah 6:6-7). See The Bible.
- “Who knew what was real?”: Descartes in Meditation I is skeptical of knowledge. If a person cannot know if they are dreaming when they have an experience then a person may not have knowledge of the physical world. The Wisdom Paradox is the more a person learns the more he is exposed to what he does not know. In the philosophy of consciousness there are generally two camps: dualism (the conscious mind or conscious mental state is non-physical in some sense) and materialism (the mind is the brain and is caused by neural activity). “I see so manifestly that there are no certain indications by which we may clearly distinguish wakefulness from sleep” (René Descartes, Meditations on First Philosophy, Meditation I, 1641, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane, 1911). See Descartes and Dualism.
    - Mysterianism, named by Owen Flanagan in 1991 and argued by Colin McGinn, holds that the human mind may be too limited to solve the mind-body problem, since the cognitive capabilities of all organisms are limited by biology. William James found this liberating in “Is Life Worth Living?” (1895), where a dog in a laboratory cannot grasp the purposes of the men around it, and wrote, “I believe rather that we stand in much the same relation to the whole of the universe as our canine and feline pets do to the whole of human life” (Pragmatism, 1907, lecture 8). See William James and Pragmatism.
- “balls of ethereal gold which seem to hang around the masts”: St. Elmo’s fire; see corpo santo in the Chapter 47 resources.
- “the glassy cricket singing in the chimney fire”: Charles Dickens’s The Cricket on the Hearth (1845) is a fairy tale of a household guarded by the cricket chirping by the fire.

- “Man might be the finest musician”: A person may have great gifts, but without connection, engagement, or the response of others those gifts fall silent, like an instrument no one plays, “an empty wooden box like the coffin of music strung with a few cat-gut strings.” Life gains meaning through being expressed, “even if played upon only by the fingers of the wind.” See Music and Instruments.
- “the trumpeter or the trumpeter’s cry”: “O body swayed to music, O brightening glance, / How can we know the dancer from the dance?” (W. B. Yeats, “Among School Children,” 1928).
- “He had made of a dead kite-flyer his premise”: These may refer to Ben Franklin, Boethius, and Diogenes. The muted bell-ringer may also be Quasimodo, the deaf bell-ringer of Victor Hugo’s The Hunchback of Notre-Dame (1831).
    - Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) was an American polymath: printer, writer, scientist, inventor, statesman, and diplomat, one of the Founding Fathers, a drafter and signer of the Declaration of Independence, and the first postmaster general. His kite experiment of 1752 showed that lightning is electricity, and Anne Robert Jacques Turgot said of him, “Eripuit fulmen cœlo, mox sceptra tyrannis” (“He snatched lightning from the sky and the scepter from tyrants”). At some points in his life he owned slaves and ran “for sale” ads for slaves in his newspaper, but by the late 1750s he began arguing against slavery, became an active abolitionist, and promoted the education and integration of African Americans. He invented the lightning rod, bifocals, the glass harmonica, and the Franklin stove. (Wikipedia)
    - The Ben Franklin effect is the finding that people like someone more after doing him a favor, explained by cognitive dissonance. Franklin quoted an “old maxim” in his autobiography: “He that has once done you a kindness will be more ready to do you another, than he whom you yourself have obliged,” and told how he won over a rival legislator by borrowing a rare book from him. (Wikipedia)
    - Boethius (about 477-524) was a Roman senator, consul, and philosopher who sought to translate Plato and Aristotle into Latin; largely through his translations the works of Aristotle survived. His works on arithmetic, geometry, and music, with astronomy, formed the quadrivium, the core of the medieval liberal arts, in which music was the mathematical study of harmony, ratio, and proportion rather than performance. Imprisoned by Theodoric for defending a fellow consul against charges of conspiracy, he wrote On the Consolation of Philosophy, a treatise on fortune and death, before he was tortured and executed in 524. (Wikipedia) See Aristotle.
    - Diogenes the Cynic (about 412-323 BCE) rejected wealth and convention, lived in a large jar, called himself “a citizen of the world,” and carried a lit lantern in daylight, saying he was looking for a man (Diogenes Laertius 6.41). He is the old lamp-lighter. (Wikipedia) See Lamps, Candles, and Light.
- “if reality had been a horse”: Mr. Spitzer thinks that if reality was a horse or a ship he would only know one small part of the thing. This is similar to the Blind Men and the Elephant parable whose moral is that humans have a tendency to claim absolute truth

based on their limited, subjective experience and they ignore others' limited, subjective experiences which may be equally true. The parable is told in the Buddhist Udana (6.4) and in John Godfrey Saxe's poem "The Blind Men and the Elephant" (1872). See Buddhism and Horses and Carriages.

- "Had he given birth to his dead twin": See Peron Spitzer. See Peron Spitzer and Twins and Doubles.
- "great Apennines of waves": See the Apennines in the Chapter 33 resources.
- "all riding for the Holy Grail": See the Holy Grail in the Chapter 47 resources.
- "Perhaps he was twelve cloaks": Mr. Spitzer cannot define himself; he shifts between roles and images. Twelve cloaks suggest concealment, disguise, and many layers of identity, the number perhaps recalling the twelve apostles or the twelve signs of the zodiac. The islands of flowers in the flood are beauty and fragility amid chaos, isolated havens like the pockets of meaning he makes in a world of flux. The stalled sail is stagnation, the sail breaking into flame sudden and violent change. The ram's horn, the shofar, is a call to awakening, remembrance, and the divine, and "metamorphosed" makes him not a fixed entity but a being always changing. See Judaism.
- "a man of many gates, gates of ivory, gates of gold": "There are two gates through which these unsubstantial fancies proceed; the one is of horn, and the other ivory. Those that come through the gate of ivory are fatuous, but those from the gate of horn mean something to those that see them" (Homer, Odyssey 19, trans. Samuel Butler, 1900). See Homer's Epics and Dreams and Imagination.
- "he trusted the past more than he trusted the future": Mr. Spitzer's uncertainty about identity, reality, and knowledge fits Popper's view that knowledge is provisional: "Perhaps all definitions failed where each was each and each was the other." He is "a man of many parts, many branches, a man of many faded horizons," an identity that defies simple categorization, as for Popper knowledge is never complete. His trust of the past comes from uncertainty about the present and future rather than from belief in the past's truth, and Popper would caution against blindly accepting any authority, including the authority of the past. He knows he may be "the decoy and not the man," "deceived by many facades," his perceptions unreliable, and he has found "the impossibility of committing suicide, for he had died merely by living, by continuing from moment to moment." In the book, Open Society, Popper warned of the dangers of idealizing the past and assuming there is some perfect past that society can return to and make everything better. For example, the idea that the 1950s were perfect and that society could just go back to that time. Or the Dark Enlightenment bros wanting to go back even further to The Gilded Age and its perceived "perfection."
    - Sir Karl Popper (1902-1994) was an Austrian-British philosopher of science who rejected the classical inductivist view of the scientific method in favor of empirical falsification: a theory in the empirical sciences can never be proven, but it can be falsified, and should be scrutinized with decisive experiments. Scientific progress is conjecture and refutation, bold guesses tested by attempts to disprove them; objective knowledge exists, but access to it is always provisional; and no number of

confirming instances can make an induction certain. He defended liberal democracy and the open society, which embraces critical thinking, tolerance, and the willingness to challenge established ideas, and opposed totalitarianism, nationalism, and fascism (The Open Society and Its Enemies, 1945). (Wikipedia)

  - Historicism is the belief that history unfolds according to fixed laws toward a predetermined end. Popper argued that historicists mistake historical trends for laws; that since the growth of knowledge shapes history and future discoveries cannot be predicted, the future course of history cannot be predicted; that history is unique and non-repetitive; and that historicism is politically dangerous, underpinning totalitarian ideologies and utopian social engineering that disregard individual freedom (The Poverty of Historicism, 1957). (Wikipedia)

- “Two tenants wrangled in an empty house”: Mr. Spitzer is in constant conflict with himself: the empty house is the body, and the wrangling tenants, body and soul, suggest no fixed self or objective truth about who he is. He would sue for “a false spring,” an illusion not to be trusted, and he is caught “between two worlds, between two lives, between two deaths.” Gorgias’s three claims run through the passage: he cannot know himself; the drifting mirrors show that what could be known could not be communicated; he mixes up greetings and farewells. “He had already gone, and yet he remained,” the paradox of existence in a world where nothing truly exists, and his confusing his conscience with his consciousness shows a world without objective value, where accuracy becomes irrelevant.
  - Gorgias (about 483-376 BCE) was a Greek sophist and rhetorician from Leontinoi in Sicily. W. K. C. Guthrie writes that like other sophists he traveled from city to city, giving public exhibitions at Olympia and Delphi and charging fees for his instruction, and that “a special feature of his displays was to ask miscellaneous questions from the audience and give impromptu replies” (A History of Greek Philosophy, vol. 3, 1969). He has been called “Gorgias the Nihilist,” though how well the epithet fits is disputed, and he carried rhetoric from Sicily to Athens. (Wikipedia)
  - In his On Non-Existence, as Sextus Empiricus reports it (Against the Logicians 1.65-87), Gorgias argued that nothing exists; that if something did exist, it could not be known; and that if something could be known, it could not be communicated.
- “the great planetary wheel turning like a ferris wheel”: George Ferris built the first Ferris wheel for the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893. Fortune’s wheel is older: in Boethius, Fortune says, “I turn the wheel that spins. I delight to see the high come down and the low ascend” (The Consolation of Philosophy 2.2, trans. W. V. Cooper, 1902). See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “A flaw in the creation had permitted this creation”: In the Kabbalah of Isaac Luria (sixteenth century), the vessels that held God’s light shattered at the creation, the shevirat ha-kelim, the breaking of the vessels, so that the world was made through a break. Mr. Spitzer’s errors “had never evolved from an original sin,” Augustine’s doctrine of the sin inherited from Adam. See Judaism and Augustine and Christian Theology.

- “a golden-footed compass point moving through a cloud”: “He took the golden compasses, prepared / In God’s eternal store, to circumscribe / This universe” (John Milton, Paradise Lost 7.225-227), the figure William Blake drew in The Ancient of Days (1794).
- “a bridge made of the wings of birds”: In the Chinese legend of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl, the lovers are parted by the Milky Way and may meet once a year, on the seventh night of the seventh month, on a bridge made of magpies’ wings.
- “He had learned to respect other people’s mirages”: Because he exists only as a mirage himself, Mr. Spitzer has learned to respect the illusions of others, accepting that each person constructs a reality that is deeply personal and meaningful. Yet he dreams of “that blind Eros” for whom there is no time and no face of love, a love beyond the individual and beyond life and death, relying on no recognition of subject or object. The only light he sees by shines “through his finger-tips lighting clouds and fogs,” insight from an intuitive, almost mystical source, turning “old trees to trees of fire… as if a star had passed where there was no star.” The shore beyond is “bordered by no sea,” inviting and forbidding, a place of catastrophe, “whether it was death or love. And perhaps they could not be divided.”
    - Eros is a concept in ancient Greek philosophy referring to sensual or passionate love. It has been used in philosophy and psychology as an equivalent to life energy. “Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind; / And therefore is wing’d Cupid painted blind” (A Midsummer Night’s Dream 1.1). See Greek Mythology and Shakespeare.
- “Never should he see his brother’s face”: Mr. Spitzer can see his brother only “through all the mazed images of the dead, through all the differences.” He lives through death no more miraculously than “some crazy old gambler who had thrown his last dice,” and he tries “to go legal,” as biased as “a left-handed portrait painter in a world of right-handed portrait painters.” “His effort to go straight had made him crooked,” and his way is “finally circular.” He practices only “in the courts which were paved with the moonstones of lost cases under a firmament of lost stars,” and he prefers “the seething silence to the sound, preferring mystery to exposure, preferring a cloak to nakedness.” See Peron Spitzer and Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “trying to practice law where there was no law and no lawyer”: The rule of law holds that everyone, the government included, is accountable to laws that are publicly known, equally enforced, and independently judged: “no one is above the law.” Mr. Spitzer practices where there is no law at all. See Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.
- “a left-handed portrait painter”: Leonardo da Vinci was left-handed, and left-handedness was long suspect: the Latin for left is sinister.
- “old lawsuits for heart’s balm”: Heart balm suits, for breach of promise to marry or alienation of affections, let a jilted or betrayed lover sue for damages; Indiana abolished them in 1935, and many states followed.
- “the lily’s spittle”: The froth on plant stems, cuckoo spit, is made by the young of the spittlebug, which hides inside it.

- “perhaps had walked off the roof like his poor brother”: Here Peron walked off the roof of the building and not through the window as earlier, which brings to mind the 1929 stock market crash and the stories of investors and brokers jumping from buildings. The wave of such suicides is largely an urban myth, amplified by sensational newspapers and the dark humor of the time; John Kenneth Galbraith called it a legend (The Great Crash, 1929, 1955). There were suicides: a brokerage firm clerk and a member of the New York Mercantile Exchange jumped to their deaths in the financial district in the weeks after the crash, others died by gas, gun, or poison, and the suicide rate rose as the Depression deepened, from 17.0 per 100,000 people in 1929 to 21.3 in 1932. Winston Churchill, in New York at the time, wrote of a man who fell from a building near his hotel (Wikipedia). Although Miss MacIntosh pays a visit to Wall Street and invests “imaginary money,” it is not mentioned if Peron or Joachim invested in Wall Street. See Suicide in History and Literature and Peron Spitzer.
- “that darkened glass through which he might view his own eclipse”: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12). Eclipses were watched through smoked or darkened glass. See The Bible.
- “drawers of his dead brother’s butterfly correspondence”: See Peron’s butterflies in the Chapter 29 resources. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “perhaps a great President’s seal to indicate a buried nation”: The President’s seal is used to mark correspondence from the President to Congress and is a symbol of the presidency itself.
    - President Monroe was the fifth president of the United States.
    - President Garfield was the twentieth president of the United States. He was shot in July 1881 and died that September.
    - The Grand Union Army may refer to the Grand Army of the Republic which is a fraternal organization composed of veterans of the Union Army, Navy and Marines who served in the American Civil War. See The Civil War.
    - A seal of the New England Lighthouse Underwriters, there is no reference for this specific company. An underwriter is a person or company that underwrites an insurance risk.
    - Boston Life and Trust, there is no reference to this specific company. It is most likely a life insurance and underwriter type of company.
    - A scratch sheet is a racing sheet listing the day’s entries and the horses scratched from them.
    - Society for the Protection of Mariners’ Widows, there is no reference to this specific organization, however, there are several organizations still in existence today that financially support seafarers, fishermen and their dependents.
    - A hook and ladder company is a fire company whose truck carries ladders and hooks; a Hook and Ladder Society would be a firemen’s benevolent society.
    - Old Lamp-lighters’ Annuities was most likely an organization that supported lamplighters when it was a profession.

- “drank the waters of nepenthe”: Nepenthe is a drug described in Homer’s Odyssey as banishing grief: Helen drugs the wine “with an herb that banishes all care, sorrow, and ill humour” (Odyssey 4, trans. Samuel Butler, 1900). A stirrup cup is a last drink taken in the saddle before riding off. See Homer’s Epics.
- “the seal of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad”: Baltimore and Ohio Railroad was the first common carrier railroad and the oldest railroad in the United States. Chartered in 1827, it merged into the Chessie System in 1972 and into CSX in 1987, so it has since become extinct, as Mr. Spitzer half expected.
- “passenger pigeons who were already of another world”: See Martha, the last passenger pigeon, in the Chapter 49 resources. See Martha the Passenger Pigeon.
- “The old waiter at the oyster bar”: Boston’s Union Oyster House, serving oysters since 1826, is the city’s oldest restaurant.
- “some old, dreaming tortoise with the stars upon his back”: In Hindu myth Vishnu as the tortoise Kurma bears the world on his back, and for the Lenape and other peoples North America is Turtle Island, the earth on a great turtle’s back. See Hinduism.
- “when he was crossing Beacon Hill”: Beacon Hill is a historic neighborhood in Boston, Massachusetts, and the location of the Massachusetts State House; “Beacon Hill” stands for the state government much as Capitol Hill does in Washington. Federal-style rowhouses, narrow streets, and brick sidewalks run through it, and it is one of the more desirable and expensive neighborhoods in Boston. (Wikipedia)
- “the crab and the bull and the ram and the goat”: There are 12 Zodiac signs but Young lists only 8: Cancer, Taurus, Aries, Capricorn, Gemini, Scorpio, Aquarius, and Virgo. The missing four are the lion, the scales, the archer, and the fishes, and Mr. Spitzer asks, “but where was his firefly, and where was his mouse?” See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica and The Umbrella.
- “by mental telepathy”: J. B. Rhine’s card-guessing experiments at Duke University made telepathy a subject of laboratory study (Extra-Sensory Perception, 1934).
- “two pianos in the silence”: John Cage’s 4′33″ (1952), first played by the pianist David Tudor, is four minutes and thirty-three seconds in which the performer plays nothing, so that the music is the sound of the room. See Music and Composers.
- “like Gabriel blowing his horn”: The Bible says “the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised” (1 Corinthians 15:52) but does not name the trumpeter; Gabriel’s horn is later tradition. See The Bible.
- “His head roared, and his eyes were blurred by visions”: This paragraph references two philosophies.
    - Idealism: The paragraph suggests that reality is a construct of the mind. Mr. Spitzer’s “increasing oblivion as to the distinctions between one individual and another” indicates a blurring of the lines between separate entities, hinting at a unified consciousness or a singular underlying reality. The mention of stripping away “dreams, errors, masks of reality” to reveal a singular “night” implies that individual perceptions obscure a deeper, more fundamental truth.

    - Existentialism: The paragraph touches upon themes of mortality, the subjective experience of time, and the search for meaning. Mr. Spitzer reflects on the fading boundary between life and death, the retrospective understanding of the heart, and the possibility of moving from death to life. These reflections suggest an awareness of the fleeting nature of existence and the individual's struggle to find purpose in a world seemingly devoid of inherent meaning. The questions posed, such as "why should the second journey seem longer than the first?" highlight the subjective and often paradoxical nature of human experience. See Existentialism.
- "the squawking of a fire bird": Igor Stravinsky's ballet The Firebird (1910) is the tale of a magical glowing bird of Russian folklore. See Music and Composers.
- "the sky was filled with mock moons": Mock moons, paraselenae, are bright spots on either side of the moon made by ice crystals in high clouds. See Astronomy.
- "had even tipped his hat surreptitiously to a stranger where there was no one": "Yesterday, upon the stair, / I met a man who wasn't there" (Hughes Mearns, "Antigonish," written 1899). See American Writers.
- "had joined a majority": To join the majority is to die, after the Latin abiit ad plures, "he has gone to the many" (Petronius, Satyricon 42).
- "there was only Mr. Spitzer coming with his knock": There is "nothing dependable." Everything repeats and doubles before Mr. Spitzer's eyes, and the boundary between life and death dissolves: he is "already dead or was of two worlds," perhaps not even "this visitor the dying saw," and there is "no threshold between world and world." "We were all transmuted while we lived": change is inherent to existence, regardless of death. Another world might be "this world which was itself these phantoms and these dreams dreaming themselves," a form of idealism, and "only one great heartbeat sounding through all of silence" suggests a monistic unity, torn by "the silks of the universe being torn in two and many splittings."
- "His cape had gonged": The passing bell was rung to mark a death; see Donne's "for whom the bell tolls" in the Chapter 49 resources.
- "The copestone was missing like the arch of the sky": "The stone which the builders refused is become the head stone of the corner" (Psalm 118:22). See The Bible.
- "a mandarin with a long cue": The queue was forced on Han Chinese men by the Manchu Qing rulers in 1645 on pain of death, and Western caricature later made it a racist emblem of the Chinese. See Society, Class, and Race.
- "the silks of the universe being torn in two": "And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom" (Matthew 27:51). See The Bible.
- "We were all transmuted while we lived": "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). See The Bible.
- "Seldom did he meet with anyone who did not suffer from some form of complex illusion beyond necessity": Most people Mr. Spitzer meets suffer "some form of complex illusion beyond necessity": the old woman who believes she is a bird cage,

the piano-tuner declaring foreheads “hollow.” Blindness and deafness become metaphors for the limits of perception: the blind portrait painter, the blind war veteran in the galleries of Europe, the deaf music critics who hear every error without hearing a note, judgment resting on something other than the senses. “One great dream informing all dreamers and all dreams” recalls a collective unconscious or universal mind, or Plato’s Form of the Good, the source all strive toward behind the shadows of sense. Happiness is fleeting as a snowflake; “three minutes of happiness seemed perhaps all there might be,” and “the greatest happiness might come through the sorrow of waiting, of postponement.” The passage holds the absurdity of existence and, through Mr. Spitzer’s work for the dead, the responsibility of making sense of their lives. See Plato and Platonism, Freud and Jung, and Deafness and Sign Language.

- “tapping every forehead with his tuning fork”: “We are the hollow men / We are the stuffed men” (T. S. Eliot, “The Hollow Men,” 1925).
- “He had once known a blind war veteran”: The veteran was real: “actually I met a World War II veteran in the hotel lobby in Rome with his seeing eye dog, and he was having a marvelous time doing the art galleries of Europe. He listened to the lectures. He heard the footsteps upon stone” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Joachim Spitzer.
- “What Mona Lisa had he seen”: The Mona Lisa was stolen from the Louvre in August 1911 and recovered in Florence in December 1913.
- “the most famous music critics were the deaf”: Beethoven was nearly deaf when his Ninth Symphony was first played in 1824, and he had to be turned around to see the applause. See Music and Composers and Deafness and Sign Language.
- “had travelled with a black coachman”: See The Black Coachman and the opium lady’s night travels in the Chapter 33 resources. See Catherine Cartwheel and The Black Coachman.
- “she would never be married until she married the emperor of China”: The last emperor of China, Puyi, abdicated as a child in 1912.
- “what infinite paradoxes there were in the lidded or the lidless box”: The box, lidded or lidless, holds the contradictions of existence: the lidded box closed, limited, secretive; the lidless box open but vulnerable and uncertain. Things contained and hidden, truths revealed and concealed, presence and absence, life and death are intertwined in ways that defy simple resolution, and Mr. Spitzer is caught in these paradoxes as he tries to reconcile his fragmented identity.
    - The lidded box may recall Schrödinger’s cat, Erwin Schrödinger’s 1935 thought experiment: a cat sealed in a box with a device that has a 50 percent chance of releasing poison is, by the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics, both alive and dead until the box is opened and observed. Schrödinger meant it to show the absurdity of applying quantum superposition to everyday objects. (Wikipedia) See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory.
    - Eugene Wigner imagined in 1961 a friend inside a laboratory who sees a measurement while Wigner, outside, must treat friend and laboratory as hovering in

a blur of possible states, so that the two seem to occupy distinct realities. In 2019 physicists tested a version with entangled photons and found that two observers could hold irreconcilable records of the same event (Massimiliano Proietti and others, “Experimental test of local observer independence,” Science Advances, 2019). QBism, developed by Christopher Fuchs and others from the early 2000s, holds that each person’s quantum states are personal beliefs built from his own interactions with the world, and the shared reality emerges from those collisions. In perception, a 2022 study found that what is seen at any moment blends with what was seen over the previous fifteen seconds or so (Mauro Manassi and David Whitney, Science Advances, 2022). See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory.

- “most believed she was its father, particularly as the antlers had sprouted from her brow”: Reindeer are the only deer in which the females also grow antlers, so the antlers prove nothing about the father.
- “Most especially she had feared a man in a red coat”: English fox hunters ride in red coats, called hunting pink.
- “a golden arrow driven through her breast”: Artemis, the huntress, is “of the golden arrows” in Homer, and when Actaeon saw her bathing she turned him into a stag and his own hounds tore him apart (Ovid, Metamorphoses 3). See Greek Mythology.
- “It was not the arrow of Cupid”: See Cupid’s gold and lead arrows in the Chapter 48 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “an old man who had been cuckolded”: The cuckold was said to grow horns, so the antlers on her brow are the cuckold’s horns.
- “He feared the naked valet who had clothed him”: The “naked valet” and the “mad couturier” who clothes him “with the colors of a dream” are outside forces shaping the perception of self and world, as in Plato’s cave, and Thomas Carlyle’s philosophy of clothes in Sartor Resartus (1833-1834) makes the body and the world garments of the spirit. “For the dream of life, even like that of death, must ever contain within it an element of the unrealized, the unrealizable—else all would be complete”: imperfection and the unattainable are part of existence, as existentialist thought holds. Mr. Spitzer fears eviction from the womb, the “citadel” where he heard “the beating of another heart above his heart,” and birth into a world where he will miss the smell of the rose, and the mother who is “a bearded man armored” unsettles fixed ideas of gender. The old jockey who dies of shock when his dream proves real shows the power of the unconscious, as in Freud. “We lived by an imperfect concatenation” echoes the Buddhist teaching of impermanence and the illusory self. See Freud and Jung, Buddhism, and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Alderman

A member of a city council.

Amphora

A tall two-handled jar of ancient Greece and Rome.

Arcana

Secrets; mysteries known only to the initiated.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Bole

The trunk of a tree.

Calker

Also caulker. A worker who seals the seams of a wooden ship to make it watertight.

Carousel

A merry-go-round. Earlier, a tournament in which horsemen performed exercises and displays.

Casket

A small, often ornate box for jewels or valuables. In American usage, also a coffin, so Young's "casket containing no jewel" carries both meanings.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Chameleon

A lizard that can change the color of its skin.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Chattels

Movable possessions.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chivalry

The code of the medieval knight; courtesy and protection shown by a man toward a woman.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Concatenation

A linked series.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Congealed

Thickened or stiffened, as with cold.

Contrariety

Opposition; contrariness.

Copestone

The top stone of a wall or building; the crowning touch.

Counterpane

A bedspread.

Couturier

A designer and maker of fine clothes for women.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Defunct

No longer living or in existence.

Demented

Out of one’s mind.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Empearled

Adorned with pearls, or having a pearly sheen.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Evanescent

Quickly fading or vanishing.

Expiration

A last breath; death.

Extricate

To free from a trap or difficulty.

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Fitful

Starting and stopping; irregular.

Fluted

Marked with long rounded grooves, like a column.

Gauze

A thin, transparent fabric.

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Impresario

The manager of an opera or concert company.

Inarticulate

Unable to express oneself clearly.

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Incandescence

The giving off of light by something heated until it glows.

Intestate

Having made no will.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Keel and list

To keel over is to capsize, with the keel, the ship’s backbone along the bottom, turning upward. To list is to lean to one side, usually from water taken on.

Laconic

Using very few words.

Lazar

A diseased beggar, especially one with leprosy.

Legatee

One who receives a legacy.

Lepidopterist

One who studies butterflies and moths.

Liquescent

Melting or becoming liquid.

Lumbering

Moving heavily and clumsily.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Mock moon

A bright spot beside the moon made by ice crystals; a paraselene.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Molt

To shed hair or feathers.

Moonstone

A milky, pearly-blue gemstone.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Myopic

Nearsighted.

Nacreous

Like mother-of-pearl; iridescent.

Nebula

A cloud of gas and dust in space; once any hazy patch of light among the stars, including galaxies.

Nepenthe

In Homer’s Odyssey, a drug from Egypt that Helen puts in the wine to banish grief and sorrow. Anything that brings forgetfulness of pain. See On Nepenthe (Ch 82).

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Obtuse

Slow to understand.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Paradox

A statement or situation that seems to contradict itself and yet may be true.

Pinion

A bird’s wing, or the outer part of it.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Pugilist

A boxer.

Pulverized

Ground to powder.

Refulgent

Shining brightly; radiant.

Regatta

A series of boat races.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Rose window

A round church window of stained glass, with tracery spreading from the center like petals.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Sceptre

A staff carried by a ruler as a sign of power. Also spelled scepter.

Scintillation

A spark or flash.

Scratch sheet

A racing sheet listing the day’s entries and the horses scratched.

Semaphore

A signaling apparatus with arms or flags.

Seminal

Seedlike; giving rise to later growth.

Sequin

A small shining disk sewn on clothing; first the zecchino, a Venetian gold coin.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Shah

The title of the king of Persia, now Iran.

Somnolence

Sleepiness; drowsiness.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Sonorous

Deep and full in sound.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Spectre

A ghost.

Spindrift

Spray blown from the tops of waves.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Spurious

False.

Squall

A sudden, violent gust of wind, often with rain or snow.

Steeplechase

A horse race over fences, ditches, and water jumps, first run cross-country from one church steeple to another.

Stirrup cup

A last drink taken in the saddle before riding off.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women’s right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women’s Suffrage.

Supernumerary

Extra; more than the number needed. In the theater, an extra with no lines.

Surreptitiously

Secretly, by stealth.

Surrey

A light four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with two seats, often with a fringed canopy on top.

Testimonial

A formal statement given as evidence or proof of something.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists’ dream of turning base metal into gold.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Tremulous

Trembling; quivering.

Undulating

Rising and falling in waves.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Warp

The lengthwise threads on a loom, crossed by the woof.

Wayfarer

A traveler, especially on foot.

Wentletrap

A sea snail whose shell winds like a spiral staircase.

Woof

The threads woven across the warp in a fabric.

Chapter 52

Summary

Mr. Spitzer remembers closing the estate of the old suffragette, who reminds him of his own duplicity and duality. From old newspapers he learns that her wildest legends were true: she lost her lady on a mountain peak when the girl went back for a white skirt embroidered with forget-me-nots, challenged a prime minister to a duel, chained herself to a lamp-post, flew over the Alps in a plane with canvas wings until the Swiss drew up claims against her for the League of Nations, fought a golden eagle, and came back from the Holy Lands in black skirts and a turban. Searching her house by lamplight, he finds ten thousand shoe horns, an acorn in an iron safe, telephones that do not work, and forty trunks that open only after long trials with forty keys, with always one key or one lid left over. The trunks hold wedding gowns and veils, and no bride's slippers. Believing she had wished to be the bride, he leaves the gowns out of his inventory to keep her secret. At dawn he finds she has turned a page of the book she was reading when she died, perhaps Eloise et Abelard, and he closes her eyes with two pennies, one in memory of the sun and one in memory of the moon.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Cousin Hannah · Joachim Spitzer · Mr. Chandelier · Peron Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Love · Music, Sound, and Silence · The Search for Meaning · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Clouds and Storms · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Moon and Stars · Mountains · Snow, Ice, and Winter · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Existentialism · Heraclitus and Flux · Hinduism · Nietzsche · Plato and Platonism · Spiritualism and the Occult · Taoism and Zhuangzi

Allusions: Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Music and Composers · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Civil War · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a complex metaphorical description of mystery, time, and identity. Mr. Spitzer reflects on the suffragette's lost love and her elusive, shadowy identity, "No name, no face told him her identity in cloud fusions as none told him who he was now." This sets the tone of searching for meaning in a life shrouded in ambiguity.
- Mr. Spitzer sees himself as connected to her through shared duplicity and duality, unable to condemn her without condemning himself. He describes himself as "one already dead in the midst of life" and the "locksmith in a street of dreams where there was neither key nor lock." This reflects the theme of lost identity and the search for self in a confusing world.
- Cousin Hannah is portrayed as a figure who chased a lost love, symbolized by the lost skirt on a mountain peak, a metaphor for incomplete or thwarted love: "the old suffragette had returned without her love who had gone to retrieve her skirt, surely no dog would ever find." This image resonates through the chapter as a motif of longing and unattainable fulfillment.
- Mr. Spitzer's research reveals her as a woman of many paradoxes and adventures: a mountain climber, balloonist, flyer, traveler through deserts and Holy Lands, who lived beyond time and space: "She had gone to Holy Lands as to Death's seraglio guarded by eunuchs black and white where were locked so many beautiful girls with their faces veiled." Her life is portrayed as almost mythical, full of contradictions and mysteries.
- The chapter meditates on the nature of time, memory, and existence. Cousin Hannah's life is described as one without clear chronology, "with little relationship to chronology, for hers were the chronologies of all dead loves, lost loves, doomed efforts." This connects to the idea that love, life, and death are intertwined in a timeless dance.
- Mr. Spitzer's physical search through her estate, opening trunks, examining keys, finding wedding gowns, veils, and other artifacts, symbolizes an attempt to unlock the mysteries of her life and, metaphorically, the mysteries of love and existence itself. The trunks with "hinges sealed by rust, the lids which had been seemingly soldered by great flames," and the abundance of bridal gowns and veils suggest the elusive and fragile nature of identity and memory.
- Mr. Spitzer questions not only her identity but his own, reflecting on the blurred lines between reality and illusion, living and dead: "He questioned who he was as he questioned who she was, and doubtless this would always be the case." This highlights the existential uncertainty permeating the chapter.
- The suffragette is likened to a bride who has hidden away or been lost, a figure of unfulfilled destiny and love: Perhaps "she had abandoned the bridegroom at the church door." This symbolizes the elusiveness of love and the human condition of searching for something lost or unattainable.

- There is a recurring tension between what is real and unreal, the dream and reality, memory and oblivion. Mr. Spitzer reflects that “Perhaps the unreal and the real were one—or there was only this mask of the stars, and there was no face behind the stars.” This blurring of boundaries questions the nature of existence itself.
- The chapter closes with a meditation on the limits of language and knowledge: “He was not certain of the book’s title now when all writing had faded… no language contained truth, for the truth was that which could not be expressed.” This encapsulates the chapter’s theme of the ineffability of the greatest mysteries of life and love.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “Should doubt move mountains which faith had not moved, or should doubt be joined with faith when the mountains moved?” What does Mr. Spitzer come to believe, and when?
- “Yes, there was an external world, he knew now as it departed.” Why does he believe in her adventures only after her death?
- “There was always one lid more than there was a key, one key more than there was a lid.” What does the leftover key or lid stand for?

Characters

- Mr. Spitzer leaves the wedding gowns out of his inventory. What does that choice say about him as a lawyer and as a mourner?
- “She reminded him of his duplicity and his duality so that he could not condemn her unless he condemned himself.” How does Cousin Hannah mirror Mr. Spitzer and his dead twin?
- Cousin Hannah preached against marriage and urged ladies to “divest themselves of excess luggage,” yet she kept forty trunks of bridal gowns. Was she the bride or the bridegroom, and does it matter?

Connections

- The Swiss drew up a bill of claims against her for the League of Nations. How does Young turn one woman’s freedom into a threat to a nation’s mountains?
- She chained herself to a lamp-post to protest “that woman was a chattel, a thing, a possession, a mere skirt.” How do coverture and the vote shape her story and her secret?
- Why might Young end the chapter with Eloise and Abelard, Tristram and the white Yseult, “lovers never mated”?

Reflection

- “How much more successful she had been in her failure than if only one door had opened to her knock.” Can failure leave a life larger than success?
- “No language contained truth, for the truth was that which could not be expressed.” Is there truth beyond words?
- He was “her only mourner among men—and he was mourning for himself.” Is all mourning partly for oneself?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- A reflective, almost spectral figure, the investigator of the old suffragette’s estate. He embodies duality and duplicity, often questioning his own identity and existence, blurring lines between life and death, reality and dream. His role is to manage and close the estate of the old suffragette, but his journey is deeply philosophical and metaphysical.

Cousin Hannah

- A mysterious woman shrouded in symbolism; she is a traveler, a rebel, and a figure of lost love and elusive identity. Known for her suffrage activism, she is also depicted as a wanderer through physical and metaphysical realms of mountains, deserts, and clouds. She carries the paradox of being both bride and bridegroom, representing the complex intersections of gender, love, and death.

Peron Spitzer

- Mr. Spitzer’s dead twin is present in every list he makes, for he is “mindful always that he was two persons, himself and his dead brother, and that what appeared in one column should appear in the other.” His greatest fear is “that there might be no differing counterpart.”

Catherine Cartwheel

- Recalled as “the opium lady” who entertains only imaginary guests, when Mr. Spitzer finds a golden teapot circled by twelve tiny golden cups as if Cousin Hannah had been entertaining someone.

Research: Themes

Mystery and Identity

See: Identity and the Self

- The chapter is permeated with questions of identity, both Mr. Spitzer's and the suffragette's. Mr. Spitzer struggles to know who he is or whether he is a ghostly twin. The suffragette's identity remains veiled, indicated by symbols like veils, masks, and cloud fusions.

Love and Loss

See: Love · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Central to the narrative is the motif of lost love, symbolized by the suffragette's lost skirt and her search for love that may never be found or may be forever elusive. Love is portrayed as inseparable from death, an eternal quest that transcends time.

Life, Death, and the Afterlife

See: Death and Mortality

- The chapter explores the boundaries between life and death, suggesting that death may multiply uncertainties and dissolve distinctions, such as gender roles and personal identities. Death is not an end but a continuation or transformation, with echoes of the past and shadows of lost loves lingering.

Time and Timelessness

See: Time

- Time is fluid and ambiguous; events are reported out of chronological order, and the notion of "when" is elusive. The suffragette's life and death exist in a timeless realm where beginnings and ends blur.

The External and Internal Worlds

See: Illusion and Reality

- The suffragette's adventures traverse both external landscapes (mountains, deserts, clouds) and internal, psychological realms. Reality and dream intertwine, with the external world mirroring internal emotional and spiritual states.

The Search and the Unattainable

See: The Search for Meaning · Keys, Doors, and Locks

- Mr. Spitzer's search through the suffragette's estate, her memories, and her secrets is a metaphor for the human quest for meaning, often futile and always incomplete. The imagery of keys, trunks, and locked doors symbolizes mysteries that cannot be fully unlocked.

Women, Gender, and Marriage

See: Women, Gender, and Marriage · Women's Suffrage

- Cousin Hannah fought “for the overthrow of man” and urged all ladies to “divest themselves of excess luggage,” yet her forty trunks hold only wedding gowns. Mr. Spitzer cannot tell whether she dreamed of being the bridegroom or the bride, and he decides the world need not know.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Clouds and Snow

See: Clouds and Storms · Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Represent mystery, concealment, and transformation. They are often described as moving, shifting, and obscuring identity and reality.

Skirts and Veils

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Weddings and Funerals

- The suffragette’s lost skirt embroidered with forget-me-nots symbolizes lost love and identity. Veils and skirts also signify the blurred boundaries of gender and self.

Keys, Locks, and Trunks

See: Keys, Doors, and Locks

- These represent the attempt to unlock secrets, memories, and truths. Mr. Spitzer’s fumbling with keys and trunks underscores the impossibility of fully understanding or revealing the suffragette’s life.

Stars, Moons, and Celestial Bodies

See: Moon and Stars

- Used to depict guidance, mystery, the unreachable, and the eternal. The moon, often mirrored or sunken, symbolizes reflection and illusion.

Birds and Butterflies

See: Birds · Butterflies and Moths

- Symbols of transformation, fleeting beauty, and the soul’s journey. The butterfly sailing out of the ear (a door) suggests escape or transcendence.

Music and Silence

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Music represents life’s rhythm, emotion, and unspoken realities; silence and muteness indicate death, absence, or the ineffable.

Mountains

See: Mountains

- Her mountains move, skip like rams, turn into clouds, and change with every climber: “Never were both the unchanging mountain and the unchanging mountain-climber.” They are her lost love’s grave and the stage of her legend.

Research: Resources

- “Perhaps she should be the husband and not the bride”: The woman might take the role traditionally assigned to the husband. Death, which offers “no firm foundation stone or unchanging lintel,” unsettles fixed roles, including those of gender, so that husband and bride, beginning and end, life and death become unstable, and the woman may take on strength, authority, and active agency in the face of life’s precariousness.
- “that old jack of all trades who was the master of none”: The saying “Jack of all trades, master of none” grew from older forms; in 1592 Robert Greene sneered at the young Shakespeare as a Johannes factotum, a Jack of all trades. See Shakespeare.
- “those feathered goose barnacles”: Medieval naturalists believed that the barnacle goose hatched from the goose barnacle, a stalked shellfish that clings to driftwood, because no one had seen the geese nest; they breed in the Arctic. Gerald of Wales described the birds hanging from timber by their beaks in his Topographia Hibernica (1188), and John Gerard pictured geese dropping from a barnacle tree in his Herball (1597).
- “Should doubt move mountains which faith had not moved”: Mr. Spitzer inverts the saying that faith can move mountains: “If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matthew 17:20). The suffragette’s search for a lost skirt, which leads to the death of her lover, suggests the absurdity of human pursuits, as in existentialist thought. She cries “Long live woman! Vive la femme! Viva la donna!” in many languages, “perhaps even in Sanskrit which was the language written upon a silent snowflake,” yet there are “secret languages never to be translated into words.” Her decision to dress as a man asserts her freedom against social norms, and her practical clothing against the other climbers’ finery sets materialism against idealism. The footman cutting a golden stairway from a frozen lake to the mountains of the moon may recall the ascent from Plato’s cave toward the light, and her climbing the Transcendentalist journey beyond the material world. See Plato and Platonism.
- “like the sea giving up its dead”: “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works” (Revelation 20:13, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.

- “the rescuer, might be the rescued”: Mr. Spitzer, so often the protector, confronts the possibility that he himself needs saving. His near-turning “to her” shows a yearning for connection beneath his reserve and sense of duty.
    - This mimics the damsel in distress trope in which one or more men must rescue a woman who has either been kidnapped or placed in general peril. Kinship, love, or lust gives the male protagonist the motivation or compulsion to initiate the narrative. The female character herself may be competent, but still finds herself in this type of situation. The helplessness of these fictional females is linked to views outside of fiction that women as a group need to be taken care of by men. What changes through history is the attacker, not the damsel: in popular media the attacker’s role goes to whichever group best meets a culture’s collective fears. This trope does not necessarily involve the male protagonist getting the female as a reward, but may be combined with other tropes where the female character becomes the male character’s reward at the end of the story. (Wikipedia)
- “the greatest St. Bernard who ever lived”: Barry (1800-1814), the most famous of the rescue dogs kept by the Augustinian canons of the Great St. Bernard Hospice in the Swiss Alps, is said to have helped rescue forty people, and the canons and their dogs saved more than two thousand travellers over two centuries. His mounted body is in the Natural History Museum of Bern, which notes that the stories of his carrying a child on his back and of his death at the hands of a soldier who took him for a wolf are legends (Natural History Museum of Bern, “Barry”). Later Cousin Hannah sleeps in shepherds’ huts with “an old St. Bernard sleeping at her feet, a Red Cross dog who had not retrieved her”; the Red Cross was founded in Geneva in 1863.
- “It was a white skirt embroidered with forget-me-nots”: Forget-me-nots are charming, low-growing plants, known for their small, delicate blue flowers with yellow or white eyes. They typically bloom in the spring and are often found in gardens and natural settings. Forget-me-nots are widely associated with true love, remembrance, and enduring friendship. They are often given as gifts or used in remembrance ceremonies. The name “forget-me-not” is derived from a German legend about a knight who, while picking the flowers for his beloved, fell into a river and drowned, tossing the flowers to her with the cry “Vergiss mich nicht!” (Forget me not).
    - Young told Studs Terkel that she found the skirt in “the history of British mountain climbing”: one of the original bloomer girls and her companion climbed an Alpine peak to shout “Vive la femme,” took off their skirts at the top where no one could see them, and on the way down the younger, “the acolyte as I call her,” went back for the skirt she had left on the other side of the peak and never returned. Cousin Hannah “is haunted all her life by the ghostly rustle of the skirt” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). In the novel the girl is her “apostle.” In 1858 Julia Archibald Holmes, a suffragist, climbed Pikes Peak in Colorado in a bloomer costume, the first recorded ascent by a woman. See Women’s Suffrage.
- “All might have been imaginary in this life as in this death”: This relates to philosophical discussions about the nature of reality, perception, and the extent to which experience is shaped by the mind. The search through the suffragette’s belongings is a search for

truth and understanding, but the paragraph suggests that this search may be futile. “Surely her entire life could not have been a game of hide-and-seek, for although she was hiding—who was seeking for her?” This touches on the philosophical problem of epistemology, or how anyone can know what is true, and whether objective truth is even attainable. Mr. Spitzer reflects on the suffragette’s death and its meaning. He wonders if death might be a “miracle,” and questions whether she has found her love in death. This aligns with philosophical inquiries into the nature of death, the possibility of an afterlife, and the meaning of existence in the face of mortality. The paragraph suggests that time may not be linear or objective, but rather a subjective experience. “All might have been an indeterminate moment or one beyond this calendar of days, hours, years. And what calendar was ever kept in the long night?” This idea relates to philosophical discussions about the nature of time, its relationship to consciousness, and whether time is an objective reality or a human construct. The paragraph also presents love as a paradox, questioning whether it can ever be fully realized or understood. It is filled with dualities and opposing forces: life and death, reality and imagination, love and loss, male and female. This relates to philosophical concepts of duality, dialectics, and the idea that reality is composed of opposing forces that are constantly interacting. It questions the value of individual experience and the search for meaning. This aligns with philosophical discussions about existentialism, individualism, and the search for meaning in a seemingly absurd world.

- “the water hen which was the Pleiades”: The Pleiades, or Seven Sisters, are a cluster of stars in the constellation Taurus. Many old European names picture them as a hen with her chicks: the Vikings called them Freyja’s hens, and the old Hungarian name Fiastyúk means “a hen with chicks.” (Wikipedia) See Astronomy.
- “had thought of satyrs and garlanded fawns”: Satyrs in Greek mythology are male nature spirits, companions of Dionysus, with the ears and tail of a horse or goat; the Roman fauns, half goat, followed the god Faunus. Both stand for unbridled desire, which may be why Mr. Spitzer feels disloyal thinking of them in the house of the suffragette. See Greek Mythology.
- “some who were the beardless boys”: Many young people served as soldiers in the Civil War, with estimates suggesting that around 10% of Union soldiers were under 18. Some were as young as 10 years old, and many served as musicians, messengers, or even in combat roles. While the official minimum enlistment age was 18, many boys lied about their age to join the military, and some were even encouraged by recruiters. William Black: At age 12, he was wounded in battle, making him the youngest known wounded soldier, according to Nashville.gov. Johnny Clem: He joined the Union Army at age 10 and became a drummer boy. Johnny Cook: He was 15 when he volunteered as a cannoneer at the Battle of Antietam and received the Medal of Honor for his bravery, according to the National Park Service. Young soldiers faced the same dangers and hardships as older soldiers, including combat, disease, and imprisonment. See The Civil War.
- “the great weaver weaving upon this loom”: Weaving is used as a metaphor in many cultures for understanding the workings of the universe and a person’s place in it.

Through the physical process of weaving, people have tried to explain or gain a better understanding of this world and how human beings are woven into it. See the weaving goddesses in the Chapter 28 resources.

- “like the infant Moses sleeping in his little boat among the reeds”: “And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch, and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river’s brink” (Exodus 2:3, KJV). Pharaoh had ordered every Hebrew son cast into the river (Exodus 1:22), and three women, his mother, his sister, and Pharaoh’s daughter, saved him. See The Bible.
- “I might fish up a minor prophet”: The twelve Minor Prophets of the Bible, Hosea through Malachi, are called minor for the shortness of their books, not their importance. Their message is judgment and salvation, social justice and the treatment of the poor, and concern for divine judgment in the future. One of them was fished up indeed: “And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land” (Jonah 2:10, KJV). See The Bible.
- “His faith came at that moment which should have most justified his lack of faith”: This paragraph uses the figure of Mr. Spitzer, a lawyer and musician, to explore the fragile boundary between faith and doubt, reality and illusion, life and death. His faith, unexpectedly strengthened by loss, parallels the fate of his music: unheard, incomplete, and destined to fade. The woman’s life and identity are similarly elusive, caught in endless cycles and transformations like the horses on a carousel or the turns of a planetary wheel. The paragraph reflects on how truth often comes too late, and how identity, art, and existence are marked by impermanence and mystery.
- “pivoted on nothingness like the dancer over the abyss”: Zarathustra tells the crowd, “Man is a rope stretched between the animal and the Superman—a rope over an abyss,” and a tightrope walker falls to his death before them (Friedrich Nietzsche, Thus Spake Zarathustra, Prologue 4, trans. Thomas Common, 1909). See Nietzsche.
- “the experiments of Marconi”: Guglielmo Marconi was an Italian inventor and electrical engineer, known for his creation of a practical radio wave-based wireless telegraph system. On 12 December 1901 he received the first transatlantic wireless signal, the letter S in Morse code, at St. John’s, Newfoundland, sent from Poldhu in Cornwall.
- “like the breasts of pigeons, perhaps those who were already extinct”: The passenger pigeon, once the most numerous bird in North America, was hunted to extinction; the last one, Martha, died at the Cincinnati Zoo on 1 September 1914. See Martha the Passenger Pigeon.
- “the snows as old as the kingdom of Charlemagne”: Charlemagne was a ruler who united the majority of western and central Europe. He was crowned emperor in Rome on Christmas Day, 800.
- “Who heard the knock of her dead heart?”: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20, KJV). Here the knock comes from within, and no one opens. See Revelation and the Apocalypse.

- “in an old Ford”: The Ford Motor Company is an American multinational automobile manufacturer. Henry Ford’s Model T (1908-1927) put America on wheels; more than fifteen million were sold.
- “in cloud cuckoo lands”: In Aristophanes’ comedy The Birds (414 BC), two Athenians persuade the birds to build Nephelokokkygia, Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, a city in the air between gods and men. The name now means any absurd dream world.
- “Mr. Spitzer had trembled like a gambler”: The opening lines immediately establish a world governed by chance. Mr. Spitzer trembling “like a gambler” suggests a life where outcomes are unpredictable and determined by forces beyond individual control. This aligns with existentialist themes of the absurdity of existence and the lack of inherent meaning. The “faceless card” and “star of no known number” symbolize the limits of human knowledge. No one can fully grasp the forces shaping a life, and there will always be elements of the unknown. This resonates with the existentialist emphasis on the limits of reason. The line “Yes, there was an external world, he knew now as it departed” is crucial. It indicates a loss of faith in an objective reality. The world is not fixed but is constantly slipping away, emphasizing the subjective experience. “He gave his belief when there was no reason for his belief” highlights a rejection of rationalism. Spitzer’s faith is not based on evidence or logic but on something deeper, perhaps a Kierkegaardian “leap of faith” into the absurd. “For he reserved his credulity for the grand occasions eliciting the skepticism of others. Their skepticism was his faith” is a complex statement. It suggests that Spitzer finds meaning in what others reject. This could be interpreted as a form of contrarianism, or as a deeper understanding that truth often lies in challenging conventional wisdom. See Existentialism and Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “a foot lover might have loved her”: Podophilia, also known as foot fetishism, is a sexual interest or attraction to feet. It is considered a type of paraphilia, where the focus of sexual arousal is on a specific body part or object. While it’s a common form of fetish, it’s only considered a paraphilic disorder if it causes significant distress or impairment in a person’s life.
- “she could not have worn her heart upon her sleeve”: Iago says in Shakespeare’s Othello, “But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve / For daws to peck at” (1.1). See Shakespeare.
- “But where was Jill who came tumbling after?”: The nursery rhyme was first printed about 1765 in Mother Goose’s Melody: “Jack and Gill / Went up the Hill, / To fetch a Pail of Water; / Jack fell down / And broke his Crown, / And Gill came tumbling after.” Cousin Hannah is Jack, and no Jill follows.
- “the white bull garlanded with white flowers”: Zeus took the form of a snow-white bull to carry off Europa, who hung garlands of flowers on his horns before she climbed onto his back (Ovid, Metamorphoses 2). Bulls were also led to the altar garlanded for sacrifice. See Greek Mythology.
- “a thieving robin redbreast such as accompanies lone travellers”: The robin redbreast of this line is the European robin, which follows gardeners and travellers for the insects

they turn up; the American robin is a larger thrush named after it. A children's poem and a legend explain that the robin's breast was reddened by fanning the fire to keep the infant Jesus warm in the manger. In the old ballad The Children in the Wood (1595), robins cover the two lost children with leaves when they die in the forest. Many cultures have different meanings for robins, from death to the coming of spring to messengers of the spirits. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.

- "She had challenged a prime minister to a duel": Young took the duel from life. She told Studs Terkel that the lawyer Charles Studin, a founder of the NAACP, knew a suffragist "battle axe who spent her entire life fighting against men. She challenged a British prime minister to a duel and the prime minister refused to bear arms against the lady" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). No record of the duel itself has turned up. The best-known duel between women is the "petticoat duel" said to have been fought in Hyde Park in 1792 between Lady Almeria Braddock and Mrs. Elphinstone, after Mrs. Elphinstone remarked on Lady Braddock's age: both missed with pistols, and Lady Braddock wounded Mrs. Elphinstone's arm with a sword. The story rests on later retellings and may be fiction. Real confrontations with prime ministers were common. In October 1908 fourteen suffragettes were thrown out of a bazaar in Islington for interrupting H. H. Asquith, and Margaret Haig Thomas, later Viscountess Rhondda, was attacked by a crowd after trying to stop the prime minister's car. She went to prison and hunger struck after trying to set fire to a postbox, and in 1922 she petitioned to take her late father's seat in the House of Lords; the Committee for Privileges first accepted her claim, then, with its membership changed, rejected it (Viscountess Rhondda's Claim, [1922] 2 AC 339). Women entered the Lords only in 1958, with life peerages, and hereditary peeresses in 1963.
- "She had slept among Laplanders": "Laplander" is an outdated and sometimes considered offensive term for the Sami people, an indigenous group inhabiting the Arctic region of Sápmi, which includes parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia. While "Laplander" was historically used to refer to people from the region of Lapland, it's now more respectful to use the term Sami or the endonym their specific language group uses, such as Northern Sámi. See Exploration and the Poles.
- "climb these Boston mountains": There are no mountains in Boston; the Boston Mountains are in Arkansas. Boston itself was first called Trimountaine for the three peaks of Beacon Hill, which were cut down in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to fill the marshes. Tremont Street keeps the name.
- "She had chained herself to a lamp-post": Chaining was a signature suffrage protest. In January 1908 Edith New and Olivia Smith chained themselves to the railings of 10 Downing Street and shouted "Votes for Women!" so that Flora Drummond and Mary Macarthur could slip inside. On 28 October 1908 Muriel Matters and Helen Fox of the Women's Freedom League chained themselves to the grille of the Ladies' Gallery in the House of Commons, and the section of grille had to be removed with them still attached. Young's source, Charles Studin's suffragist, "chained herself to a lamppost in front of the White House" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). Chaining herself to a lamp post, she makes herself a public fixture, visible and

accountable, a woman who takes control of her fate even while bound by it. See Women's Suffrage.

- "a gerrymandered ward shaped like a salamander": The word gerrymander comes from a Massachusetts district drawn in 1812 under Governor Elbridge Gerry, which a cartoon in the Boston Gazette pictured as a salamander.
    - Gerrymandering, defined in the contexts of representative electoral systems, is the political manipulation of electoral district boundaries to advantage a party, group, or socioeconomic class within the constituency. The manipulation may involve "cracking" (diluting the voting power of the opposing party's supporters across many districts) or "packing" (concentrating the opposing party's voting power in one district to reduce their voting power in other districts). Gerrymandering can also be used to protect incumbents. Wayne Dawkins, a professor at Morgan State University, describes it as politicians picking their voters instead of voters picking their politicians. The word comes from Elbridge Gerry, governor of Massachusetts and later Vice President, who in 1812 signed a bill creating a partisan district in the Boston area; the Boston Gazette compared its shape to a salamander and called it the Gerry-mander. The term has negative connotations, and gerrymandering is almost always considered a corruption of the democratic process. (Wikipedia)
- "that woman was a chattel, a thing, a possession": This reflects the brutal reality and social critique regarding the status of women, particularly in the context of marriage and society during the period depicted. To call a woman a "chattel" means to reduce her to the status of personal property or something owned by her husband or father, rather than a person with autonomy and rights.
    - Coverture was a legal doctrine in common law systems where a married woman's legal existence was subsumed into that of her husband's, essentially making her a legal non-entity. Under coverture, a married woman (feme covert) had no independent legal rights, meaning she couldn't own property, enter into contracts, sue or be sued, or control her own earnings. This concept, rooted in the idea that husband and wife were one legal entity, with the husband as that entity, has significantly shaped legal and social landscapes, particularly for women. William Blackstone put it plainly in his Commentaries on the Laws of England (1765): "By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage." This concept formed the core of coverture, asserting that husband and wife were a single legal entity, with the husband as the representative. Coverture has roots in feudal Norman customs and English common law. It was a fundamental aspect of the legal system in early America, shaping social and legal norms. Coverture influenced not only legal practices but also societal expectations and gender roles. As the women's rights movement gained momentum, coverture was increasingly criticized as oppressive, leading to reforms. The Married Women's Property Acts, passed in the United States from 1839 (Mississippi) and 1848 (New York) onward, began to modify or dismantle coverture by granting women greater control over their property. Coverture was gradually weakened and eventually eliminated through legislation

and legal reforms in the United States. While coverture is no longer in effect, its legacy continues to shape legal and social discussions, particularly concerning gender equality. Some legal scholars argue that vestiges of coverture persist in contemporary legal frameworks, particularly in areas like real estate and tax law. Hannah chains herself to a lamp-post against the denial of political rights, and woman is called “chattel, a thing, a possession, a mere skirt.” Mr. Spitzer thinks all should vote, even the dead. Of the two moons, he inclines to believe the “sunken moon was real because it existed only in men’s dreams,” and “he had stood still as she had progressed”: she is modern and has changed with the times, while he is “stuck in the age of the surrey.” See the Blackstone entry in the Chapter 48 resources.

- “seals of the old Merovingian kings”: The Merovingian dynasty was the ruling family of the Franks. They were called the long-haired kings, for uncut hair was the mark of their royalty. The gold signet ring of Childeric I, father of Clovis, engraved with his long-haired portrait and the words CHILDIRICI REGIS, was found in his tomb at Tournai in 1653; it was stolen from the royal library in Paris in 1831 and is known today from casts.
- “Or both changed together”: Neither the mountain, the world, nor the mountain-climber, the person, stays fixed; both change together, and permanence is an illusion.
    - This may refer to Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher, who proposed universal flux and unity of opposites. The universal flux statement is that it is not possible to step twice into the same river, or to come into contact twice with a mortal being in the same state. Unity of opposites statement points to ways things are the same and not the same over time. Things are interconnected but not identical. An example of this is ocean water is fine for fish but undrinkable for man. See Heraclitus and Flux.
- “come down by angelic, swan-breasted parachute”: Early parachuting was as much a woman’s art as a man’s, and two pioneers fit Cousin Hannah’s daring.
    - Georgia Ann “Tiny” Thompson Broadwick or Georgia Broadwick, previously known as Georgia Jacobs, and later known as Georgia Brown, was an American pioneering parachutist and the inventor of the ripcord. She was the first woman to jump from an airplane, and the first person to jump from a seaplane. (Wikipedia)
    - Katharina “Käthe” Paulus was a German exhibition parachute jumper and the inventor of the first collapsible parachute. At the time, 1910, the parachute was named “rescue apparatus for aeronauts.” The previous parachutes were not able to fit in a case like apparatus worn on the back, thus Paulus’ invention became of paramount importance for the Germans in the First World War and she produced about 7,000 parachutes for the German forces. During the First World War, Paulus created approximately 125 parachutes a week. She was also credited with inventing the “drag ‘chute,” an intentional breakaway system where one small parachute opens to pull out the main parachute. Paulus was an avid aeronaut herself and logged over 510 balloon flights and over 165 parachute jumps in her lifetime. She was the first German to be a professional air pilot and the first German woman

aerial acrobat. Despite the fact that hot air balloons are currently known as a sort of tourist attraction, during the final decades of the 19th century these hot air balloons were on the cutting edge of technology, and were popular before the invention of airplanes. (Wikipedia)

- “parachute slowly down to Skid Row”: Skid Row began as Skid Road in Seattle, where logs were skidded down to Henry Yesler’s mill in the 1850s; the street became a district of cheap lodging, and the name passed to down-and-out districts everywhere.
    - It is an impoverished area, typically urban, in English-speaking North America whose inhabitants are mostly poor people “on the skids.” This specifically refers to people who are poor or homeless, considered disreputable, downtrodden or forgotten by society. A skid row may be anything from an impoverished urban district to a red-light district to a gathering area for people experiencing homelessness or drug addiction. In general, skid row areas are inhabited or frequented by impoverished individuals and also people who are addicted to drugs. Urban areas considered skid rows are marked by high vagrancy, dilapidated buildings, and drug dens, as well as other features of urban blight. Used figuratively, the phrase may indicate the state of a poor person’s life. The term skid road originally referred to the path along which timber workers skidded logs. Its current sense appears to have originated in the Pacific Northwest. Areas in the United States and Canada identified by this nickname include Pioneer Square in Seattle; Old Town Chinatown in Portland, Oregon; Downtown Eastside in Vancouver; Skid Row in Los Angeles; the Tenderloin District of San Francisco; and the Bowery of Lower Manhattan. The term Poverty Flats is used for some Western US towns. (Wikipedia)
- “one of the first women flyers over the Alps”: Marie Marvingt was a French athlete, mountaineer, aviator, and journalist. She won numerous prizes for her sporting achievements including those of swimming, cycling, mountain climbing, winter sports, ballooning, flying, riding, gymnastics, athletics, rifle shooting, and fencing. Between 1903 and 1910 she was the first woman to climb most of the peaks in the French and Swiss Alps, and she was the first woman to cross the North Sea by balloon (1909) and the English Channel (1914). She was a record-breaking balloonist, an aviator, and during World War I she became the first female combat pilot. She was also a qualified surgical nurse, was the first trained and certified flight nurse in the world, and worked for the establishment of air ambulance services throughout the world. In 1903 M. Château de Thierry de Beaumanoir named her “the fiancée of danger,” which newspapers used to describe her for the rest of her life. It is also included on the commemorative plaque on the façade of the house where she lived at 8 Place de la Carrière, Nancy. (Wikipedia)
- “like Venus sleeping in her mother-of-pearl shell”: In Sandro Botticelli’s The Birth of Venus (about 1484-1486, Uffizi, Florence), the goddess, born of the sea foam, is blown ashore standing in a scallop shell. See Greek Mythology.
- “an airplane with canvas wings”: Early airplanes were wooden frames covered with doped canvas. Young’s is a “flying chicken coop buzzing in the snow clouds,” fit for

Cousin Hannah, whose daring journeys included balloon ascensions and flights over the Alps.

    - It may refer to the Wright Flyer which made the first sustained flight by a manned heavier-than-air powered and controlled aircraft on December 17, 1903. Invented and flown by brothers Orville and Wilbur Wright, it marked the beginning of the pioneer era of aviation. The aircraft is a single-place biplane design with drooping wings, front double elevator, and rear double rudder. It used a 12 horsepower (9 kilowatts) gasoline engine powering two pusher propellers. Employing “wing warping,” it was relatively unstable and very difficult to fly. The Wright brothers flew it four times in a location now part of the town of Kill Devil Hills, about 4 miles (6 kilometers) south of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The airplane flew 852 ft (260 m) on its fourth and final flight, but was damaged on landing, and wrecked minutes later when powerful gusts blew it over. The brothers shipped the wreckage back to Dayton, and the aircraft never flew again. Orville later restored it and displayed it on several occasions. The Flyer joined the Smithsonian Institution’s collection of historic aircraft in 1948 after the end of a long and bitter dispute between Orville and the Institution over its refusal to recognize the Flyer as the first successful airplane. Today, it is on display in a place of honor in the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. (Wikipedia)

- “glowed like a Holy Grail”: The Holy Grail is a treasure that is an important motif in Arthurian literature. It is the cup of the Last Supper, sought by the knights of the Round Table and achieved by the pure Galahad.
- “between the evening star and the morning star”: The evening star (Hesperus) and the morning star (Phosphorus, the light-bringer) are both the planet Venus, seen after sunset and before dawn; the Greeks came to know that the two were one. Gottlob Frege used the pair in “On Sense and Reference” (1892) to show that two names can have different senses yet name the same thing, a question of “the constitution of reality” into which Cousin Hannah never inquired. See Astronomy.
- “presented to the League of Nations”: The League of Nations was the first worldwide governmental organization whose principal mission was to maintain world peace. Founded in 1920 after the First World War, it had its seat in Geneva, Switzerland, and voted itself out of existence in April 1946, its work passing to the United Nations.
- “there were many accusations possible”: The Swiss accusations against Cousin Hannah highlight the ethical problem of unintended consequences. Even if her actions were driven by noble intentions, such as seeking her lost love or advancing suffrage, they allegedly resulted in harm to others, such as causing snow-slides or burying trains. This relates to consequentialism, which evaluates actions based on their outcomes. There is a tension between progress and destruction. Cousin Hannah “uncovered some things” but “covered others,” raising questions about whether progress inevitably involves loss or harm. This relates to dialectical thinking, where progress emerges from the conflict between opposing forces. The Swiss fear of Cousin Hannah potentially disrupting the stability of their nation reflects a conflict between individual freedom and the collective good. The Swiss are concerned about their

community and way of life. This relates to political philosophy and the social contract. Mr. Spitzer questions the reliability of perception and the possibility of truly knowing anything. The mountains may be clouds, and the clouds may be mountains, highlighting the subjective nature of reality. This relates to skepticism and the questioning of empirical knowledge. The newspaper reports of the suffragette's adventures are presented as "blurred" and open to interpretation. This emphasizes the role of the observer in shaping reality and the difficulty of establishing objective truth. Mr. Spitzer's belief "when there was no reason for his belief" and his reservation of "his credulity for the grand occasions eliciting the skepticism of others" suggests a rejection of conventional notions of truth based on empirical evidence or logical reasoning. This relates to philosophical movements like existentialism, which prioritize individual experience and meaning-making. The notion that Cousin Hannah's actions could cause "reverberations to eternity if not to infinity" implies a belief in the interconnectedness of all things and the far-reaching consequences of even seemingly small actions. This aligns with holistic philosophies that emphasize the unity of existence. The idea that "time and the dream were never married in her" suggests a rejection of linear time and an embrace of a more fluid, dreamlike reality. This relates to philosophies that challenge conventional notions of time, such as those found in process philosophy. Mr. Spitzer considers the possibility that Cousin Hannah might "ferry snow-crowned mountains of passage to another world" and "take all to that world where there was no mourning," suggesting a belief in transcendence or the possibility of escaping the limitations of earthly existence. These philosophical inferences are not presented as systematic arguments but rather as fragmented reflections that emerge from Mr. Spitzer's consciousness as he grapples with the legacy of Cousin Hannah.

- "had uncovered many cantons never marked on any map": A canton is a subdivision of a country established for political or administrative purposes. Switzerland is a confederation of cantons, each with its own constitution; there are twenty-six today.
- "The mountains skipped about like rams": "The mountains skipped like rams, and the little hills like lambs" (Psalm 114:4, KJV). See The Bible.
- "the airplanes crashing over Switzerland": During World War II, Switzerland experienced both intentional and accidental airplane crashes. While Switzerland was neutral, its airspace was frequently violated, and some aircraft were forced to land or crash within Swiss territory. Switzerland's neutrality during World War II meant it was often violated by both Allied and Axis aircraft. These incursions led to aerial engagements, including the Swiss shooting down German planes and being forced to intern some aircraft. One notable incident involved a Swiss Messerschmitt 109 shooting down a German Bf 110, which prompted a retaliatory incursion by 32 Bf 110s, intercepted by Swiss fighters.
    - Swissair, the Swiss national airline, was formed on 26 March 1931 by the merger of Ad Astra Aero (1919) and Balair (1925) under Walter Mittelholzer and Balz Zimmermann. In 1933 it opened the first air route across the Alps, Zurich to Milan, and in 1934 it put Europe's first flight attendant, Nelly Diener, aboard; she was killed in a crash that July. On 4 September 1963, Swissair Flight 306, a Caravelle bound

from Zurich to Rome by way of Geneva, caught fire after takeoff and crashed near Dürrenäsch in the canton of Aargau, killing all eighty people aboard. The farming village of Humlikon lost forty-three of its 217 residents, among them its whole council, all of its school board, and its post office clerk. After 1964: the whole Swissair fleet was grounded for lack of cash on 2 October 2001, and its last flight landed in Zurich on 1 April 2002. (Wikipedia)

- “mail planes crashing on their way to Italy”: air mail services were disrupted during World War II, particularly in Northern Italy under the Italian Social Republic (RSI). Allied forces banned all Italian air activities, including civilian flights, until the peace treaty was defined. Despite these disruptions, civilian mail was transported by air in Northern Italy from December 1944 until the end of the war, mainly along the Milan-Munich route with connections to Berlin and Vienna.
- “carried by pigeon post”: During the Prussian siege of Paris in 1870 and 1871, carrier pigeons taken out of the city by balloon flew messages back in, photographed onto film so small that one bird could carry thousands of letters.
- “a letter written by the Pope to a French queen”: Young makes the anachronism part of the joke: “It was a fourteenth century Pope who had written to a thirteenth-century queen.” Two real cases come close. Philip II of France married Ingeborg of Denmark in 1193 and repudiated her the day after the wedding; Pope Celestine III declared the annulment invalid, and Innocent III placed France under interdict in 1200 after Philip took Agnes of Merania as his wife. Ingeborg, held for years in confinement, wrote that she lacked visitors, a priest for comfort, and even sufficient food and clothing; Philip restored her as queen in 1213. In the fourteenth century Isabella of France, a French king’s daughter and the wife of Edward II of England, went to France in 1325 with the encouragement of Pope John XXII, who called her an “angel of peace,” to mediate between her husband and her brother Charles IV. She refused to go home and from December 1325 lived openly in Paris with Roger Mortimer, and when word came that the pope had spoken against her, her brother ordered her out of France.
    - An example of a Pope intervening in the affairs of the French monarchy regarding morality can be found in the context of the Avignon Papacy. This period happened from 1309 to 1376 during which seven successive popes resided in Avignon (at the time within the Kingdom of Arles, part of the Holy Roman Empire, now part of France) rather than in Rome. The situation arose from the conflict between the papacy and the French crown, culminating in the death of Pope Boniface VIII after his arrest and maltreatment by agents of Philip IV of France. Following the subsequent death of Pope Benedict XI, Philip pressured a deadlocked conclave to elect the Archbishop of Bordeaux as pope Clement V in 1305. Clement refused to move to Rome, and in 1309 he moved his court to the papal enclave at Avignon, where it remained for the next 67 years. This absence from Rome is sometimes referred to as the “Babylonian captivity” of the Papacy. A total of seven popes reigned at Avignon, all French, and all under the influence of the French Crown. In 1376, Gregory XI abandoned Avignon and moved his court to Rome, arriving in January 1377. After Gregory’s death in 1378, deteriorating relations between his

successor Urban VI and a faction of cardinals gave rise to the Western Schism. This started a second line of Avignon popes, subsequently regarded as illegitimate. The last Avignon antipope, Benedict XIII, lost most of his support in 1398, including that of France. After five years besieged by the French, he fled to Perpignan in 1403. The schism ended in 1417 at the Council of Constance.

- “attacked by a golden mountain eagle”: Mistaking her for another bird, the eagle attacked her in the “wasp-colored clouds over Switzerland,” and she “jousted furiously against him,” yet “none knew who had won or who had lost.” The battle stands for the dangers of her long fight for suffrage and liberation.
    - Several groups of World War II aircraft were nicknamed “Eagles.” The Eagle Squadrons (three Royal Air Force squadrons composed of American volunteers), the Aztec Eagles of the Mexican Air Force, and the P-51 Mustang fighter planes nicknamed “Gray Eagles.”
- “the furies of crinolines”: Mr. Spitzer, as an old man dealing with the complexities and increasing impersonality of the modern world, nostalgically prefers this bygone era with its passionate, theatrical, and perhaps clearer social roles and rituals. It contrasts with his current experience of fading realities, illusions, and the disorienting modernity surrounding him.
    - Crinolines were a popular fashion in women’s clothing during the mid-1850s to the mid-1860s, a period often referred to as the Crinoline Period within the Victorian era. This era is characterized by the widespread adoption of crinolines, which created the voluminous, bell-shaped skirts that defined the fashion of the time. “Crinolinomania” (refers to the widespread adoption and fascination with the crinoline fashion during the mid-19th century) saw the crinoline evolve from a dome shape to a more pyramid shape, and eventually became almost flat in the front. Crinolines emerged as a lighter and more convenient alternative to the numerous petticoats previously used to create fullness in skirts. The mid-1850s to the mid-1860s period marks the height of crinoline popularity, with the style becoming a fashion staple across different social classes. While still worn, crinolines began to evolve, with the silhouette shifting from a bell shape to a flatter front and more fullness in the back. By the 1870s, the crinoline was largely replaced by the bustle, which focused on fullness at the rear of the skirt.
- “each reporter had worn his own antennae on his head”: Mr. Spitzer looks back to the days before wire services and radio, when each reporter gathered his own news.
    - The 1850s and 1860s in the US were a period of intense national division and conflict, culminating in the Civil War. The central issue was slavery and its expansion, which led to political realignment, violence, and ultimately, secession and war. The decade of the 1850s saw escalating tensions surrounding slavery, with political compromises failing to resolve the issue and the nation moving closer to the brink of war. The Civil War itself, fought from 1861 to 1865, resulted in the end of slavery and Northern victory, but at a tremendous cost in human lives and national unity. Compromise of 1850 attempted to address the issue of slavery in newly

acquired territories, but ultimately failed to quell the growing divide. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 introduced the concept of “popular sovereignty,” allowing residents of territories to decide on slavery, leading to violence and conflict in Kansas (“Bleeding Kansas”). Existing political parties fractured, and new ones emerged, such as the Republican Party, dedicated to preventing the expansion of slavery. The movement to abolish slavery gained momentum, with figures like Harriet Beecher Stowe and her novel Uncle Tom’s Cabin further inflaming anti-slavery sentiment. Dred Scott Decision (1857) where the Supreme Court ruled that enslaved people were not citizens and Congress could not prohibit slavery in the territories, further exacerbating tensions. Abraham Lincoln’s election as president in 1860, without a single Southern electoral vote, led to the secession of several Southern states. The Civil War (1861-1865) was fought between the Union (North) and the Confederacy (South), resulting in immense loss of life and widespread destruction. Major battles like Gettysburg and Vicksburg marked turning points in the war. Emancipation Proclamation (1863) declared enslaved people in Confederate-held territory to be free. New York City draft riots (1863) discontent with the draft laws during the Civil War led to violent protests. The 13th Amendment (1865) officially abolished slavery in the United States. Reconstruction (1865-1877) after the Civil War focused on rebuilding the South and integrating formerly enslaved people into society. This era was marked by successes and failures in achieving true equality. See The Civil War.

    - From 1850 to 1860 American news was dominated by the quarrel over slavery: the Compromise of 1850, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and the Dred Scott decision. The penny press, led by James Gordon Bennett’s New York Herald, made newspapers a mass medium, and editors like Horace Greeley of the Tribune shaped opinion. Papers were openly partisan. The telegraph sped the news, railroads carried the papers across the country, and the Civil War made the war correspondent. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin first ran as a serial in The National Era (1851-1852), and the Wide Awakes of the late 1850s organized through the press. (Wikipedia)
    - Samuel Morse sent the first message over his telegraph line from Washington to Baltimore on 24 May 1844: “What hath God wrought” (Numbers 23:23, KJV).
- “kiss of a frog or by its croak”: In the Grimms’ “The Frog King” (1812) the princess does not kiss the frog but throws him against the wall, and he becomes a prince; the kiss came later. Here the enchantment fails: neither the frog’s kiss nor its croak can wake this beauty.
    - It may refer to The Frog Prince; or, Iron Henry, a German fairy tale collected by the Brothers Grimm and published in 1812 in Grimm’s Fairy Tales. In the forest, a selfish princess accidentally drops her golden ball into a well. A frog offers to retrieve it in exchange for her friendship. She agrees but goes back on her word after getting the ball back and runs to her castle. The next day, she is eating with her father when the frog knocks on the door and requests to be let in. The king tells his daughter that she must keep her promise and she reluctantly obeys. The frog

sits next to her and eats from her plate, then desires to sleep in the princess's bed. She is disgusted at the idea of sleeping with the frog, but her father angrily chastises her for loathing someone who helped her in a time of need. She picks up the frog and places him in the corner of her bedroom, but he hops up to her bed and demands to sleep as comfortably as the princess. Furious, she throws the frog against the wall, but as he falls to the floor he has transformed into a handsome prince. He explains that he was cursed by a wicked witch and the spell could only be broken with the princess's help. The next day, the two go to the prince's kingdom where they will be married. In modern versions, the transformation is triggered by the princess kissing the frog (a motif that apparently first appeared in English translations). In other early versions, it was sufficient for the frog to sleep for three nights on the princess' pillow. The frog prince also has a loyal servant named Henry who had three iron bands affixed around his heart to prevent it from breaking from sadness when his master was cursed. When the frog prince reverts to his human form, Henry's overwhelming happiness causes the bands to break, freeing his heart from its bonds. (Wikipedia) See Fairy Tales and Folklore.

- "guarded by eunuchs black and white": In the Ottoman palace of Topkapı in Istanbul, Black eunuchs under the Kızlar Ağası, the Agha of the Girls, guarded the harem, while white eunuchs guarded the palace gates and the school of pages. Most of the Black eunuchs were enslaved boys taken from Sudan and Ethiopia and castrated on the way north, an operation that killed many of them.
- "locked at home in an iron chastity belt": The story that crusaders locked their wives in chastity belts before riding east is a later legend. The earliest known drawing of a chastity belt is in Konrad Kyeser's military treatise Bellifortis (1405), and most belts in museum collections are now thought to be later fabrications.
- "this old bloomer girl": Elizabeth Smith Miller wore loose trousers under a short skirt in Seneca Falls in 1851, and Amelia Bloomer championed the costume in The Lily, her temperance and women's rights paper, so that it took her name. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony wore it for a time before ridicule drove most women back into long skirts. See Women's Suffrage.
- "The Swiss had called her the Black Knight or blackamoor": The nicknames make her a striking, fearsome figure riding through the Alps in dark clothes and a turban. See the Black Knight of Ivanhoe in the Chapter 43 resources and the blackamoor ballad in the Chapter 35 resources.
    - Saint Maurice, commander of the Theban Legion raised in Roman Egypt, was martyred in the late third century at Agaunum, now Saint-Maurice in the Swiss canton of Valais, for refusing orders to persecute Christians; his historicity is not certain. A statue of about 1240 in Magdeburg Cathedral is the earliest known depiction of him as a Black African knight in armor, and he was venerated across Europe. Black knights could also be called this because of the color of their armor. A black knight is a literary stock character who masks his identity and that of his liege by not displaying heraldry. Black knights are usually portrayed as villainous figures who use this anonymity for misdeeds. They are often contrasted with the knight-

errant (white knight). The character appeared in Arthurian literature and has been adapted by various authors, in film and popular culture, and is sometimes associated with death or darkness. See Ancient Egypt.

- “the white witch sleeping under the snow”: The Alp is both the mountain and, in German folklore, the Alp, a nightmare spirit (below), so the sleeping peak hides a dangerous power.
    - Both are in folklore and literature. The Alp is a supernatural being, often likened to a demon, vampire, or incubus. It can be a spirit summoned by a witch or an evil person or can be a human or animal that transforms into an Alp during the night. Known for shapeshifting, sometimes appearing as a cat, pig, dog, snake, or even a small white butterfly. It wears a magical hat which grants powers like invisibility. The Alp may also possess an “evil eye” that causes illness and misfortune. Primarily known for attacking sleeping victims, causing nightmares and difficulty breathing, similar to sleep paralysis. They may also drink blood or milk from their victims. Can be warded off by placing a broomstick under a pillow, iron horseshoes on the bedpost, or shoes with toes pointing towards the door. Trapping them indoors by plugging holes and keeping a light on at night are also mentioned as protective measures. A White Witch is generally considered a benevolent or sympathetic magic practitioner, focusing on healing and/or helping others. In C.S. Lewis’s “The Chronicles of Narnia,” specifically “The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe,” Jadis, the White Witch, is the main antagonist, a powerful and malevolent sorceress who usurped the throne of Narnia. She is not human but rumored to be half-Jinn and half-Giantess. Described as tall with skin “white like snow or paper or icing-sugar,” with a very red mouth. She casts a spell of eternal winter, turns her enemies to stone, and is defeated by Aslan, who stands for Christ. (Wikipedia) See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “Perhaps she was the ladder personality”: “And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it” (Genesis 28:12, KJV). See The Bible.
- “he had purchased this new planet”: In Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s The Little Prince (1943), a businessman spends his days counting the stars because he believes he owns them, though he can do nothing with them; the little prince, who tends a single flower on his tiny planet, finds him absurd.
- “no old Boston tram”: Boston’s tram or streetcar system has a long and complex history, evolving from horse-drawn cars to electric streetcars and eventually to the modern MBTA’s Green Line and Mattapan Line. The system saw significant expansion in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with the first subway tunnel (Tremont Street) opening in 1897. Over time, many lines were converted to buses or trackless trolleys, and the system was consolidated under various entities, including the Boston Elevated Railway Company and the Metropolitan Transit Authority, before becoming part of the MBTA. (Wikipedia)

- “a four-faced cherub one hundred cubits high”: “And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings” (Ezekiel 1:6, KJV). See The Bible.
- “Every coffin should have its keyhole”: Mr. Spitzer’s wish has a history. The first recorded safety coffin, made for Duke Ferdinand of Brunswick in 1792, had a window for light, a tube for air, and a lid locked rather than nailed shut, with keys to the lid and to the tomb door placed in a pocket of his shroud. Later designs ran cords from the coffin to bells above ground so that someone buried alive could signal. Perhaps every coffin should have its telephone, “now in these days of instruments to deny both space and time, to say that all had been man’s dreams.”
- “he was not violent like a mad musician”: Young’s mad musician “had reduced a piano to fire wood in three minutes and had even burned the harp.” Mr. Spitzer, who could have hacked open the trunks with an axe, is not violent.
    - Raphael Montañez Ortiz gained recognition for his “Piano Destruction Concerts” in the 1960s, using an ax to chop up pianos as a form of performance art. Flag: after 1964. His piano destructions were performed in London in 1966 at the Destruction in Art Symposium.
- “that old knight Tancred”: Tancred, a hero of the First Crusade, is the knight of Torquato Tasso’s epic Jerusalem Delivered (1581). He loves the pagan warrior maiden Clorinda and, not knowing her in her armor, kills her in single combat at night, baptizing her as she dies. In Canto 13, when the crusaders need timber from an enchanted forest, Tancred strikes a tall cypress; blood flows from the cut, and Clorinda’s voice cries from inside the tree that he wounds her still. Claudio Monteverdi set the duel as Il combattimento di Tancredi e Clorinda (1624). Clorinda was never Tancred’s wife; Young makes her one. See Music and Composers.
- “She had been reading a little book opened at page seven when she died”: The book open at page seven marks a life stopped early, its story unfinished; seven, often the number of completeness, here marks the incomplete.
    - The trope of a book left open to a specific page or passage serving as a clue in a mystery novel is a classic device.
- “Perhaps it was she who was the master of keys”: grapples with the question of what happens after death. Mr. Spitzer contemplates whether the soul (“spirit”) needs a physical exit, like a chimney, if the conventional routes (“doors and passage-ways”) are closed. This reflects philosophical inquiries into the soul’s immortality and its separation from the body. The idea that “death was unknown to those who loved, and death was unknown to those who loved not, and death was unknown to those who died” suggests that death remains an enigma regardless of one’s experiences or beliefs. It’s a state beyond comprehension, aligning with existentialist themes of the unknown and the limits of human knowledge. The paragraph questions whether the senses provide a complete picture of reality. The idea that “Even the closed door was not closed, for should death be better known than love? Not all the senses were ever sealed at once” suggests that there are realities beyond immediate perception. The image of the butterfly escaping through the ear, “even when it was a door of the

silence," implies that even in the absence of sound, there are avenues for experience or existence. The description of Mr. Spitzer as a night watchman in the "starry universe" raises questions about the nature of reality. Is he a real figure, or is he merely a figment of someone's imagination? His light awakening "other sleepers, those he never knew" suggests the interconnectedness of existence, even unawares. The suggestion that he perhaps "had intended to lock and not to unlock" introduces the possibility that his actions may have unintended consequences, highlighting the limits of human control and the role of chance. The final lines emphasize Mr. Spitzer's role as the "only mourner among men," suggesting a profound sense of isolation and the burden of grief. His mourning for himself implies a recognition of his own mortality and the inevitability of loss. This connects to existentialist themes of individual responsibility and the search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless world.

- "the spirit might go up a chimney flue": In European folklore chimneys were a liminal space connecting the natural and supernatural worlds. Spirits were widely believed in the fifteenth century to be able to travel through closed doors and walls. An old custom in Britain and Ireland was to open a window or door at a death so the soul could leave, as Mr. Spitzer thinks of leaving "only one aperture through which the spirit might escape."
- "Perhaps her butterfly had sailed out of her ear": The Greek word psyche means both soul and butterfly, and the soul was often pictured leaving the body as a butterfly. See Greek Mythology.
- "he had always been so remarkably careful in making lists": Mr. Spitzer's meticulous accounting and listing is directly tied to his struggle with his identity, particularly his relationship with his deceased brother. He seeks a perfect balance, a mirrored reflection where everything in his life corresponds to his brother's, suggesting a desire to understand himself through this dualistic lens. The fear of "no differing counterpart" speaks to the existential anxiety of lacking a defined self, relying on another for definition. This resonates with philosophical concepts of identity formation, the "self" versus the "other," and the influence of external relationships on self-perception. Thinkers like Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir explored similar themes in existentialism. Spitzer's obsessive listing and indexing of even the most mundane objects (pearl buttons, rusted nail heads, etc.) reflects a deep-seated need to impose order on a chaotic world. He's trying to find patterns, connections, and a "common denominator" to make sense of existence. This aligns with the philosophical pursuit of metaphysics: trying to understand the fundamental nature of reality. The futility of Spitzer's efforts mirrors the inherent difficulties in finding absolute order or meaning in a world often perceived as absurd or chaotic (a key theme in existentialism and absurdism). The questions about the sail ("Was the sail unwinding the same as the winding sail?") touch on the philosophical problem of identity over time. Does something remain the same if its state changes? This is further complicated by the cyclical nature of the tides and the wagon wheels, implying a sense of eternal return or repetition. This connects to Heraclitus's famous saying, often given as "No man ever steps in the same river twice" (Plato's version is "you could not step twice into the same river," Cratylus 402a),

emphasizing the constant flux and change in the universe. The paragraph also hints at Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence. Spitzer's attempts to capture reality through lists and measurements are ultimately limited. His fear that "all the weight, as he had often complained, was on this weightless star" alludes to the disparity between the tangible and intangible, the concrete and abstract. He can list the physical properties of objects, but he cannot capture their essence or meaning. This is related to epistemology, the study of knowledge and its limitations. The paragraph suggests the impossibility of fully knowing or representing reality, as there will always be something missing or lost in translation. The description of Spitzer's actions creating "division as in division there was creation," suggests that in every act of creation, there is also an act of destruction. This mirrors the belief that every action has an equal and opposite reaction. This is connected to the concept of the "Tao" which states that everything is composed of two opposites, and that without the other, it cannot exist. See Nietzsche and Taoism and Zhuangzi.

- "in creation there was division as in division there was creation": Genesis tells creation as a series of divisions: "and God divided the light from the darkness" (Genesis 1:4, KJV). Life begins the same way: in nearly all animals the fertilized egg, or zygote, splits again and again, a process called cleavage. See The Bible.
- "Who knew the womb of a snowflake?": "Hath the rain a father? or who hath begotten the drops of dew? Out of whose womb came the ice? and the hoary frost of heaven, who hath gendered it?" (Job 38:28-29, KJV). See The Bible.
- "like that old coachman who had lost his passenger long ago": This may be the opium lady's black coachman, who drove her through the nights. See The Black Coachman.
- "where none had moved over the face of the waters": "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2, KJV). See The Bible.
- "who should find the doors which held back the sea": "Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb?" (Job 38:8, KJV). Young follows it at once: "The sea flowed like the waters from the womb." See The Bible.
- "his fingers turning to candles with flames like Mr. Chandelier": See Mr. Chandelier.
- "a lost bride who had played a game of hide-and-seek with the bridegroom": The old romance is "The Mistletoe Bough," a legend claimed by several English country houses and best known from Thomas Haynes Bayly's ballad of the 1830s: on her wedding day a bride hides in an old oak chest during a game of hide-and-seek, the lid locks shut, and her skeleton in its wedding dress is found years later. Samuel Rogers told the same tale of the Italian bride Ginevra in his poem Italy (1822). See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- "She would be found when she was dust and ashes": The body is found among the remnants of a life, "the bride who might almost have been the bridegroom," as if death dissolved the roles that defined her. Lost Atlantis drifts above, its cities "carried away while man slept and woman loved," and Mr. Spitzer has heard of conceptions by strange means, children "born by the ear of the dead," "because the wind blew," and

“because another woman had shouted at her”: forces at work beyond the senses. “Dust and ashes” is Abraham’s phrase before God: “I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes” (Genesis 18:27, KJV).

- “being that Lost Atlantis”: Plato tells of Atlantis in the Timaeus and Critias (about 360 BC), an island empire beyond the Pillars of Hercules that “in a single day and night of misfortune” disappeared in the depths of the sea (Timaeus, trans. Benjamin Jowett). See Plato and Platonism.
- “who were born by the ear of the dead”: In the Christian bible Mary is supposed to be impregnated by the Holy Spirit and not by a mortal man, thus giving birth to Jesus. A medieval belief held that Mary conceived through her ear when she heard the angel’s word, conceptio per aurem, and paintings of the Annunciation sometimes show a ray of light or the dove of the Holy Spirit entering her ear. See The Bible.
- “a sterile woman had conceived because another woman had shouted at her”: This may echo the barren Hannah of 1 Samuel, whose name Cousin Hannah shares, taunted by her husband’s other wife: “And her adversary also provoked her sore, for to make her fret, because the LORD had shut up her womb” (1 Samuel 1:6, KJV). Hannah prayed at Shiloh, “and the LORD remembered her,” and she bore Samuel (1 Samuel 1:19-20, KJV). In Luke, when the long-barren Elisabeth heard Mary’s greeting, “the babe leaped in her womb” and “she spake out with a loud voice” (Luke 1:41-42, KJV). See The Bible.
- “like that Spanish don”: It evokes a man whose bride leaves him not for another man but for the convent, to become a bride of Christ. Like the don’s bride, the suffragette left traditional roles for solitary journeys and quests.
    - It may refer to José Zorrilla’s play “Don Juan Tenorio,” Don Juan makes a bet that he can conquer more women than Don Luis. Don Luis challenges Don Juan to conquer a woman about to take her vows as a nun, and an engaged woman. Here is a Spanish don whose bride became a nun. In the play, Don Juan’s target, Doña Inés, is a novice nun whose innocence captivates him and leads him to contemplate redemption.
- “like a blind man playing dice by Braille”: Louis Braille, blinded as a child, published his system of raised dots for reading and music in 1829. Dice for the blind have raised pips.
- “searching for he knew not what”: He searches for “he knew not what,” and “magnetic doors” open by themselves, as if knowledge came unsought. The “windowless seraglio or cave or darkened tower” is the mind as a prison, and the “supernumerary love, a wife unknown” a hidden self. The “blind god of love” is love irrational and indiscriminate, and in the turban-winder’s unwinding “there should be no memory and no woman and no man.”
- “Love knew no age”: Jessica says in Shakespeare’s The Merchant of Venice, “But love is blind, and lovers cannot see / The pretty follies that themselves commit” (2.6). Cupid was sometimes depicted blindfolded; Erwin Panofsky traced the image in “Blind Cupid,” in Studies in Iconology (1939). See Shakespeare.

- “those knockings which might have come from him”: Modern Spiritualism, popular through the Victorian age, began in 1848 when the Fox sisters of Hydesville, New York, claimed that rappings in their house were messages from the dead; in 1888 Margaret Fox confessed that the knocks were made by cracking her toe joints, though she later took the confession back. In 1920 Thomas Edison told B. C. Forbes of The American Magazine that he was working on an apparatus for communicating with the dead. See Spiritualism and the Occult.
- “footless like the footless bird of paradise”: Skins of birds of paradise reached Europe from New Guinea with the feet cut off by the traders who prepared them, beginning with those brought home by the survivors of Magellan’s voyage in 1522, and Europeans came to believe the birds had no feet and lived always in the air. Linnaeus named the greater bird of paradise Paradisaea apoda, “footless,” in 1758.
- “the tree rooted in clouds with its branches growing downward”: The Bhagavad Gita (15.1) and the Katha Upanishad (6.1) describe the eternal ashvattha, the sacred fig, with its roots above and its branches below. See Hinduism.
- “He had felt as if he were Ali Baba in the cave of forty thieves”: Ali Baba in the cave of forty thieves is a folk tale from the One Thousand and One Nights book where the door to the treasure only opened if a person said the magic word, open sesame. The tale is not in the Arabic manuscripts. Antoine Galland added it to his French translation (1704-1717) after hearing it in 1709 from Hanna Diyab, a young Maronite storyteller from Aleppo.
- “there had been trunk lid after trunk lid”: Mr. Spitzer finds “so many wedding gowns, sheets of silk and veils of lace,” “many bridal gowns and no bride’s slippers,” “porous silks so thin that the least touch might cause them to fall into nothingness”: the trappings of a ceremony that never came. These are Young’s source story, the sealed trunks of Charles Studin’s suffragist, each holding a bridal trousseau; see the Chapter 31 resources.
    - Which leaves more questions than it answers. Had Cousin Hannah secretly wanted to marry even though it was supposed that she did not support the institution of marriage? Had there been forty suitors who wanted to marry her but she had backed out at the last minute? Had there been forty weddings where Cousin Hannah was rejected at the last minute? There is, of course, a deeper pull in men and women. Human beings are animals with instincts. One of the strongest is to reproduce. Mr. Spitzer has also thought about his lack of progeny to pass on the family since his brother is dead and he did not marry. Mr. Spitzer commented earlier that if Cousin Hannah had wanted to marry he would have married her when they were younger. If she had noticed him. A further study of marriage, suffrage and Cousin Hannah can be found in Volume 3 of To All My Darlings.
    - Young took the trunks from life. She told Studs Terkel that Charles Studin’s suffragist went to Europe every year for forty years, “brought back a heavily sealed trunk and had it placed in the basement of her Fifth Avenue house,” and never opened them. “It was his business as a lawyer to open the trunks when she died,”

and in each he found a complete bridal trousseau, “showing that after all she had a dream too.” One of Studin’s themes was “that you never know a person really until he is dead” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See the Chapter 30 resources.

- “He had been trapped by wedding gowns”: The wedding gowns turn into seas, sails, and shrouds, and Mr. Spitzer cannot tell whether there is one moon, many mirrored moons, or none, a world of reflections like Plato’s cave. He fears the census-taker as he fears final knowledge. The old maid who told women to “divest themselves of excess luggage” kept her trunks of wedding gowns, rejecting marriage yet longing for it, and Mr. Spitzer, a “dead man coming to mourn for her,” likens himself to the ferry of Charon, who carried the dead across the Styx.
- “let the dead bury the dead”: “But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead” (Matthew 8:22, KJV). See The Bible.
- “or perhaps a hen crowing if she was right”: An old proverb says, “A whistling woman and a crowing hen are neither fit for God nor men.” See the Chapter 43 resources.
- “no language contained truth”: The truth “was that which could not be expressed”: the ineffable of the mystics, “the word never written, the name never told.” His mind is “like a sieve,” and he walks on “coming to no end.” She died reading of “lovers never mated,” Eloise and Abelard, and he cannot tell whether she was Tristram or Yseult. The pennies on her eyes, “one in memory of the sun, one in memory of the moon,” close all perception, and he will not wake the dead for fear they might die again.
- “Eloise et Abelard”: The twelfth-century philosopher Peter Abelard and his student Héloïse secretly married, were parted when her uncle had Abelard castrated, and lived out their lives in the cloister, joined afterward by their letters. Young names them again among parted lovers in Chapter 65; see the Chapter 65 resources.
    - Peter Abelard was a medieval French scholastic philosopher, leading logician, theologian, teacher, musician, composer, and poet. In philosophy he is celebrated for his proposed logical solution to the problem of universals via nominalism and conceptualism and his pioneering of intent in ethics. Often referred to as the “Descartes of the twelfth century,” he is considered a forerunner of Rousseau, Kant, and Spinoza. He is sometimes credited as a chief forerunner of modern empiricism. In Catholic theology, he is best known for his development of the concept of limbo, and his introduction of the moral influence theory of atonement. He is considered (alongside Augustine) to be the most significant forerunner of the modern self-reflective autobiographer. He paved the way and set the tone for later epistolary novels and celebrity tell-alls with his publicly distributed letter, The History of My Calamities and public correspondence. In history and popular culture he is best known for his passionate, tragic love affair and intense philosophical exchange with his brilliant student and eventual wife, Héloïse d’Argenteuil. After they secretly married, Abelard sent Héloïse to the convent at Argenteuil; her uncle and guardian Fulbert, believing she had been cast off, had Abelard ambushed and castrated, and both entered religious life. Roscellinus and others made fun of him. Their son was

named Astrolabe. (Wikipedia) See the problem of universals in the Chapter 49 resources.

- Héloïse d’Argenteuil was a French nun, philosopher, writer, scholar, and abbess. Héloïse was a renowned “woman of letters” and philosopher of love and friendship, as well as an eventual high ranking abbess in the Catholic Church. She achieved approximately the level and political power of a bishop in 1147 when she was granted the rank of prelate nullius. She is famous in history and popular culture for her love affair and correspondence with the leading medieval logician and theologian Peter Abelard, who became her colleague, collaborator, and husband. She is known for exerting critical intellectual influence upon his work and posing many challenging questions to him such as those in the Problemata Heloissae. Her surviving letters are considered a foundation of French and European literature and primary inspiration for the practice of courtly love. Her erudite and sometimes erotically charged correspondence is the Latin basis for the bildungsroman genre and serve alongside Abelard’s Historia Calamitatum as a model of the classical epistolary genre. Her influence extends on later writers such as Chrétien de Troyes, Geoffrey Chaucer, Madame de Lafayette, Thomas Aquinas, Choderlos de Laclos, Voltaire, Rousseau, Simone Weil, and Dominique Aury. She is an important figure in the establishment of women’s representation in scholarship and is known for her controversial portrayals of gender and marriage which influenced the development of modern feminism. When Abelard gave a rationalistic interpretation of the Trinitarian dogma he was charged with heresy. Theologia by Peter Abelard refers to his three treatises on the Trinity, written in the 12th century. These works, titled Theologia “summi boni,” Theologia Christiana, and Theologia “scholarium,” explore the nature of God and the Trinity using dialectical reasoning. Theologia Christiana is considered the most influential of the three. However, Abelard’s Theologia was also controversial, with the first version being condemned as heretical and burned in 1121. Abelard employed logical arguments and philosophical analysis to examine theological concepts, particularly the Trinity. He adopted the Boethian sense of theologia as discourse about the divine nature, according to a study from Oxford Academic. The core of his work revolves around understanding the nature and relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Abelard’s approach, which emphasized reason and challenged traditional interpretations, led to conflicts with Church authorities. His works were condemned at the Council of Soissons (1122) and the Council of Sens (1141). Abelard proposed that Christ’s death was primarily a demonstration of God’s love, rather than a satisfaction of divine justice. This view is now known as the moral influence theory. Despite the controversies, Abelard’s work had a lasting impact on medieval philosophy and theology, particularly in the development of scholasticism. (Wikipedia)
- The Letters of Abelard and Heloise are two series of passionate and intellectual correspondences apparently written in Latin during the 12th century. The purported authors, Peter Abelard, a prominent theologian, and his pupil, Heloise, a gifted young woman later renowned as an abbess, exchanged these letters following their ill-fated love affair and subsequent monastic lives. The letters reveal the personal

and intellectual relationship between Abelard and Heloise, and provide an intimate glimpse into the societal context of 12th-century Europe. They've played a significant role in the development of Western epistolary literature, attracting attention from historians, literary scholars, and general readers alike. The Letters of Abelard and Heloise also serve as primary source documents on questions of medieval gender roles, love, and monastic life. (Wikipedia)

- "Was she Tristram, or was she the white Yseult?": Tristram (Tristan) and Iseult (Yseult, Isolde) is a chivalric romance told in many versions since the twelfth century, the tragedy of the illicit love between the Cornish knight Tristram and the Irish princess Iseult, wife of his uncle King Mark. The white Yseult is Iseult of the White Hands, the Breton princess Tristram marries for her name; in the version of Thomas of Britain and many later tellings the marriage is never consummated, so she too is a lover never mated. Matthew Arnold's Tristram and Iseult (1852) is in three parts, "Tristram," "Iseult of Ireland," and "Iseult of Brittany," and gives the last part to the white-handed wife, whom Arnold, unusually, makes the mother of Tristram's children.
- "no physician even to a centaur": Chiron, the wise centaur, was the healer and teacher of Asclepius, Achilles, and Jason. Wounded by a poisoned arrow of Heracles that would not let him die, he gave up his immortality. See Greek Mythology.
- "two pennies, one in memory of the sun": Coins were laid on the eyes of the dead to keep the lids closed, a custom often linked to the Greek obol placed in the mouth of the dead as Charon's fare across the Styx. Mr. Spitzer has just pictured himself as "Charon's ferry boat." See Greek Mythology.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Alabaster

A fine, smooth, white stone used for carving.

Ambivalence

Mixed or contradictory feelings.

Ambivalently

With mixed or contradictory feelings or meanings.

Amulet

A charm worn against evil.

Aperture

An opening.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Attrition

A wearing away by friction.

Ballast

Heavy material, such as stones, carried low in a ship to keep it steady.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Bier

A stand on which a corpse or coffin is carried.

Billows

Great waves.

Bisect

To cut or divide into two parts.

Blackamoor

An old term for a Black African or any dark-skinned person, common in European art and in decorative figures of Black servants. It is now considered offensive.

Bodice

The close-fitting upper part of a dress.

Bulrush

A tall rush of marshes.

Calyx

The ring of sepals that encloses a flower in bud.

Carousel

A merry-go-round. Earlier, a tournament in which horsemen performed exercises and displays.

Casket

A small, often ornate box for jewels or valuables. In American usage, also a coffin, so Young's "casket containing no jewel" carries both meanings.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Chalet

A wooden Swiss mountain house with wide overhanging eaves.

Chameleon

A lizard that can change the color of its skin.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Chattels

Movable possessions.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chronometer

A timepiece of great accuracy, used at sea to find longitude.

Chrysalis

The hard case in which a caterpillar becomes a butterfly or moth.

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Clapper

The hanging metal tongue inside a bell that strikes it to make it ring.

Cockle

A small saltwater clam with a ribbed, heart-shaped shell. A cockleshell boat is a small, flimsy one.

Coif

A close-fitting cap, such as the white headdress a nun wears under her veil.

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Conformation

The shape and proportions of an animal’s body, especially a horse’s.

Congealed

Thickened or stiffened, as with cold.

Contraband

Forbidden; smuggled.

Corolla

The petals of a flower taken together.

Crinoline

A stiff petticoat or hooped frame worn to spread a skirt.

Crucible

A heat-resistant pot for melting metals. Figuratively, a severe test that changes a person.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Cubit

An ancient measure of length, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, about eighteen inches.

Curdled

Thickened into lumps, like soured milk.

Cusp

A point where two curves meet; a pointed end.

Deference

Polite respect, or yielding to someone else’s wishes or judgment.

Deluge

A great flood or downpour. The Deluge is Noah’s flood.

Devious

Winding; straying from the direct way.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Domino

A loose hooded cloak worn with a half mask at a masquerade.

Dominoes

A game played with small oblong tiles marked with spots.

Dry dock

A dock that can be pumped dry so a ship’s hull can be repaired.

Duplicity

Double-dealing.

Eaves

The edges of a roof that overhang the walls.

Echoic

Echoing.

Edelweiss

A small alpine plant with woolly white star-shaped flower heads.

Ere

Before.

Erratically

Unpredictably; irregularly.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Etude

A piece of music written to practice a technique.

Eunuch

A man who has been castrated. Eunuchs were employed for centuries to guard harems and to serve as officials in royal courts in the Middle East, China, and Byzantium. See The eunuch (Ch 35).

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Filament

A fine thread or fiber.

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Flounced

Trimmed with flounces, wide strips of gathered or pleated fabric sewn to a skirt or dress.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Genealogy

A record of a family’s descent.

Gentian

A plant with deep blue trumpet-shaped flowers.

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Glissando

A rapid slide up or down a musical scale.

Grimace

A twisted expression of the face.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Hanging gardens

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: terraced gardens said to have been built by King Nebuchadnezzar II. No trace of them has ever been found.

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Hobble skirt

A long skirt so narrow below the knee that it hampered walking, fashionable about 1910.

Inarticulate

Unable to express oneself clearly.

Indeterminate

Not clearly fixed or defined.

Intaglio

A design cut into the surface of a gem or stone.

Jack-in-the-pulpit

A woodland plant whose flower spike stands under a hooded leaf, like a preacher in a pulpit.

Kibitzer

An onlooker at a card game who offers unwanted advice.

Larboard

The old word for the left side of a ship.

Lintel

The horizontal beam across the top of a door or window.

Litigacious

An old form of litigious: fond of lawsuits; quarrelsome.

Lorgnette

A pair of eyeglasses held up to the eyes by a long handle.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Mantua-maker

A dressmaker; from the mantua, a loose gown of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Matador

The bullfighter who kills the bull.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mourning cloak

A dark butterfly with pale-edged wings that survives the winter as an adult; also a black cloak worn in mourning.

Myopic

Nearsighted.

Nuncio

An ambassador of the Pope; any messenger.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Pannier

A frame or hoop worn under a skirt to widen it at the hips.

Pavilion

A large tent; a light ornamental building.

Petticoat

An underskirt.

Phantasmal

Ghostly; like a phantom or an illusion.

Pigeon-hole

A small open compartment in a desk for papers.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Plumb line

A cord with a weight at the end, used to find the true vertical or to sound depth.

Porous

Full of tiny holes that let water through.

Prescience

Knowledge of events before they happen.

Presentiment

An intuitive feeling that something is about to happen.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Psyche

A tall mirror that swings in a frame; also the soul.

Purlieus

Outskirts; haunts.

Rosette

A rose-shaped decoration of ribbon or lace.

Samovar

A metal urn used, especially in Russia, to boil water for tea.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Scintillation

A spark or flash.

Scrupulous

Very careful to do what is right.

Scrutiny

Close, searching examination.

Seraglio

The women’s quarters of a Muslim palace; a harem.

Sexton

A church officer who looks after the building and churchyard and often digs the graves.

Shah

The title of the king of Persia, now Iran.

Signet

A small seal, often set in a ring, used to stamp documents.

Skein

A loosely coiled length of yarn or thread.

Solder

Melted metal used to join metal parts; to join them with it.

Somnolence

Sleepiness; drowsiness.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Spangled

Covered with spangles, small glittering ornaments.

Spectre

A ghost.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Stomacher

An ornamental panel worn over the chest and stomach under the lacing of a bodice.

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women's right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women's Suffrage.

Supernumerary

Extra; more than the number needed. In the theater, an extra with no lines.

Surrey

A light four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with two seats, often with a fringed canopy on top.

Tallow

Animal fat used for candles and soap. Tallow-colored is a dull, yellowish white.

Taloned

Having talons, the sharp claws of a bird of prey.

Tracery

Delicate lacework of interlacing lines.

Transcended

Went beyond.

Transience

The state of passing away quickly.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Troubadour

A poet and singer of southern France in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries who sang of courtly love.

Tumult

A loud, confused uproar.

Tumultuous

Loud, wild, and disorderly.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Ward-heeler

A minor political worker who canvasses a city ward for a party boss.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Wentletrap

A sea snail whose shell winds like a spiral staircase.

Zither

A stringed instrument with a flat soundboard, played lying flat.

Chapter 53

Content note: *This chapter mentions Peron Spitzer's suicide and tells of a man who drowns himself after a game of pool.*

Summary

Mr. Spitzer has found no instrument wide enough for his feelings and no unity for his life, only an unfinished song marked by many segnos. Since Peron's apparent suicide he is mistaken everywhere for his brother: strangers stop him on Boston Common and in Scollay Square to ask who won on the dogs and the horses, and to his chagrined surprise he knows. He knows the speakeasies and billiard halls, who wore the featherweight crown longest, the fighter who believed he battled his father's ghost, the fistmele of archery and the suits of an ancient card game, though he has never seen a fight. He walks Boston in his black cloak, past the Cockerel Church, the State House, and the Beacon Hill house with its twin parlors, and carries a coin for Charon that the old ferryman will not take. He recalls a ward-heeler found at death to have been a woman and concludes that "this life is the chrysalis, and no one knows whether he will be the butterfly or the moth." Peron was a chameleon crawling across a cloth of many colors; Joachim crawls forever upon a black velvet pall.

Characters present

Catherine Cartwheel · Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Fear and Courage · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · The Search for Meaning · Time

Symbols: Cards, Games, and Chance · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Fog and Mist · Music and Instruments · Snow, Ice, and Winter · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Marguerite Young on Her Craft · Plato and Platonism · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres

Allusions: Ancient Egypt · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Judaism · Music and Composers · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Sir Walter Raleigh · The Bible · The Civil War · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, Mr. Spitzer is described as a "lost musician with his unfinished song," struggling to find a way to express the vast range of his feelings and

experiences, which surpass any available instrument or keyboard. His music is marked by many segnos and signs, suggesting incomplete or concealed meanings. This metaphor extends to his life itself, indicating a sense of incompletion and fragmentation, a yearning for unity and integration that remains unfulfilled.

- A central motif is the blurring of identities between Mr. Spitzer (Joachim) and his brother Peron. Since Peron's apparent suicide, Mr. Spitzer has been mistaken for Peron and struggles with the paradox of being a "pale replica," a mask or dream rather than flesh and blood. The reversal of roles with Joachim seeming to be Peron, exposes the fragile boundary between life and death, self and other, reality and illusion.
- Time is portrayed as fluid and illusory. Mr. Spitzer contemplates the collapse of centuries into moments and the eternal cry of a lost child wandering in darkness. He is haunted by the feeling that he has "missed his brother by only a minute," symbolizing missed opportunities and the relentless passage of time. The imagery of trains passing by, always missing the right connection, reinforces this sense of temporal dislocation and existential solitude.
- Peron's life is described as volatile, colorful, and many-sided, like a chameleon changing colors, while Joachim's is opaque, timorous, and marked by a search for equilibrium. Peron's life is a "crazy patchwork" of many identities and experiences, whereas Joachim is the "heart of darkness," withdrawn and selfless. This contrast underscores themes of individuality, fate, and the search for meaning in a fractured existence.
- Death is depicted as the "heart of life," and yet life itself may be the "heart of death." Mr. Spitzer reflects on the inevitability of change, the impossibility of stasis, and the paradox of "changelessness" as a form of change. Love, represented by the blind god Cupid, is indifferent to distinctions between the living and the dead, blurring boundaries and questioning the significance of identity itself.
- Mr. Spitzer is a solitary mourner, wandering through empty landscapes seeking his dead brother and a place where they might be reunited. His grief is diffused and pervasive, spreading like an ink blot over his unwritten music and his existence. The imagery of the black cloak, the ivory-headed cane, and the shadowed self accentuate the theme of mourning and existential alienation.
- Through his late-blooming sympathies with his brother, who was involved in shady and illegal activities, Mr. Spitzer acquired unexpected knowledge of the underworld of gambling, speakeasies, boxing, billiards, and other sports and games. This knowledge, alien to his former life as a musician and lawyer, symbolizes the crossing of boundaries between worlds, the mingling of high and low, life and death, order and chaos.
- Recurring images of chess, billiards, and card games illustrate life's strategic, repetitive, and sometimes futile nature. Mr. Spitzer sees himself as a timid chess player afraid to make a move that would mean his final defeat, highlighting the paralyzing fear of change and the interplay of fate and free will. The idea that he might have "missed his cue" in life or become a "dead man walking" underscores the theme of existential uncertainty and the search for selfhood.

- The chapter closes with the idea that identity is fluid and that men are like chameleons or accidental conformations, changing with circumstances and perceptions. Joachim's fixed, black-velvet pall identity contrasts with Peron's many-colored, shifting persona. This evokes the essential ambivalence and mystery of human existence and the elusive nature of the self.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "His character did not correspond to his experience." What does Mr. Spitzer mean?
- "Changelessness, too, was a kind of change." How can a man who never moves keep changing?
- "The wound was the creative thing." What wound, and what does it create?

Characters

- Strangers ask him "Who won on the dogs? Who won on the horses?" Why does being taken for Peron both disconcert and "oddly" flatter him?
- Peron was "like a chameleon … crawling forever across a many-colored cloth," Joachim "like a chameleon crawling forever upon a black velvet pall." What does each brother reflect?
- After the ward-heeler's secret is found, Mr. Spitzer decides "that many men must live to be the widow's of themselves." What does he mean, and does it describe him?

Connections

- Mr. Spitzer carries a coin "for old Charon," and the ferryman will not take it. Where have Charon and his fare appeared before?
- The ward-heeler's secret is found only at the post-mortem, as Cousin Hannah's wedding gowns were found only after her death. Why does the novel keep its deepest secrets for the dead?
- "Death danced with the lady." How does this echo Hannah's "mad dance, dance of death" in Chapter 43?

Reflection

- "Love knew no time." Can love outlast the line between the living and the dead?
- "No man lived to die his own death—but in this life, died many times." Is that true?
- Mr. Spitzer would pity anyone who "had not lived also through a mistaken dream." Is a mistaken dream part of a life?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer (Joachim)

- A composer and musician, burdened by an unfinished “song,” representing his incomplete life and unresolved feelings.
- He is introspective, sensitive, and often alienated from the world. His reflections reveal a man caught between worlds like life and death, self and other, reality and illusion.
- He wrestles with the sense of being overshadowed by his brother’s legacy and struggles with his own identity and place in existence.
- A bankrupt attorney closing last estates, mistaken everywhere for his gambling twin, he finds he knows Peron’s world of speakeasies, billiard halls, and boxing rings “much to his chagrined surprise.”

Peron Spitzer

- Mr. Spitzer’s brother, a gambler and more flamboyant, volatile personality.
- Peron’s life is described as colorful, many-sided, and seemingly successful, but also transient and elusive.
- His death creates a “rift” in Spitzer’s life and intensifies Spitzer’s struggle with his own existence and identity.

Catherine Cartwheel

- Peron was blind to “the opium lady’s beautiful and enigmatic face which Joachim had seen in every cloud conformation or rippling shadow.” Joachim once escorted “my drugged, dazzled mother” to archery meets on a seaside golf course, and Vera’s voice slips into his story.

Research: Themes

Identity and Duality

See: Twins and Doubles · Identity and the Self

- The chapter explores the paradox of the two brothers’ overlapping identities. Joachim as the “pale replica” of Peron, and Peron as an elusive, many-personality figure. The idea that Joachim might be Peron and vice versa underlines the instability of self and questions the fixity of identity.

Life, Death, and Memory

See: Death and Mortality · Memory and the Past

- Mr. Spitzer contemplates death not as an end but a transformation and continuation beyond physical existence. The boundaries between life and death blur, as love and memory maintain connections beyond mortality. He mourns his brother, yet also mourns himself, reflecting on the theme of grief diffused over time.

Time and Eternity

See: Time

- Time is depicted as fluid, collapsing moments, and shifting perspectives. Mr. Spitzer experiences a disorienting sense of timelessness, where centuries might seem like minutes, and events overlap or miss connections like trains passing at the wrong station.

Failure and Unfulfilled Potential

See: The Search for Meaning

- Spitzer’s sense of failure pervades the chapter. His unfinished compositions, his timid nature, and his unrealized potential as a musician contrast with his brother’s more vibrant, reckless, life.

The Illusory Nature of Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- The narrative suggests that much of human experience is illusion or performance, with shifting roles, identities, and perceptions. Peron’s chameleon-like existence contrasts with Joachim’s desire for stability and order.

The Intersection of the Mundane and the Metaphysical

See: Cards, Games, and Chance

- Spitzer’s knowledge expands beyond his musical sphere to encompass gamblers, fighters, sportsmen, and other facets of earthly life, blending the terrestrial and the spiritual, the everyday and the eternal.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Music and the Unfinished Composition

See: Music and Instruments

- Symbolizes Spitzer’s incomplete life and emotional fragmentation. Music also represents the ineffable, the transcendent, and the ungraspable aspects of existence.

The Train and Missed Connections

- Represents lost opportunities, failed encounters, and the passage of time. The recurring image of trains passing the wrong station illustrates disjunctions in Spitzer's life and identity.

Chess and Cards

See: Cards, Games, and Chance

- Symbolizes strategic life moves, fate, and chance. Spitzer's timidness as a chess player echoes his fear of making irreversible decisions.

The Black Cloak and Ivory Cane

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Emblems of mourning, identity, and secondary intelligence. The cane serves as an extension of Spitzer's self and his cautious, measured approach to life.

Sports and Fighters

See: Fear and Courage

- Represent struggle, endurance, defeat, and human frailty. Spitzer's extensive knowledge of fighters and sportsmen symbolizes life's battles and the inevitability of loss.

The Weather and Nature (Fog, Snow, Wind)

See: Fog and Mist · Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Reflect Spitzer's moods and the shifting, uncertain nature of reality. The snow's color shifts (black, white) and the fog symbolize ambiguity and blurred perception.

Research: Resources

- "People were indifferent to those things which interested Mr. Spitzer": Young drew Peron's world from her own reading: "I've read a great many books on gambling, and I've been interested in it since early childhood, because I knew gamblers in early childhood." Of her research she said, "Baseball, gambling, vaudeville, burlesque jokes, all this became part, as well as Moby Dick, the Bible" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Marguerite Young on Her Craft and Gambling and Playing Cards.
- "the one chance in a million": Young told Studs Terkel, "Mr. Spitzer is really two people. There are two Mr. Spitzers. One is a musical composer who has lived in memory of his gambling brother, the suicide, and who since his brother's death has never composed a music which can be heard." Peron "is a gay gambler, an impresario in the world of

games and sports," who describes himself "as the gambler who took one chance in a million, committed suicide, and lived." In the third draft she realized "that it was not just a case of twins, but the two parts of the same man… a beautiful case of duality, which might be in all of us, like left and right, shadow and sunlight" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Marguerite Young on Her Craft and Twins and Doubles.

- "as if suddenly an angel had passed": When a conversation falls suddenly silent, the French say "un ange passe," an angel is passing.
- "They probably would not have understood Mr. Spitzer's swan song": The legend that the swan sings most beautifully just before it dies is old; in Plato's Phaedo (84e-85b) Socrates says swans sing at their death out of joy that they are going to the god they serve. See Plato and Platonism.
- "the old shell games in which the victim had no chance": In the shell game, or thimblerig, a pea is shuffled under three shells or thimbles and the operator palms it, so the mark can never win. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- "A child was always wandering lost, crying in the night somewhere": "But what am I? / An infant crying in the night: / An infant crying for the light: / And with no language but a cry" (Alfred Tennyson, In Memoriam A. H. H., LIV, 1850). See Romantic Poets.
- "For who should catch a moment on the wing": "He who binds to himself a joy / Does the winged life destroy; / But he who kisses the joy as it flies / Lives in eternity's sun rise" (William Blake, "Eternity"). See Romantic Poets.
- "Madness had also its reasons": Young turns Pascal's "Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point," "The heart has its reasons which reason knows nothing of" (Blaise Pascal, Pensées, 1670).
- "the heart of darkness, as Mr. Spitzer sighingly remarked": Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899) follows Marlow up the Congo to the ivory trader Kurtz, through the horrors of Belgian King Leopold's rule, in which millions of Congolese died.
- "he should knock upon all doors, all ivory doors": Through the gate of ivory, Homer and Virgil say, come false dreams, and through the gate of horn the true. See the gates of horn and ivory in the Chapter 42 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- "whose faces were parallelograms": Young sets the textbook definition beside the glass prism that breaks light into colors: in geometry a prism is a solid whose two ends are equal, similar, and parallel polygons and whose sides are parallelograms.
- "as if she were Venus rising from the sea": See Botticelli's The Birth of Venus in the Chapter 52 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- "that which he carried now in his purse for old Charon": Charon, the ferryman of the dead in Greek myth, took a coin for the crossing of the Styx. See the coins on Cousin Hannah's eyes in the Chapter 52 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- "old Dan Cupid, the wizened cherub, the blind god of love": Dan was an old title of respect, from the Latin dominus; Berowne calls him "Dan Cupid" in Shakespeare's

Love’s Labour’s Lost (3.1). See blind Cupid in the Chapter 52 resources. See Shakespeare.

- “each snowflake different from every other”: Wilson A. Bentley of Jericho, Vermont, photographed more than five thousand snowflakes and found no two alike (W. A. Bentley and W. J. Humphreys, Snow Crystals, 1931). Each forms around a speck of dust, as Young’s “grain of wandering stardust.”
- “turned to cross North Square”: North Square is in Boston’s North End, where the Paul Revere House still stands. Built around 1680, it is the oldest house remaining in downtown Boston, and Revere lived there from 1770 to 1800.
- “the golden Capitol dome”: The State House or the Massachusetts State House is the state capitol and seat of the government. Charles Bulfinch’s State House on Beacon Hill was completed in 1798; its dome, sheathed in copper by Paul Revere’s company in 1802, was gilded in 1874.
- “why were there no cypress trees in New England?”: The cypress has been the tree of mourning since antiquity. Ovid tells of the boy Cyparissus, who killed his beloved stag by accident and was changed into a cypress so that he might grieve forever (Metamorphoses 10). See Greek Mythology.
- “Cockerel Church, the golden cock upon the weathervane”: The Cockerel Church was the New Brick Church on Hanover Street in Boston’s North End, later the Second Church, nicknamed for the gilded rooster weathervane Shem Drowne made for it in 1721; the rooster now turns above the First Church in Cambridge. The cock became Peter’s emblem because he denied Jesus three times before the cock crew (Matthew 26:74-75), and Pope Gregory I is said to have deemed it a suitable Christian symbol. Pope Nicholas I decreed that roosters could be used on weathervanes. Protestant churches used this symbol on church steeples to distinguish them from Catholic churches.
- “Parker House which, he was pleased to see, was still doing an excellent trade”: Parker House may refer to the Omni Parker House. A historic hotel in Boston, Massachusetts. It opened in 1855 and gave its name to the Parker House roll; Boston cream pie is also said to have been created there.
- “an old Beacon Hill house where he once had lived”: Beacon Hill is an historic neighborhood in Boston with Victorian style brick houses lit by antique lanterns.
- “In Scollay Square, they thought he was a lawyer”: Scollay Square was a vibrant city square in downtown Boston, Massachusetts. A district of theaters, burlesque houses, and sailors’ bars, it was razed in 1962 to make way for Government Center.
- “In the region of Boston Common”: Boston Common is a central public park in downtown Boston, Massachusetts. Set aside in 1634, it is the oldest public park in the United States.
- “when he crossed an iron bridge”: There are several historic iron bridges in Massachusetts.

- “some painted with enormous human eyes”: Eyes painted on a ship’s bow, the oculus, go back to ancient Egypt and Greece and survive on Chinese junks and Maltese fishing boats, so that the boat can see its way.
- “he crossed the Public Gardens”: The Boston Public Garden was the first public botanical garden in America. It was decorative and flowery from its inception, featuring meandering pathways for strolling. Its swan boats, designed by Robert Paget, have carried passengers around the lagoon since 1877.
- “a black coachman sleeping in the coachman’s box”: See The Black Coachman.
- “shadowed Brattle Street”: Brattle Street is the most famous residential street in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow lived at 105 Brattle Street.
- “the roof of the Sistine Chapel”: The Sistine Chapel is a chapel in the Apostolic Palace in Vatican City. Michelangelo painted its ceiling between 1508 and 1512.
- “the tombs of the Medicis”: The tomb of the Medicis is the Medici Chapel at the Basilica of San Lorenzo, Florence, Italy. The pawnbroker’s sign of three golden balls is often traced to the balls, or palle, on the Medici arms.
- “Mt. Ararat, where Noah’s Ark was supposed to have rested”: Mount Ararat is a snow-capped dormant volcano in Turkey. “And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat” (Genesis 8:4, KJV). See Genesis.
- “hanging gardens in Babylon”: The Hanging Gardens of Babylon: see Chapter 36, Resources, for the full entry.
- “the hoof of Pegasus striking water in an arid place”: The hoof of Pegasus is a myth about the winged, divine horse in Greek mythology. Wherever it stepped a water spring would burst forth. The spring he struck on Mount Helicon was Hippocrene, the horse’s spring, sacred to the Muses. See Greek Mythology.
- “the shrouded Bedouins”: The Bedouins are a nomadic Arab tribe.
- “old Brookline or old Newburyport or old Newport”: Brookline is a suburb in Boston, Massachusetts. Newburyport is a coastal city in Massachusetts. Newport is a city in Rhode Island.
- “the stone men upholding the roofs of the houses of the dead”: Columns carved as men holding up a roof are called atlantes, after Atlas, who bears the sky; carved women are caryatids. See Greek Mythology.
- “the music of the spheres”: Pythagoras held that the planets make a music by their motion, too constant for human ears to notice; in the Myth of Er at the end of Plato’s Republic a siren on each sphere sings one note, and together they make one harmony. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres.
- “an old billiard-hall king who had once miscued”: Young retells the legend of Louis Fox, who lost the American billiards championship to John Deery at Rochester, New York, on 7 September 1865. In the story a fly landed on the cue ball as Fox neared victory; trying to shoo it, he touched the ball, miscued, lost, and drowned himself in the

Genesee River. Only the match, his disappearance in December 1866, and the finding of his body in May 1867 are on record; the fly and the suicide are legend.

- “the only man who could beat Louis XIV at billiards”: Louis XIV is said to have taken up billiards on his doctors’ advice, and Antoine Trouvain engraved him at the table in 1694. Michel Chamillart “had originally won the king’s favour through his honesty and his skill at billiards” (Encyclopaedia Britannica, “Michel Chamillart”); he became Controller-General of Finances in 1699 and Secretary of State for War in 1701. Louis XIV encouraged gambling at Versailles to entertain the nobles and keep them close, though gambling was banned for the general populace.
- “the cue-stick was sometimes called a baton”: The cue grew out of the mace and is similar in shape to a cane. There is no reference for a cue-stick being called a baton. Cue-sticks could be very elaborate with jewels, inlays, and works of art. A baton was used in the military as a weapon and in heraldics. Billiards was first played with the mace, a stick with a broad head; players began to turn it around and strike with the narrow tail, the queue, which gave the cue its name. In English heraldry the baton sinister, a shortened diagonal band, marked royal bastards.
- “He knew who was behind the 8-ball”: Being behind the eight ball refers to being in a difficult or disadvantageous position, often one from which it is hard to recover. The term originates from the game of pool, where being “behind the eight ball” means your cue ball is blocked by the eight ball, making it difficult to make a shot.
    - Pool is a series of cue sports played on a billiard table. The table has six pockets along the rails, into which balls are shot. Of the many different pool games, the most popular include: eight-ball, blackball, nine-ball, ten-ball, seven-ball, straight pool, one-pocket, and bank pool. Eight-ball is the most frequently played discipline of pool, and it is often thought of as synonymous with “pool.” The generic term pocket billiards is sometimes also used, and favored by some pool-industry bodies, but is technically a broader classification, including games such as snooker, Russian pyramid, and kaisa, which are not referred to as pool games. There are also hybrid games combining aspects of both pool and carom billiards, such as American four-ball billiards, bottle pool, cowboy pool, and English billiards. (Wikipedia)
- “Death rode a stumbling nag”: In Revelation, “I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him” (Revelation 6:8, KJV), and the swift horse of the archer is the white horse of Revelation 6:2: “he that sat on him had a bow” (KJV). Young’s death rides a stumbling nag, an old, worn-out horse: not graceful, certain, or dignified, but awkward and uncertain in its approach. See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “Martin Luther was a great believer in bowling”: Martin Luther, the Protestant Reformation founder, had a bowling lane built next to his house. Mr. Spitzer thought Martin Luther recommended bowling as an outlet for “...human aggression and the thirst for conquest…” Organized sports has been compared to simulated war and as a diversion for the populace.

- “a queen of the desert sands had played billiards”: The “queen of the desert” who played pool may refer to Cleopatra in Shakespeare’s play Antony and Cleopatra where she is bored and asks Charmian to play billiards. “Let it alone; let’s to billiards: come, Charmian” (2.5), an anachronism, since billiards is a much later game. See Shakespeare.
- “Sir Walter Raleigh”: Sir Walter Raleigh was beheaded but there is no mention of him playing cards with his executioners. He is said to have felt the edge of the axe and called it a sharp medicine that would cure all diseases. See Sir Walter Raleigh.
- “what was a playing card with eight pips”: A playing card with eight pips is any of the four eights in a standard deck. Each suit (hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades) contains an 8 card with eight corresponding suit symbols (pips) on the face. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “what was an act of trumping”: Trump comes from triumph, the name of an old card game, which is why the musician first thinks of an angel blowing a trumpet. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “who was the jack of discs, who was the jack of cups”: The Latin suits of Italian and Spanish cards and of the tarot are cups, coins, swords, and batons; in tarot the coins are often drawn as discs or pentacles. A jack of cups is the knave of that suit. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “knew that in skijoring”: Skijoring is a winter sport in which a person on skis is pulled by a horse, dogs or a motor vehicle. Although skijoring is said to have originated as a mode of winter travel, it is currently primarily a competitive sport.
- “what was the difference between a heavyweight and a middleweight”: Boxing in Young’s day had eight traditional weight divisions: flyweight, bantamweight, featherweight, lightweight, welterweight, middleweight, light heavyweight, and heavyweight, grouping fighters of similar size. Flag: after 1964 more divisions were added, and today there are 17 for men and 17 for women, from strawweight to heavyweight.
- “who wore the featherweight crown for the longest time in history”: John Patrick Kilbane was an American featherweight boxer in the early part of the 20th century. He held the World Featherweight title from 1912 to 1923, the longest period in the division’s history, having defended the title against four contenders during the reign. He was inducted into the Ring Magazine Hall of Fame in 1960 and the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 1995.
    - Tony Canzoneri held the world light-welterweight title for only 33 days in 1933.
- “who lost his leathers”: In boxing, “leathers” is slang for boxing gloves, specifically those made of leather. It refers to the traditional material used for boxing gloves, which offers superior protection, comfort, and durability compared to synthetic alternatives.
- “He knew who changed his weight from fight to fight”: Henry Jackson Jr. was an American professional boxer and a world boxing champion who fought under the name Henry Armstrong. He is the only fighter to ever hold world championships in three

divisions (featherweight, lightweight and welterweight) simultaneously. Armstrong was one of the few fighters to win titles in three or more different divisions: featherweight, lightweight, and welterweight. He defended his welterweight title a total of 19 times.

- “a whole Decameron of sports”: Decameron is a collection of novellas by Giovanni Boccaccio. Written about 1353, it gathers a hundred tales told over ten days by ten young people who have fled the plague in Florence.
- “who fought a spurred angel until the angel lost its feathers”: In Genesis 32:22-32 Jacob wrestles with an angel. See Genesis.
- “his black etude for the black keyboard only”: Black keyboards where the sharps are white were found in harpsichords and fortepianos. The white keys with black sharps became the standard because it was easier to see the keys.
- “what great contention was fought for more than an hour”: Young’s bout without a blow is not on record, but the longest fight on record was far from bloodless. On April 6, 1893, Andy Bowen and Jack Burke fought the longest fight in history. Bowen had originally scheduled the fight with another opponent, however after dropping out of the fight, Jack Burke, who was the latter’s trainer, fought the bout instead. The fight took place at the same Olympics Club Bowen had defended his title from Carroll. The fight lasted 110 rounds over seven hours and 19 minutes (each round lasting three minutes). It was reported that the fight went on for so long that the spectators who stayed to watch the fight had fallen asleep in their seats. It was also recorded that at round 108, with no clear end in sight, referee John Duffy made the decision that if no winner had emerged in the next 2 rounds, the bout would be ruled a “no contest.” With both men having become too dazed and tired to come out of their corners, Duffy declared the match a no contest. Burke broke all the bones in both of his hands and was bedridden for six weeks. He had considered retiring after the fight but chose to continue competing. Bowen fought four more times after the fight. The club where the fight took place would burn to the ground four years later.
    - Andy Bowen died at 27 years old after his 1894 fight with Kid Lavigne.
- “who hit the canvas eighty-seven times and rose again”: The highest number of knockdowns recorded in a single professional fight involved Christy Williams, who was knocked down 42 times by Battling Nelson in a 1902 bout. Nelson himself was knocked down 7 times in that same fight, which he ultimately won by knockout in the 17th round. Another fight between Joe Jeanette and Sam McVey lasted for three and a half hours for forty-nine rounds in 1909 where Jeanette was knocked down twenty-seven times and McVey nineteen times. Jeanette won the fight. Jeanette was never given a shot at the world heavyweight title because he was African-American. At that time the rules did not state that when a fighter is knocked down the other fighter must go to a neutral corner.
- “the umpire counts to twelve”: Referees have a ten count rule where the boxer must get to his feet, unaided, by that time. The count does not refer to the number of seconds since there have been times when a long count has resulted in a boxer having more than ten seconds. Modern boxing rules have a standing eight count.

- “a former featherweight who had thought, every time he entered the ring, he was battling his father’s ghost”: The fighter retired from the ring and lived in isolation believing he had killed his father’s ghost when he killed that opponent. This is similar to the plot line in the Shakespeare play Hamlet where the ghost is Hamlet’s dead father. See Shakespeare.
- “He knew a man who had fought on when he had broken his hand”: The man who fought on with a broken hand stands for endurance: fighting on when the body is broken, as Mr. Spitzer does with his losses and the suffragette with her quest.
    - Burke is said to have broken all the bones in both his hands during the fight with Bowen.
- “He knew a champion steeple-sitter”: The champion pole sitter was Alvin “Shipwreck” Kelly, who started the flagpole-sitting fad in 1924 and in 1930 sat 49 days and one hour atop a pole on the Steel Pier at Atlantic City. The first pole sitters were the stylites, Christian hermits like Simeon Stylites, who lived for decades on a pillar in Syria in the fifth century.
- “a man who was a Bridge of Sighs, a Bridge of Lies, a lake of fire”: Bridge of Sighs is a bridge in Venice, Italy. Built about 1600 over the Rio di Palazzo, it led prisoners from the Doge’s Palace to the prisons, and their sighs at a last view of Venice gave it its name. Bridge of Lies is a legendary pedestrian bridge in Sibiu, Transylvania, Romania. Lake of fire is a place of after-death punishment in Egyptian and Christian religions. “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Revelation 20:14, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse and Ancient Egypt.
- “many had wound up their days on Skid Row”: See Skid Row in the Chapter 52 resources.
- “No man lived to die his own death”: Rainer Maria Rilke prayed, “O Herr, gib jedem seinen eignen Tod,” “O Lord, give each his own death” (The Book of Hours, The Book of Poverty and Death, 1905).
- “Death danced with the lady”: The suffragette, who left the roles of bride and wife for a life of wandering, disguise, and defiance, meets death as a dance partner, close and intimate rather than a distant stranger.
    - It may refer to the Danse Macabre, the Dance of Death, which spread in late medieval art after the Black Death: Death, often a skeleton, leads people of every rank in a dance to the grave, the great equalizer. Hans Holbein the Younger’s woodcuts (1538) are the best known, and Camille Saint-Saëns wrote the symphonic poem Danse Macabre (1874). See Music and Composers.
    - See Cousin Hannah’s “mad dance, dance of death” on a mountain top in the Chapter 43 resources.
- “perhaps for angels in all his angles”: Angels in all his angles may refer to a Latin pun attributed to Pope Gregory I when he saw pale skinned boys at the slave market. Bede tells the story (Ecclesiastical History of the English People 2.1): seeing fair-skinned boys for sale in the Roman marketplace and told they were Angles, Gregory said they

had the faces of angels, a pun remembered as “Non Angli, sed angeli,” “Not Angles but angels.”

- “when the parties changed”: The two political parties in the United States switched roles in the nineteenth century.
- “this traditional Republican”: A traditional Republican may refer to the original Republican Party that emerged in the 1850s, founded by anti-slavery activists who opposed the expansion of slavery into US territories. During the 19th century, the party was strongly associated with the abolition of slavery and the preservation of the Union. See The Civil War.
- “admirer of Garrison”: Garrison may refer to William Lloyd Garrison who published a newspaper in Boston against slavery and was for women’s rights. His paper was The Liberator (1831-1865).
    - Included is Althea Garrison because she was the first transgender person to be elected to a state legislature although she was not active in politics at the time Young wrote this novel.
- “he had been a woman masquerading as a man”: Young’s ward-heeler has a real counterpart. Murray Hall, a Tammany Hall politician in New York who worked the 13th Senatorial District for some twenty-five years, lived as a man for about forty years, married twice, and voted at a time when no woman in New York could. When Hall died of breast cancer in January 1901, the discovery that Hall had been born female made headlines across the country, and Hall was buried in women’s clothing with none of the political colleagues at the funeral (Smithsonian Magazine, “The Mystery of Murray Hall”). See Women’s Suffrage.
- “the rules introduced by the Marquis of Queensberry”: The Marquis of Queensberry, John Douglas (9th Marquess of Queensberry), did establish the Queensberry rules that are the basis for rules in modern boxing. The rules were written by John Graham Chambers and published under the Marquess’s sponsorship in 1867.
- “John L. Sullivan”: John L. Sullivan was the last bare-knuckle heavyweight champion, defending his title against Jake Kilrain over 75 rounds in 1889, and he lost it to James J. Corbett in 1892 in the first heavyweight championship fought with gloves under the Queensberry rules.
- “Gentleman Jim with his diamond-studded teeth”: Gentleman Jim may refer to James J Corbett who revolutionized boxing and was the only man to beat John L. Sullivan. There is no reference to Corbett having diamond-studded teeth but after his boxing career he did star in low budget films. He was considered the first sports sex symbol of the era.
- “his old Prince Albert suit”: The Prince Albert suit is a frock coat with double-breasted, peaked lapels.
- “leather punching bags, stuffed with sand or flour”: Greek boxers trained with the korykos, a hanging leather bag filled with sand, flour, or seeds, so the bags were indeed “used thousands of years before the discovery of the New World.”

    - Evidence suggests that ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans utilized various forms of punching bags for combat training. These bags were often crafted from materials like leather and filled with sand or other readily available materials. Ancient Chinese and Japanese civilizations also used animal skin punching bags filled with sand or grain for martial arts training. Indian wrestling traditions also employed practice equipment called “mukha dhanda,” which were essentially hanging leather pouches filled with sand, pebbles, or grain. See Ancient Egypt.
- “he knew the Jew who was knocked out by an angel”: It recalls Jacob at Peniel: “And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day” (Genesis 32:24). Jacob was left lame and renamed Israel. Young turns the wrestling match into a boxing match.
    - This may refer to Genesis 32 that describes Jacob wrestling with a “man” throughout the night. In the Book of Hosea, this figure is explicitly called an “angel.” During the struggle, Jacob is injured, specifically having the socket of his hip put out of joint. This injury left him with a limp. Jacob is considered a foundational figure in Judaism and the patriarch from whom the nation of Israel descends. “Yea, he had power over the angel, and prevailed: he wept, and made supplication unto him” (Hosea 12:4, KJV). See Genesis and Judaism.
- “the Greek fighters had used the cestus”: In ancient Greece and Rome, the cestus (also spelled caestus) was a type of combat glove, similar to modern-day brass knuckles, used in boxing and gladiatorial combat. Early Greek cesti were primarily leather straps or thongs used to protect the hands during boxing matches. As they evolved, particularly in Roman gladiatorial contexts, they became more elaborate, incorporating metal studs, spikes, and even lead or iron to inflict greater damage.
- “who beat Mary, Queen of Scots, at golf”: Mary, Queen of Scots, is often called one of the first women golfers. The Book of Articles (1568), drawn up by her enemies, charged that after the murder of her husband Lord Darnley in February 1567 she played golf and pall-mall at Seton with the Earl of Bothwell, whom she married that May.
- “what famous baseball player never made a come-back”:
    - It may refer to Lou Gehrig. He was forced to retire from baseball in 1939 at the age of 36 due to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), which became known as “Lou Gehrig’s disease.” He played his last game on April 30, 1939 and never played another major league game after taking himself out of the lineup on May 2, 1939, ending his consecutive game streak at 2,130. He died two years later in 1941.
- “old Egyptian wrestling holds”: Ancient Egyptian wrestling, depicted in tomb paintings and sculptures, showcased a variety of holds and techniques, many of which are still recognizable in modern wrestling styles. These depictions, particularly those at Beni Hasan, reveal over 4000-year-old techniques, including throws, takedowns, and ground grappling, emphasizing both athletic prowess and strategic combat training. See Ancient Egypt.

- “who drove a team of hairless racing dogs across the Arctic zone”: Hairless dogs, like the Mexican Xoloitzcuintli, could never survive the Arctic; the feat is impossible.
    - It may refer to Joseph-Armand Bombardier’s Tracked Vehicles, a precursor to the snowmobile.
    - In the winter of 1925, relays of dog teams carried diphtheria antitoxin 674 miles across Alaska to Nome in five and a half days, and the lead dogs Togo and Balto became famous.
- “who vaulted the farthest distance”: The phrase belongs to Mr. Spitzer’s list of sporting records, and it suggests someone who has made the greatest leap, physically, emotionally, or spiritually, surpassing all others in attempting the impossible.
    - It may refer to Jesse Owens who held the men’s long jump world record for twenty-five years. He achieved his record-breaking leap of 8.13 meters (26 ft 8 in) on May 25, 1935. This record stood for an impressive 25 years until it was broken by fellow American Ralph Boston in 1960.
    - If the vault is the pole vault, Cornelius Warmerdam, vaulting on a bamboo pole, was the first to clear fifteen feet (1940), and his best, 4.77 meters (15 feet 7¾ inches) in 1942, stood as the world record until 1957.
- “that early tennis balls were black”: Historically, balls were either black or white, depending on the background color of the court.
- “the pebble embedded in Goliath’s forehead”: “And David put his hand in his bag, and took thence a stone, and slang it, and smote the Philistine in his forehead, that the stone sunk into his forehead; and he fell upon his face to the earth” (1 Samuel 17:49, KJV). See The Bible.
- “tallyho was a term in hunting”: “Tallyho” is a cry traditionally used in fox hunting to signal the sighting of the quarry (the fox). It’s also used as an exclamation of excitement or triumph, particularly when hunting.
- “archery was employed originally only in hunting”: Archery has been a crucial hunting method for millennia, with evidence of its use dating back to prehistoric times. Bows and arrows were also essential for warfare in many cultures throughout history. The widespread adoption of firearms, particularly flintlock weapons, by the 1800s led to a decline in the use of archery for hunting, especially in regions where firearms were readily available. However, archery did not disappear entirely. In fact, the 19th century saw a revival of archery as a sport and recreational activity, with the establishment of archery clubs and competitions in Europe and elsewhere. A notable example is the Toxophilite Society in London, founded in 1781. While firearms became more prevalent, archery continued to be used for hunting in some areas, particularly where firearms were not as accessible or by those who preferred the traditional methods. Indigenous peoples in many parts of the world went on using bows and arrows in hunting and war, and archery kept its spiritual and social meaning in many societies; in Japan, kyūdō became a spiritual discipline. The book “The Witchery of Archery” by the Thompson brothers, who took up archery after the American Civil War, is credited with inspiring a revival of the sport in the United States.

- “that fistmele, which he might at one time have supposed was a term in boxing”: Fistmele refers to the brace height, which is the distance between the bowstring and the deepest part of the bow’s grip, traditionally measured using a fist with the thumb extended. It’s a critical measurement for traditional bows, impacting performance and noise levels.
- “are swimming strokes”: The butterfly stroke grew out of the breaststroke in the 1930s and was first swum as a separate Olympic event in 1956; the crawl is the freestyle stroke.
- “the bird cage, of course, has something to do with gambling”: “birdcage” typically refers to Chuck-a-Luck, a dice game played with a distinctive hourglass-shaped cage containing three dice. The game is also known as “birdcage” or “sweat rag.” Players bet on the outcome of the dice roll after the dealer flips the cage and the dice come to rest. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “the flying horse is a hold in wrestling”: “Flying Mare” or “Flying Horse” (also known as Kasek Neyja or Mare) is a throw where a wrestler rotates their opponent over their back using a rope grip, similar to a shoulder throw but with a focus on rotational momentum and a bending forward motion. This technique is used in various wrestling styles, including Cornish wrestling and Collar and Elbow wrestling. In professional wrestling, “flying” moves refer to aerial maneuvers like dives and leaps onto opponents.
- “acorns, hearts, bells, and leaves”: are associated with German-suited playing cards, a traditional card system used in Central Europe. These suits predate the more internationally recognized French suits (hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades). German-suited cards typically feature 32 or 36 cards with these four suits. The acorns suit is one of the oldest. Leaves is another of the original suits. Hearts are the same in both the German and French systems. Bells are a distinctive German suit. German suits are believed to have influenced the development of the French suits. For example, the French “clubs” are thought to be derived from the German “acorns.” German-suited cards are still used in many parts of Central Europe. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “medieval ladies snow-balling”: There are historical depictions of medieval ladies participating in snowball fights. The January fresco of the months in the Torre Aquila of the Castello del Buonconsiglio at Trento, Italy (about 1400), portrays individuals engaged in a snowball fight, showcasing the postures and expressions of players. Snowball fights are also referenced in medieval chronicles.
- “the clouded Argonauts”: In Greek mythology, the Argonauts were a group of heroes who, led by Jason, sailed on the ship Argo to retrieve the Golden Fleece from Colchis. The myth of the Argonauts is one of the most famous tales from Greek mythology. See Greek Mythology.
- “Chinese kite fighting”: Chinese kite fighting, also known as “fighter kite” flying, is a competitive sport where participants attempt to cut the strings of their opponents’ kites using specially designed kites and string. The string is often coated with abrasive

materials like glass or other substances to enhance its cutting ability. The last kite remaining in the air wins the contest. Kites date back to over two thousand years in China.

- “Peron had been like a chameleon”: Chameleons are popularly believed to take on the colors of whatever they stand on, which is why an old joke asks what happens when a chameleon crawls onto plaid. In fact they change color mostly to signal and to control their temperature, by tuning tiny crystals in their skin (Jérémie Teyssier and others, Nature Communications, 2015). Flag: after 1964.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Ambivalence

Mixed or contradictory feelings.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Apoplectic

Red-faced and shaking with rage, as if about to have a stroke.

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Barouche

A fashionable four-wheeled carriage with a folding half-hood and two seats facing each other.

Bedouin

A nomadic desert Arab.

Bemused

Puzzled and lost in thought.

Blasé

Bored and unimpressed from having seen too much.

Blatant

Loud and showy; obvious.

Bookie

A bookmaker, who takes bets and pays off the winners.

Bowler

A hard felt hat with a rounded crown, called a derby in America; also one who bowls.

Brigantine

A two-masted sailing ship, square-rigged on the foremast.

Calliope

A keyboard instrument of steam whistles, heard on showboats and at fairs.

Cauliflower ear

An ear swollen and misshapen by repeated blows, common among boxers.

Chagrin

Distress or annoyance at having failed or been humiliated.

Chameleon

A lizard that can change the color of its skin.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chrysalis

The hard case in which a caterpillar becomes a butterfly or moth.

Clinch

In boxing, a hold in which the fighters grip each other.

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Conformation

The shape and proportions of an animal’s body, especially a horse’s.

Congealed

Thickened or stiffened, as with cold.

Contrapuntal

Of counterpoint: two or more independent melodies sounding together.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Crone

A withered old woman.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Disdain

Scorn; contempt.

Domino

A loose hooded cloak worn with a half mask at a masquerade.

Dominoes

A game played with small oblong tiles marked with spots.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Duplicity

Double-dealing.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Empyrean

The highest heaven, the realm of pure fire or light.

Enigmatic

Mysterious; puzzling.

Equable

Even-tempered; not easily disturbed.

Esse

Actual existence; being (Latin, “to be”), as in the phrase in esse.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Etude

A piece of music written to practice a technique.

Euchred

Outwitted or cheated, from the card game euchre.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Filament

A fine thread or fiber.

Fire-dog

An andiron, one of a pair of metal stands that hold logs in a fireplace.

Fitful

Starting and stopping; irregular.

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Frigid

Very cold; stiffly unfriendly.

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Hanging gardens

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: terraced gardens said to have been built by King Nebuchadnezzar II. No trace of them has ever been found.

Hansom

A two-wheeled covered cab with the driver seated high behind.

Harpsichord

A keyboard instrument, ancestor of the piano, whose strings are plucked rather than struck.

Hobble skirt

A long skirt so narrow below the knee that it hampered walking, fashionable about 1910.

Hulk

The body of an old ship; a big, clumsy person or thing.

Illimitable

Without limits; boundless.

Immolation

Sacrifice, especially by fire.

Imperceptibly

So slowly or slightly as to go unnoticed.

Inarticulate

Unable to express oneself clearly.

Incongruous

Out of place; not in keeping with its surroundings.

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Intermittent

Stopping and starting.

Interstellar

Between the stars.

Inveterate

Long settled in a habit and unlikely to change, as in “inveterate gambler.”

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Jaundiced

Sour and distrustful, as if seeing through the yellow of jaundice.

Jaunty

Lively and self-confident; set at a rakish angle.

Lope

A long, easy, bounding stride.

Lucid

Clear; clear-headed.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Mace

A heavy club carried as a weapon or a symbol of authority; also the early stick used in billiards.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Mercurial

Quick and changeable in mood. From the swift Roman messenger god Mercury and the liquid metal named for him.

Mien

A person’s look or manner.

Miscue

In billiards, a stroke in which the cue slips off the ball; any blunder.

Morosely

Gloomily, sullenly.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mourning cloak

A dark butterfly with pale-edged wings that survives the winter as an adult; also a black cloak worn in mourning.

Mundane

Ordinary; of this world.

Nag

An old or worn-out horse.

Ninepins

A bowling game with nine pins, forerunner of tenpins.

Nocturnal

Of or happening in the night.

Numbers racket

An illegal lottery in which bettors pick numbers, usually run by organized crime. Young writes “a number’s racket.”

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Obtuse

Slow to understand.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Pall

A cloth spread over a coffin; anything dark that covers.

Paradox

A statement or situation that seems to contradict itself and yet may be true.

Parallelogram

A four-sided figure whose opposite sides are parallel.

Parsimonious

Very unwilling to spend money; stingy.

Patent leather

Leather with a hard, glossy finish.

Peregrination

A long, wandering journey.

Peregrinations

A journey, especially a long or meandering one.

Petrified

Turned to stone; also, paralyzed with fear.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Polygon

A flat figure with many straight sides.

Porous

Full of tiny holes that let water through.

Pram

A baby carriage.

Predilection

A preference or special liking.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Profligate

A reckless, immoral spendthrift.

Pumice

A light, porous, grey volcanic stone.

Punch-drunk

Dazed and confused from repeated blows to the head.

Refraction

The bending of light as it passes from one medium to another.

Retribution

Punishment given in return for a wrong.

Roulette

A gambling game in which a ball comes to rest in a numbered slot of a spinning wheel.

Satinwood

A hard, lustrous yellow wood used for fine furniture and instruments.

Segno

A sign in written music marking where a repeat begins or ends.

Sepulchral

Of the tomb; gloomy and deathly.

Sequestration

Seclusion; a setting apart.

Shell game

A swindle in which a pea is hidden under one of three shells or cups and shuffled, and bettors guess where it is. The operator usually palms the pea, so no one can win.

Slalom

A downhill ski race on a winding course between pairs of flags.

Sloop

A sailboat with one mast.

Spats

Short cloth gaiters worn over the instep and ankle.

Speakeasy

An illegal bar during Prohibition.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Steeplechase

A horse race over fences, ditches, and water jumps, first run cross-country from one church steeple to another.

Stumble-bum

A clumsy, punch-drunk boxer; a down-and-out.

Sublunar

Beneath the moon; earthly.

Sublunary

Of this world; beneath the moon.

Supernumerary

Extra; more than the number needed. In the theater, an extra with no lines.

Surrey

A light four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with two seats, often with a fringed canopy on top.

Tactlessly

Without tact; bluntly.

Tallow

Animal fat used for candles and soap. Tallow-colored is a dull, yellowish white.

Tallyho

The huntsman’s cry on sighting the fox.

Tenement

A crowded, run-down apartment building.

Torpor

A sluggish, heavy, half-asleep state.

Tort

A wrongful act, other than a breach of contract, for which one may sue.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Tweed

A rough woolen cloth, often of mixed colors, first woven in Scotland.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Vagaries

Unpredictable changes or whims.

Velocity

Speed in a given direction.

Volatile

Changeable; quick to evaporate.

Volitional

Of the will; done by choice.

Ward-heeler

A minor political worker who canvasses a city ward for a party boss.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Whalebone

Baleen, the flexible plates from the mouths of certain whales, once used to stiffen corsets.

Whirligig

A spinning toy; anything that whirls.

Chapter 54

Content note: *This chapter mentions the suicide of Mr. Spitzer's twin brother, Peron.*

Summary

From his years with the opium lady, Mr. Spitzer knows the subterranean world of dreams, and since Peron's death he hears all day the noises of Peron's friend the sound effects man, who could make a city where no city was. He walks a Boston that will not hold still: the Flatiron and Fishback buildings loom in the fog, a news-hawk cries that President Wilson lies dead, and the man who carried the lantern for Paul Revere asks him for a tip on the horses. Mistaken for Peron or for a madman, he hands out cheroots to the dead, refuses the railroads, bridges, and lodestars that derelicts offer him, and searches for lost heirs, his greater work being "to reunite a man with himself." He refuses a carbuncle from a maharajah's crown, preferring glass to real jewels, then reads that a jewel is missing from a rajah's crown and that the thief's description is his own, until he finds the newspapers are ten years old and carry Peron's obituary, which mourns a famous sportsman. At the end his elegy, written on scraps of paper kept in his opera hat, blows down a long, dark street while he stamps his cane and weeps.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · The Sound Effects Man · Vera Cartwheel · Catherine Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Duality and Doubles · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Madness and Sanity · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence · Society, Class, and Race · The Search for Meaning · Time

Symbols: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Mirrors and Reflections · Pearls and Jewels · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Augustine and Christian Theology

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · American Writers · Astronomy · Dante · Exploration and the Poles · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Music and Composers · Napoleon and Wellington · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Civil War · Women's Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- At the beginning, Mr. Spitzer is described as knowing the “subterranean world—of the vast unconscious like a dream no one had dreamed,” filled with fantastical images such as golden spires sunken under the sea, underwater fountains, narrow queens with wooden faces, and old heroes nurtured on mares’ milk. This passage establishes the surreal, dreamlike atmosphere that pervades the chapter. It symbolizes the unconscious mind’s vastness and mystery, reflecting Mr. Spitzer’s psychological state and his passive role in understanding things that transcend rational comprehension.
- Mr. Spitzer hears a “sound effects man” who can imitate everything from trains, roosters, barking dogs, to the wind and ice creaking. This character, though unseen by Mr. Spitzer, fills the environment with chaotic noises that disturb the silence Mr. Spitzer cherishes but also evokes an unwilling envy in him. The sound effects man embodies the chaotic, uncontrollable external world that contrasts with Mr. Spitzer’s desire for silence and order. It also metaphorically represents the intrusion of madness, memory, and noise into Mr. Spitzer’s internal world after his brother’s death.
- Throughout the chapter, Mr. Spitzer wrestles with his identity, often confusing himself with his brother Peron, who has died. He searches for him among the living and the dead, blurring the lines between himself and his brother, reality and dream, living and dead. This passage explores themes of duality, identity crisis, and grief. The indistinguishability of the brothers and the shifting realities emphasize the fragile nature of selfhood and the impact of loss.
- Mr. Spitzer wanders through a city resembling Boston but constantly changing, with streets moving, buildings appearing and disappearing, and landmarks like the Flatiron Building or the Fishback Building misplaced. The city becomes a metaphor for Mr. Spitzer’s mental landscape: uncertain, unstable, and haunted by memory and illusion. This shifting environment reflects his inner confusion and his search for meaning and connection.
- Mr. Spitzer meets various figures (derelicts, disguised persons, forgotten heirs, and those who have lost their identity or status) such as the old cancer specialist who does not know his own greatness, or the old woman who had been Lady Macbeth but now wanders as a man. These encounters highlight themes of loss, forgotten greatness, and the fragility of identity. They also underline Mr. Spitzer’s role as a mediator attempting to restore lost connections or identities, reflecting his own struggle with self and memory.
- Mr. Spitzer is agitated and fearful over a missing jewel from a rajah’s crown, an incident he is somehow implicated in but does not remember clearly. This episode symbolizes the elusive nature of truth and guilt, and the burden of unremembered or misunderstood events. The jewel itself can be seen as a metaphor for something precious lost or perhaps time, identity, or reality.

- Mr. Spitzer seeks out “lost heirs,” “forgotten legacies,” and “persons who had forgotten their bank accounts,” trying to restore what has been lost. He helps the poor and forgotten, buying clothes and necessities for those in need. This portrays Mr. Spitzer as a figure of compassion and redemption, despite his own suffering and confusion. It also reflects the broader theme of searching for and reclaiming lost fragments of identity and memory.
- Mr. Spitzer is described as a composer who carries his musical notes on scraps of paper, composing an elegy that is fragmented and incomplete, with motifs of mistake and truth intertwined. The music represents life’s ephemeral and fragmented nature, the interplay of creation and error, memory and loss. Mr. Spitzer’s music is his means of making sense of his existence and grief, even as it remains unresolved.
- The chapter repeatedly returns to Mr. Spitzer’s grief for his dead brother and his own fractured existence, caught between life and death, reality and dream, certainty and doubt. The imagery of snow, fog, shadows, and shifting streets reinforce this pervasive melancholy and ambiguity. This is the emotional core of the chapter, emphasizing the universal human experience of loss and the difficulty of finding meaning in a world that is constantly changing and often incomprehensible.
- The chapter closes with Mr. Spitzer, alone, his elegy scattered like music fluttering away in the wind, a figure both present and absent, caught in a liminal space beyond human knowledge. This ending encapsulates the chapter’s meditation on mortality, artistic creation, and the transience of life and memory. Mr. Spitzer’s elegy symbolizes his enduring yet fading presence in a world indifferent to individual existence.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “Perhaps, indeed, every man must know two worlds.” Which world does each brother belong to?
- “He preferred glass jewels for the reason that glass jewels were glass, but real jewels were real and, therefore, of no value to him.” Why?
- “Sometimes he thought the best part of him was his mistake.” What seed of truth can a mistake hold?

Characters

- The sound effects man could “create the illusion of the city where no city was.” Why does he stir Mr. Spitzer’s “unwilling envy”?
- The thief’s description “was the description of himself.” What has Mr. Spitzer stolen, if only “the jewel of time”?
- Peron’s obituary shows that “his brother had been better thought of than he had known.” What does Mr. Spitzer learn about Peron, and about himself?

Connections

- His “greater work” is “to reunite a man with himself.” How is every lost heir he seeks a version of his search for Peron?
- The greatest Lady Macbeth now wanders “dressed as a man,” like the ward-heeler of Chapter 53. Why does Young keep returning to lives lived in disguise?
- On his compass “all four points were North.” Where else in the novel do maps and directions fail?

Reflection

- “Each man was a deposed king, surrounded by his own fallen glory.” Is Mr. Spitzer right never to challenge another person’s illusions?
- “There was ineffable beauty in this grief… for it illuminated him.” Can grief illuminate?
- His elegy blows away down a dark street. Is music lost if no one hears it?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer (Joachim Spitzer)

- The protagonist, an aging, reflective man struggling with his brother’s death and his own sense of self. He is a man of order and logic but is overwhelmed by grief and uncertainty, experiencing shifting realities and identities. Mr. Spitzer is profoundly lonely and disoriented, caught between madness and sanity.
- He experiences shifting identities with Peron, unsure of who he is or whether he is alive or dead.
- His grief is pervasive, touching on universal themes of loss and the search for meaning.
- He is meticulous but uncertain, often doubting his perceptions and memories.
- Despite his despair, he displays moments of kindness and creative impulse, especially through his music.

Peron Spitzer

- Mr. Spitzer’s deceased brother, described as wild, gregarious, and reckless, almost the opposite of Joachim. Peron’s life and death haunt Joachim, and his presence is felt as a contrasting force driving Joachim’s reflections and wanderings.

Sound Effects Man

- A mysterious figure associated with Peron, capable of producing chaotic, mimicry-like sounds symbolizing the noise and madness of life. He represents the opposite of Spitzer’s silence and order.

Research: Themes

Duality of Identity and Madness

See: Identity and the Self · Duality and Doubles · Madness and Sanity

- Mr. Spitzer oscillates between his own identity and that of his brother, sometimes confused about who he truly is. The chapter explores the thin line between sanity and madness, with Joachim embodying order and Peron chaos, yet both are reflections of each other.

Life, Death, and the Unconscious

See: Dreams and Imagination · Death and Mortality

- The narrative blurs the boundaries between the living and the dead. Mr. Spitzer's experience suggests he might be dead or in a liminal state ("he was dead"), emphasizing the ambiguity of existence and the unconscious mind's role in understanding life.

Memory, Time, and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Time

- Time is fluid and non-linear. Newspapers are dated years ago but read as current; streets and cities shift; memories and experiences overlap. This challenges the concept of objective reality and highlights the fragility of memory.

Isolation and Grief

See: Isolation and Connection · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Joachim's profound loneliness is expressed through his endless wandering and failed attempts to find connection or meaning after Peron's death. His grief touches on universal sorrow, described as a "precious grief" that illuminates him despite its pain.

The Search for Meaning

See: The Search for Meaning

- Mr. Spitzer's journey is a metaphorical search for self-understanding, love, and redemption, yet it is fraught with failures, illusions, and ambiguities.

Music and Creation

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Music symbolizes order, creativity, and the attempt to impose meaning. Mr. Spitzer is described as a composer of life's elegy, writing fragments of music on his clothing, representing his fragmented perception and desperate attempt to create coherence.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Sea and Water Imagery

See: The Sea and Water

- The sea symbolizes the unconscious, the fluidity of reality, and the passage between life and death. Underwater fountains, sea's burning gold, and submerged cities evoke a dreamlike state and loss.

Mirrors and Reflections

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- Mirrors symbolize identity and illusion. Mr. Spitzer sees his shadow or reflection change or move independently, emphasizing his fractured self.

The Black Cape and High Silk Hat

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- These identify Mr. Spitzer's figure as a ghostly, almost theatrical presence, marking him as an outsider and a man out of time.

Jewels and Coins

See: Pearls and Jewels

- Gems and coins appear repeatedly, symbolizing value, loss, and illusion. Mr. Spitzer refuses real jewels, preferring glass ones which is a metaphor for preferring illusion over reality.

The Sound Effects Man

- Represents chaos and the intrusion of noise into Mr. Spitzer's ordered world, symbolizing the inescapability of life's dissonance.

The Compass and Directions

- The compass always pointing North symbolizes disorientation and the impossibility of finding a true direction or meaning.

Research: Resources

- "He could whistle like the calliope": In Greek mythology, Calliope is the name of the Muse of epic poetry, known for her eloquence and beautiful voice. Calliope can also refer to a musical instrument, a steam-powered organ with whistles, often associated with circuses and riverboats. See Greek Mythology.

- “an old-fashioned Maxwell automobile”: Maxwell was an American automobile manufacturer which ran from 1904 to 1925. The present-day successor to the Maxwell company was Chrysler, now Stellantis North America, which acquired the company in 1925.
- “had he been Peter, he would have betrayed Christ every five minutes”: The Denial of Peter refers to the three acts of denial of Jesus by the Apostle Peter as described in all four Gospels of the New Testament. “Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice” (Matthew 26:34, KJV). See The Bible.
- “his old, gilded Venetian billfold”: A “Venetian billfold” likely refers to a slim, leather wallet, often bi-fold, designed to hold bills and cards, inspired by the style and craftsmanship associated with Venice. The term “Venetian” often suggests a connection to Italian craftsmanship and quality.
- “a Venetian doge”: Venetian doge was elected for life by the city-state’s aristocracy.
- “he had never been to Siam”: Siam was the old name for Thailand.
- “last year’s Grand Steeplechase”: Grand Steeplechase is in Paris, France and is a race for horses five years old and older.
- “a lead nickel which had been given to him by a blind beggar”: A lead nickel was a counterfeit coin cast in lead, so a “lead nickel” came to mean anything worthless. The real United States nickel, first struck in 1866, is 75 percent copper and 25 percent nickel.
- “a golden shekel or talent or florin”: A shekel is an ancient Mesopotamian coin, usually of silver. A shekel was first a unit of weight and became currency in ancient Tyre, Carthage and Hasmonean Judea.
    - The Attic talent, also known as the Athenian talent or Greek talent, is an ancient unit of weight equal to about 26 kilograms (57 lb), as well as a unit of value equal to this amount of pure silver. A talent was originally intended to be the mass of water required to fill an amphora, about one cubic foot.
    - The Florentine florin was a gold coin struck from 1252 to 1533 with no significant change in its design or metal content standard during that time. It had 54 grains (3.499 grams, 0.1125 troy ounces) of nominally pure or ‘fine’ gold. The name of the coin comes from the Giglio bottonato, the floral emblem of the city, which is represented at the head of the coin.
- “the ferry boatman when he had crossed the dark and many-branching and many-flowing Styx”: See Charon and his fare in the Chapter 52 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “had seen Red Grange kicking the red football”: Red Grange was an American football player for the University of Illinois, the Chicago Bears, and the New York Yankees.
- “some school children kicking a skull over a playing field”: Children kicking a skull over a playing field treat death as a plaything, the young careless of mortality and of the past, as the gravediggers toss skulls in Hamlet (5.1).

    - It may refer to the Mesoamerican ballgame where human sacrifice was practiced. There is speculation that human heads were used as the ball. This is also similar to the story of Mr. and Mrs. Tidings in the later chapters.
- “the Church of the Golden Cockerel”: See the Cockerel Church, Boston’s New Brick Church on Hanover Street, named for Shem Drowne’s gilded rooster weathervane of 1721, in the Chapter 53 resources.
- “Peron had been mad as a mad hatter”: Hatters were said to go mad from the mercury used to cure felt, which poisons the nerves; Lewis Carroll’s Hatter in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865) made “mad as a hatter” famous. See Alice in Wonderland.
- “the Aurora Borealis was the Aurora Australis”: Aurora Borealis and Aurora Australis are the northern and southern lights seen around the Arctic and Antarctic sky. See Astronomy.
- “whether it was the North Pole or the South Pole”: The North Pole and the South Pole are the northernmost and southernmost points of the Earth. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “this music of Inferno”: Inferno is the first part of Italian writer Dante Alighieri’s 14th-century narrative poem The Divine Comedy, followed by Purgatorio and Paradiso. The Inferno describes the journey of a fictionalized version of Dante himself through Hell, guided by the ancient Roman poet Virgil. In the poem, Hell is depicted as nine concentric circles of torment located within the Earth; it is the “realm [...] of those who have rejected spiritual values by yielding to bestial appetites or violence, or by perverting their human intellect to fraud or malice against their fellowmen.” As an allegory, the Divine Comedy represents the journey of the soul toward God, with the Inferno describing the recognition and rejection of sin. See Dante.
- “Sound of the hurdy-gurdy in a dark street”: Hurdy-gurdy is a string instrument that produces sound by a hand-crank-turned wheel rubbing against the strings.
- “one imaginary Napoleon and another imaginary Napoleon”: Napoleon was a French military and political leader. See Napoleon and Wellington.
- “one murdered archduke and another murdered archduke”: Murdered archduke may refer to Archduke Ferdinand of Austria whose assassination was one of the events leading up to World War I.
- “one bishop and another bishop if both were wearing the mitre and the alb”: A Bishop wearing the mitre and the alb are the Pontifical vestments worn by bishops celebrating or presiding over liturgical functions in the Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Eastern Catholic, Anglican, and some Lutheran churches.
- “Captain Cook and Admiral Perry”: Captain Cook was a British captain in the British Royal Navy famous for three voyages between 1768 and 1779 in the Pacific Ocean and to Australia. Admiral Perry is probably Robert E. Peary, the Arctic explorer who claimed to have reached the North Pole in 1909 and was made a rear admiral in 1911; Commodore Matthew Perry, who opened Japan to American ships in 1854, never sailed to the ends of the earth. See Exploration and the Poles.

- “the Northern Cross or the Southern Cross or Charing Cross”: The Northern Cross is the cross-shaped pattern of bright stars in the constellation Cygnus, and the Southern Cross is the constellation Crux, seen from the Southern Hemisphere. Charing Cross is a junction in London named for the Eleanor cross Edward I raised there in memory of his queen; Young slips an earthly cross among the stars. See Astronomy.
- “At the South Pole of the moon”: “At the South Pole of the moon, there were more mountains than at the North Pole of the moon” is not entirely accurate. The Lunar south pole of the moon has more craters that are not reached by sunlight because of the tilt of the moon’s axis. See Astronomy.
- “matter has ever a tendency to drift downward”: “matter has ever a tendency to drift downward” is due to friction, gravity, and air resistance which slows an object down. This would be Newton’s laws of motion.
- “the pearl-mantled Arctic tern”: The Arctic tern: see Chapter 82, Resources, for the full entry.
- “so many droshkies and troikas”: “droshkies” is a term used for a four-wheeled open carriage used especially in Russia. The vehicle has a long bench on which the driver or passengers sit as if on a saddle, either astride or sideways. The name probably derives from droga, the pole that connects the front and rear axles. “troikas” is a traditional Russian harness driving combination, using three horses abreast, usually pulling a sleigh.
- “the unfamiliar pleasures of a penny arcade”: Penny arcades, precursors to modern video game arcades, were entertainment venues featuring coin-operated amusement machines that typically cost a penny to operate. These arcades, popular from the late 1800s to the mid-20th century, offered a variety of mechanical games and novelty devices.
- “an old gramophone honking”: A phonograph, later called a gramophone, and since the 1940s a record player, or more recently a turntable, is a device for the mechanical and analogue reproduction of sound. The sound vibration waveforms are recorded as corresponding physical deviations of a helical or spiral groove engraved, etched, incised, or impressed into the surface of a rotating cylinder or disc, called a record. To recreate the sound, the surface is similarly rotated while a playback stylus traces the groove and is therefore vibrated by it, faintly reproducing the recorded sound. In early acoustic phonographs, the stylus vibrated a diaphragm that produced sound waves coupled to the open air through a flaring horn, or directly to the listener’s ears through stethoscope-type earphones. The phonograph was invented in 1877 by Thomas Edison; its use would rise the following year. Alexander Graham Bell’s Volta Laboratory made several improvements in the 1880s and introduced the graphophone, including the use of wax-coated cardboard cylinders and a cutting stylus that moved from side to side in a zigzag groove around the record. In the 1890s, Emile Berliner initiated the transition from phonograph cylinders to flat discs with a spiral groove running from the periphery to near the center, coining the term gramophone for disc record players, which is predominantly used in many languages. Later improvements through the

years included modifications to the turntable and its drive system, stylus, pickup system, and the sound and equalization systems. The disc phonograph record was the dominant commercial audio distribution format throughout most of the 20th century, and phonographs became the first example of home audio that people owned and used at their residences. In the 1960s, the use of 8-track cartridges and cassette tapes were introduced as alternatives. By the late 1980s, phonograph use had declined sharply due to the popularity of cassettes and the rise of the compact disc. However, records have undergone a revival since the late 2000s.

- “St. Sophia’s Dome, the Kremlin Wall, thirteen minarets, twelve Greek crosses”: St. Sophia’s Dome or Hagia Sophia is a place of worship in Istanbul. The Kremlin Wall or Moscow Kremlin Wall is a defensive wall that surrounds the Moscow Kremlin. Thirteen minarets may refer to the type of tower built around a mosque. There are typically only one to six minarets. Twelve Greek crosses may refer to the Greek cross which predates the Latin cross. It was used in ancient Babylon for the god Shamash. It has an esoteric meaning for the four directions, the four evangelists, the twelve apostles, the twelve zodiac signs and the basic element of many alchemical symbols. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.
- “he had stopped to use a public pay phone”: A public payphone is a coin-operated telephone located in high-traffic areas. They were maintained and operated from 1889 to 1999 where most were discontinued because of the advent of cell phones.
- “had nearly put a drachma into the slot”: In ancient Greece, the drachma was an ancient currency unit issued by many city-states during a period of ten centuries, from the Archaic period throughout the Classical period, the Hellenistic period up to the Roman period. The ancient drachma originated in Greece around the 6th century BC. The coin, usually made of silver or sometimes gold, had its origins in a bartering system that referred to a drachma as a handful of wooden spits or arrows. The drachma was unique to each city state that minted them, and were sometimes circulated all over the Mediterranean. The coinage of Athens was considered to be the strongest and became the most popular.
- “she had gone to the Golden Horn”: Golden Horn is a major urban waterway in Istanbul, Turkey.
- “suing the Boston telephone company”: “Boston telephone company” may refer to the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company formed in 1878.
- “his wife had cuckolded him”: A cuckold is the husband of an adulterous wife (or partner for unmarried companions); the wife of an adulterous husband is a cuckquean. In biology, a cuckold is a male who unwittingly invests parental effort in juveniles who are not genetically his offspring. A husband who is aware of and tolerates his wife’s infidelity is sometimes called a wittol or wittold. The slang term bull refers to the dominant man who has relations with the cuckold’s partner. See Shakespeare.
- “A large Colonial boot hanging out over a long grey street”: Colonial boots, while not a specific style like modern cowboy boots, represent the footwear worn during the colonial period in America, primarily by men. They were typically made of leather, with

styles ranging from simple, low-cut shoes to taller riding boots, and often featured buckles. The construction and materials reflected the available technology and the wearer's social status and needs.

- "the old Flatiron Building": The Flatiron Building is a triangular landmark in New York City.
- "from the starboard side to the portside": Portside is the left side of a vessel, when facing the front (bow). It's one of the two sides of a ship, the other being starboard (right side). The term "port" replaced "larboard" because it was easily confused with "starboard."
- "a wooden policeman in the fog, a traffic robot": There is one article that mentions a wooden policeman in Marysville, Washington in 1917 that was in the middle of the street with a sign in order to direct the increasing automobile traffic.
    - "traffic robot": Early automatic traffic signals were often called robots, a name South Africa still uses for traffic lights. The first electric traffic lights went up in Salt Lake City in 1912 and Cleveland in 1914. Garrett Augustus Morgan, an African American inventor, patented a three-position traffic signal in 1923, a T-shaped signal with a position that stopped traffic in every direction, and sold the rights to General Electric. (Wikipedia) Morgan's work is celebrated during Black History Month as an example of African American innovation.
- "the grasshopper weathervane on old Faneuil Hall": The grasshopper weathervane on Faneuil Hall is a famous landmark in Boston. Peter Faneuil commissioned Shem Drowne to make the grasshopper weathervane. In 1755 an earthquake knocked it down and Drowne's son was commissioned to repair it. He put a note in the grasshopper's belly. From time to time it has been repaired and more historical documents have been placed inside the grasshopper's belly. In 1974 it was stolen and recovered and a lock was placed on it so it could not be stolen again.
- "Sometimes the lights went out on Griffin's Wharf": Griffin's Wharf in Boston is where, on December 16, 1773, colonists disguised as Mohawks dumped 342 chests of East India Company tea into the harbor in the Boston Tea Party. The wharf was later buried by landfill, and its site now lies inland.
- "Beacon and Charles Streets still crossed": Beacon and Charles Streets are major thoroughfares in Boston, Massachusetts. Beacon turns into a one way street when it crosses Charles Street.
- "Once on Copp's Hill": Copp's Hill is an elevation in the historic North End of Boston, Massachusetts.
- "that old, dour Mather": "old, dour Mather" may refer to Cotton Mather who was a New England Puritan clergyman and writer. Increase, Cotton, and Samuel Mather lie in the Mather family tomb on Copp's Hill. See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- "a ragged news-hawk crying": A newshawk was a newsboy hawking papers in the street, crying the headlines; the word also meant a reporter.

- “President Wilson had not died in office”: President Wilson did not die in office. He was the twenty-eighth President of the United States, a Democrat and the leading architect of the League of Nations. His successor President Harding died in office in August 1923, about six months before ex-President Wilson died in February 1924.
    - The League of Nations was an international organization founded in 1920 after World War I to maintain world peace and promote international cooperation. It was headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and aimed to prevent future conflicts through diplomacy and collective security. While it achieved some successes in areas like disease eradication and refugee protection, its effectiveness was ultimately limited by factors like the lack of participation from major powers like the United States, and its inability to prevent the outbreak of World War II. The League was formally dissolved in 1946, handing over its assets and responsibilities to the newly formed United Nations.
- “binomial equations”: Binomial equations may refer to the binomial theorem which describes the algebraic expansion of powers.
- “He had met the fellow who carried the lantern for Paul Revere”: Paul Revere was an American silversmith, military officer and industrialist who played a major role during the opening months of the American Revolutionary War in Massachusetts, engaging in a midnight ride in 1775 to alert nearby minutemen of the approach of British troops prior to the battles of Lexington and Concord. Born in the North End of Boston, Revere eventually became a prosperous and prominent Bostonian, deriving his income from silversmithing and engraving. During the American Revolution, he was a strong supporter of the Patriot cause and joined the Sons of Liberty. His midnight ride transformed him into an American folk hero, being dramatized in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1861 poem, “Paul Revere’s Ride.” He also helped to organize an intelligence and alarm system to keep watch on the movements of British forces. Revere later served as an officer in the Massachusetts Militia, though his service ended after the Penobscot Expedition, one of the most disastrous American campaigns of the American Revolutionary War, for which he was absolved of blame. Following the war, Revere returned to his silversmith trade. He used the profits from his expanding business to finance his work in iron casting, bronze bell and cannon casting, and the forging of copper bolts and spikes. In 1800, he became the first American to successfully roll copper into sheets for use as sheathing on naval vessels.
    - Two men are believed to have carried the lanterns to the steeple of Old North Church, Robert Newman and Captain John Pulling.
    - The woman who rode with Paul Revere to warn colonists about the British was Sybil Ludington. She was only 16 years old when she rode 40 miles on April 26, 1777, to alert the militia about the British attack on Danbury, Connecticut. While Paul Revere is famous for his “midnight ride,” Sybil Ludington’s ride was even longer and took place during a rainstorm. Her ride was crucial in mustering the militia, who were able to drive the British out of Ridgefield after the attack on Danbury.

- “a tri-cornered hat”: Tri-cornered hat or tricorne was a style of hat popular in the 18th century.
- “the British Red Coats were coming”: British Red Coats were the British infantrymen who fought in the American Revolution.
- “Constitution Wharf”: Constitution Wharf in the North End stands on the site of Edmund Hartt’s shipyard, where the frigate USS Constitution, Old Ironsides, was built and launched in 1797. Constitution Wharf may refer to the USS Constitution or Old Ironsides which is retired at Pier 1 at one end of Boston’s Freedom Trail.
- “time for the stirrup cup”: A stirrup cup is a “parting cup” given to guests, especially when they are leaving and have their feet in the stirrups. It is also the traditional drink (usually port or sherry) served at the meet, prior to a traditional foxhunt. It is mentioned in the poem “The Stirrup-Cup” by the nineteenth-century American poet, Sidney Lanier.
- “running yesterday at Suffolk Downs”: Suffolk Downs is a former Thoroughbred race track in East Boston, Massachusetts.
- “the Renaissance gilded chairs, the Louis XIII and the Louis XIV and the Louis XV”: The Renaissance is a period in European history marking the transition from the Middle Ages to modern times. Louis XIII was the King of France from 1610-1643. Louis XIV was King of France from 1643-1715. Louis XV was the King of France from 1715 to 1774.
- “the Duke of Wellington stepped out of the fog”: Duke of Wellington was one of the leading military and political figures of 19th-century Britain. See Napoleon and Wellington.
- “the old Fishback Building”: The Fishback Building may refer to the Fishback Company Building which was located on McCarty and Delaware streets in Indianapolis, Indiana. Frank Fishback started his coffee roasting business in the late 1880s and, by the 1910s, also sold Virginia Sweet brand foods including coffee and pancake flour. The Fishback Company closed during the 1930s. Young grew up in Indianapolis. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “the Steinway Building”: Steinway Hall, the piano maker’s building at 109 West 57th Street in Manhattan, opened in 1925 with a concert hall and showroom. Flag: after 1964, the supertall Steinway Tower (2021) was built over and around it.
- “an old uncle in Paradiso”: Paradiso is the third and final part of Dante’s Divine Comedy, following the Inferno and the Purgatorio. It is an allegory telling of Dante’s journey through Heaven, guided by Beatrice, who symbolizes theology. In the poem, Paradise is depicted as a series of concentric spheres surrounding the Earth, consisting of the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the Fixed Stars, the Primum Mobile and finally, the Empyrean. It was written in the early 14th century. Allegorically, the poem represents the soul’s ascent to God. See Dante.
- “the foot of Boylston Street”: Boylston Street is a major east-west thoroughfare in Boston, Massachusetts.

- “nearly knocked down by a lady cyclist”: The bicycle craze of the 1890s gave women a new freedom, and new clothes to ride in. Susan B. Anthony told Nellie Bly in 1896, “Let me tell you what I think of bicycling. I think it has done more to emancipate women than anything else in the world” (New York World, 2 February 1896). See Women’s Suffrage.
- “the statue of Aristides the Just”: The statue of Aristides the Just is in Boston’s Beacon Hill neighborhood is in Boston, Massachusetts. Aristides was an Athenian statesman. His nickname was The Just and he was called the best and most honorable man in Athens.
- “Exchange Street”: Exchange Street is in Boston, Massachusetts.
- “the sentinel Indian on the cupola”: The Province House, the royal governors’ residence in Boston, was crowned by Shem Drowne’s copper weathervane of an Indian archer (1716), his arrow turning with the wind; it is now in the collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society.
- “a pack of little brown Cubans for the dead”: Brown Cubans may refer to Cuban cigars which come in a variety of colors from pale brown to black.
- “his dies in faustus”: Dies in faustus may mean dies faustus which means lucky day.
- “a long dim street of cigar store Indians”: The cigar store Indian or wooden Indian is an advertisement figure, in the likeness of a Native American, used to represent tobacconists. The figures are often three-dimensional wooden sculptures measuring from several feet tall up to life-sized. They are still occasionally used for their original advertising purpose, but are more often seen as decorations or advertising collectibles, with some pieces selling for hundreds of thousands of dollars.
- “an Indian stockade”: During the forced removal of the Cherokee people, also known as the Trail of Tears, stockades were built to hold them captive before their westward journey to Indian Territory. These stockades were often overcrowded, lacked adequate sanitation and food, and were plagued by disease. A stockade camp at Rattlesnake Springs in Tennessee held many Cherokees awaiting relocation, and it was the site of the final Cherokee council before their departure. The Treaty of Greenville, which concluded a period of conflict between the United States and Native American tribes in the Ohio region, was signed at a large stockade in Greenville, Ohio. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “Indian massacre!”: “Indian massacre” The phrase eventually became commonly used to also describe mass killings of American Indians. Killings described as “massacres” often had an element of indiscriminate targeting, barbarism, or genocidal intent. According to historian Jeffrey Ostler, “Any discussion of genocide must, of course, eventually consider the so-called Indian Wars, the term commonly used for U.S. Army campaigns to subjugate Indian nations of the American West beginning in the 1860s. In an older historiography, key events in this history were narrated as battles. It is now more common for scholars to refer to these events as massacres. This is especially so of a Colorado territorial militia’s slaughter of Cheyennes at Sand Creek (1864) and the army’s slaughter of Shoshones at Bear River (1863), Blackfeet on the Marias River

(1870), and Lakotas at Wounded Knee (1890). Some scholars have begun referring to these events as “genocidal massacres,” defined as the annihilation of a portion of a larger group, sometimes to provide a lesson to the larger group.” In The Wild Frontier: Atrocities during the American-Indian War from Jamestown Colony to Wounded Knee, lawyer William M. Osborn compiled a list of alleged and actual atrocities in what would eventually become the continental United States, from first contact in 1511 until 1890. His parameters for inclusion included the intentional and indiscriminate murder, torture, or mutilation of civilians, the wounded, and prisoners. His list included 7,193 people who died from atrocities perpetrated by those of European descent, and 9,156 people who died from atrocities perpetrated by Native Americans. In An American Genocide, The United States and the California Catastrophe, 1846-1873, historian Benjamin Madley recorded the numbers of killings of California Indians between 1846 and 1873. He found evidence that during this period, at least 9,400 to 16,000 California Indians were killed by non-Indians. Most of these killings occurred in what he said were more than 370 massacres (defined by him as the “intentional killing of five or more disarmed combatants or largely unarmed noncombatants, including women, children, and prisoners, whether in the context of a battle or otherwise”). See Society, Class, and Race.

- “the lovely Indian maiden Pocahontas”: Pocahontas also known as Matoaka and Rebecca Rolfe was a Native American woman belonging to the Powhatan people, notable for her association with the colonial settlement at Jamestown, Virginia. She was the daughter of Wahunsenacawh, the paramount chief of a network of tributary tribes in the Tsenacommacah (known in English as the Powhatan Confederacy), encompassing the Tidewater region of what is today the U.S. state of Virginia. Pocahontas was captured and held for ransom by English colonists during hostilities in 1613. During her captivity, she was encouraged to convert to Christianity and was baptized under the name Rebecca. She married the tobacco planter John Rolfe in April 1614 at the age of about 17 or 18, and she bore their son, Thomas Rolfe, in January 1615. In 1616, the Rolfes travelled to London, where Pocahontas was presented to English society as an example of the “civilized savage” in hopes of stimulating investment in Jamestown. On this trip, she may have met Squanto, a Patuxet man from New England. Pocahontas became a celebrity, was elegantly fêted, and attended a masque at Whitehall Palace. In 1617, the Rolfes intended to sail for Virginia, but Pocahontas died at Gravesend, Kent, England, of unknown causes, aged 20 or 21. She was buried in St George’s Church, Gravesend; her grave’s exact location is unknown because the church was rebuilt after being destroyed by a fire. Numerous places, landmarks, and products in the United States have been named after Pocahontas. Her story has been romanticized over the years, many aspects of which are fictional. Many of the stories told about her by the English explorer John Smith have been contested by her documented descendants. She is a subject of art, literature, and film. Many famous people have claimed to be among her descendants, including members of the First Families of Virginia, First Lady Edith Wilson, American actor Glenn Strange, and astronomer Percival Lowell.

- “one hundred First Preferred shares of the Grand Union Pacific Railway”: Grand Union Pacific Railway may refer to the Union Pacific Railroad which is a freight-hauling railroad that is the second largest in the United States. Its tracks met the Central Pacific’s at Promontory Summit, Utah, where the golden spike was driven on 10 May 1869.
- “a Civil War silver dollar”: “Civil War silver dollar” may refer to the Seated Liberty Dollar. The Civil War caused widespread hoarding of the coins due to their value. They were made of 90% silver. This led to a coin shortage in 1862. The government issued paper Demand Notes and later minted silver dollars which were stored in a vault for future use. The Seated Liberty Dollar was the design in use for U.S. silver dollars before and during the Civil War. A law in 1865 allowed the motto “In God We Trust” to be added to coins, and it was placed on the Seated Liberty dollar in 1866. The Seated Liberty dollar was the first coin struck at the Carson City Mint in Nevada, beginning in 1870, with thousands of these coins stored in Treasury vaults. See The Civil War.
- “a plush-lined parlor car”: A railroad parlor car is a luxury train car designed for comfort and relaxation, offering amenities superior to standard coach cars, such as plush seating, individual tables, and lounge areas. Historically, these cars served a wealthy clientele, providing a comfortable, exclusive space that conveyed status, and they remain a feature on some modern luxury and heritage railroads for passengers seeking a premium travel experience.
- “a veritable Midas with the Midas touch”: Midas was the most famous King in Greek mythology for his ability to turn everything he touched into gold. See Greek Mythology.
- “En passant”: En passant may refer to a special pawn capture that can only occur immediately after a pawn makes a move of two squares from its starting square and provided that it could have been captured by an enemy pawn had it advanced only one square. The opponent captures the just-moved pawn “in passing” through the first square.
- “he had been offered, at various times, various railroads”: American railroads began in the 1830s with lines like the Baltimore and Ohio. The Pacific Railway Act of 1862 led to the first transcontinental railroad, completed in 1869, and land grants built four more, opening the West and feeding the industry of the Northeast. Rail mileage peaked in 1916; the Interstate Commerce Act of 1887 brought the first federal regulation, and Wilson nationalized the railroads from 1917 to 1920. The automobile and the airplane brought decline. (Wikipedia)
    - Railroad stock: In the nineteenth century railroads were the leading American investment. Their need for capital filled the New York Stock Exchange, drew money from overseas, and gave rise to modern accounting and finance, but also to watered stock, bribery, and boom and bust, as in the panics of 1837, the 1870s, and the 1880s. (Wikipedia)
    - The Panic of 1901 was the first stock market crash on the New York Stock Exchange, caused in part by struggles between E. H. Harriman, Jacob Schiff, and J. P. Morgan/James J. Hill for the financial control of the Northern Pacific Railway. The

stock cornering was orchestrated by James Stillman and William Rockefeller's First National City Bank financed with Standard Oil money. After reaching a compromise, the moguls formed the Northern Securities Company. As a result of the panic, thousands of small investors were ruined. (Wikipedia)

    - Panics and crashes before 1964: 1819, 1837, 1857, 1866, 1873 (followed by the Long Depression, 1873-1896), 1882-1885, 1884, 1890, 1893, 1896, 1901, 1907, 1910-1911, 1914, the recession after the First World War and of 1920-1921, the Wall Street crash of 1929 and the Great Depression (1929-1939), and the recessions of 1937-1938, 1949, 1953, 1958, and 1960-1961. The United States has experienced some of the most globally famous and heavily documented systemic stock market crashes and corrections.
- "the old Interurban": The Interurban is a streetcar-like electric self propelled rail car that runs within or between cities.
- "the old Hartford Electric": Hartford Electric may refer to the now defunct electrical company that was in Hartford, Connecticut.
- "the old Mohawk Owl Train": The Mohawk Owl Train may refer to the New York Central steam locomotive that followed the Mohawk River.
- "the Iroquois Flyer": Iroquois Flyer may refer to the Canadian SS Iroquois steamboat ferry.
- "the Grand Montezuma Railway": The Grand Montezuma Railway may refer to the steam engine Montezuma or a railroad operated on part of the Rio Grande Southern Railroad by the Montezuma Lumber Company.
    - The tomb of Montezuma may refer to two Aztec Emperors in Mexico.
    - Montezuma's treasure is a legendary treasure that can be found in the southwest United States and Mexico.
- "the Andean Special": The Andean Special may refer to an earlier train than the current Belmond Andean Explorer that runs between Cusco and Puno, Peru.
- "the Great Siberian": The Great Siberian may refer to the Trans-Siberian Railway that connects Western and Eastern Russia.
- "the Oriental Express": The Oriental Express was a long-distance passenger train service that ran across continental Europe and into western Asia.
- "never riding in a sleeping car": The concept of dedicated sleeping cars dates back to the 1830s, with George Pullman's Pullman Palace Car Company becoming famous for their widespread use beginning in the late 1860s. These cars revolutionized first-class rail travel, offering a level of comfort and privacy previously unavailable.
- "the Taj Mahal": The Taj Mahal is an ivory-white marble mausoleum in Agra, India.
- "the Polo Grounds": The Polo Grounds was a series of three ballparks in Upper Manhattan, New York City, named for its origin as a polo field in 1876 and later serving as the home for several professional baseball and football teams, most notably the New York Giants and the Yankees, before being demolished in 1964 to make way for

apartments. The final Polo Grounds stadium, built after a 1911 fire, featured unique, “bathtub” dimensions with very short foul lines and a deep center field, a design that was unusual for baseball but well-suited for football. Today, the Polo Grounds site is occupied by the Polo Grounds Towers apartment buildings. The unique, “bathtub” shaped field with short foul lines and deep center field became a famous, albeit quirky, part of baseball lore.

- “Somebody had offered him a lodestar”: See Lodestar in the vocabulary.
- “tried to sell him a sextant”: A sextant is a doubly reflecting navigation instrument that measures the angular distance between two visible objects.
- “the Customs House”: The Customs House was traditionally a building housing the offices for government officials. Boston’s Custom House, with its tower added in 1915, was for decades the tallest building in the city.
- “the Fishermen’s Wharf”: The Fishermen’s Wharf may refer to the famous Fisherman’s Wharf in San Francisco, California. Boston’s own fishing fleet landed at T Wharf and, from 1914, at the Boston Fish Pier.
- “the Green Dragon Tavern”: The original Green Dragon Tavern in Boston was a central meeting place for American revolutionary leaders like Paul Revere and Samuel Adams, earning it the nickname the “Headquarters of the Revolution.” Located in the North End, it hosted secret gatherings of the Sons of Liberty, Boston Committee of Correspondence, and Boston Caucus, where they planned resistance against British rule, including the Boston Tea Party. The original tavern was destroyed in the 1800s, but the current Green Dragon, opened in the 1990s, continues the legacy with its historical ties and revolutionary-themed restaurant.
- “several China clippers”: China clippers may refer to the first four-engine flying boats built for Pan American Airways. The name first belonged to the fast sailing clippers of the China tea trade, many built in Boston by Donald McKay.
- “half of Brooklyn Bridge for half price”: may refer to George C. Parker (1860-1936) and the phrase “If you believe that I have a bridge in Brooklyn to sell you.” Mr. Parker, a native New Yorker, “became famous for selling New York City landmarks of all kinds ranging from Madison Square Garden to the Statue of Liberty. He also sold the Metropolitan Museum of Art and even Grant’s tomb as the general’s grandson! He would set up fake sales offices and forge documents to support his cons. One of his most popular places for spotting rubes or victims was Ellis Island where some of the immigrants came with money to invest in new enterprises. Out-time out-of-town tourists on their first visit to New York comprised another favorite target. His greatest con was selling the Brooklyn Bridge. Legend claimed that he sold it at least twice a week. He did sell it several times including at least once for $50,000! The new owner would discover he was the victim of a con when the New York police officers would stop the “new owners” from setting up toll booths in the middle of the bridge. The Brooklyn Bridge had been a toll bridge that pedestrians had to pay a penny to cross when it opened for business in 1883. Tens of thousands crossed the bridge every day on the way to work from Brooklyn to Manhattan. When the Brooklyn Bridge first

opened, it cost a penny to cross by foot, 5 cents for a horse and rider and 10 cents for a horse and wagon. Farm animals were allowed at a price of 5 cents per cow and 2 cents per sheep or hog. Under pressure from civic groups and commuters, the pedestrian toll was repealed in 1891. The roadway tolls were then rescinded on July 19, 1911 with the support of New York Mayor William J. Gaynor, who declared, “I see no more reason for toll gates on the bridges than for toll gates on Fifth Avenue or Broadway.” On Columbus Day, 1892 a quarter of a million people walked across the bridge in celebration of the quadrennial. At one point, George Parker earned the title as “the greatest con man” but he kept on getting caught. Finally, in 1928 upon his third conviction for conning people, Brooklyn Judge Alonzo G. McLaughlin sentenced him to mandatory life imprisonment to Sing Sing Prison, where he died.”

    - Brooklyn Bridge is a bridge in New York City spanning the East River between Manhattan and Brooklyn.
    - Emily Warren Roebling was an engineer known for her contributions over a period of more than 10 years to the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge after her husband Washington Roebling developed caisson disease (a.k.a. decompression disease) and became bedridden. For the decade after Washington was confined to his sick bed, Roebling was dedicated to the completion of the Brooklyn Bridge. She took over much of the chief engineer duties, including day-to-day supervision and project management. Emily and her husband jointly planned the bridge’s continued construction. She dealt with politicians, competing engineers, and all those associated with work on the bridge, to the point where people believed she was behind the bridge’s design. In 1882, Washington’s title of chief engineer was in jeopardy because of his extended illness. To allow him to retain his position, Roebling lobbied for him in meetings with engineers and politicians to defend her husband’s work. To the Roeblings’ relief, the politicians responded well and permitted Washington to remain chief engineer of the Brooklyn Bridge. The Brooklyn Bridge was completed in 1883. In advance of the official opening, carrying a rooster as a sign of victory, Emily Roebling was the first to cross the bridge by carriage. At the opening ceremony, Roebling was honored in a speech by Abram Stevens Hewitt, who said that the bridge was “...an everlasting monument to the sacrificing devotion of a woman and of her capacity for that higher education from which she has been too long disbarred.”

- “the leaning Chrysler Building”: Chrysler Building is an Art Deco skyscraper on the East Side of Manhattan.
- “the Brooklyn Dodgers”: The Brooklyn Dodgers were a Major League Baseball team from 1884 to 1957.
- “by the Big Leagues”: The Big Leagues are the two highest US baseball leagues.
- “the old Boston Red Stockings”: The Boston Red Stockings are now known as the Atlanta Braves.
- “the old Baltimore Orioles”: The Baltimore Orioles are an American professional baseball team based in Baltimore.

- “the Robins and the Cincinnati Woodpeckers and the St. Louis Browns”: The Brooklyn team was called the Robins from 1914 to 1931, after its manager Wilbert Robinson, and was otherwise the Dodgers until it moved to Los Angeles in 1958. The Cincinnati Woodpeckers may refer to a minor league baseball team. St. Louis Browns were a Major League Baseball team that originated in Milwaukee, Wisconsin as the Milwaukee Brewers.
- “had been able to effect numerous reconciliations”: Forcible and systemic separation of children from their parents has a long and painful history in the US, affecting Native Americans, enslaved Black people, and immigrants. Beyond these large-scale injustices, poverty, war, and the shortcomings of child welfare policies have also led to family separations. From 1819 until the 1970s, the US government and churches ran a system of over 500 boarding schools designed to culturally assimilate Native American children. The policy’s stated goal was to “Kill the Indian, Save the Man.” Children were forcibly taken from their families and communities and sent to distant schools. In 1891, the government began withholding rations and annuities from parents who refused to send their children. Upon arrival, children’s hair was cut, their traditional clothing was replaced with uniforms, and they were assigned new English names. They were forbidden from speaking their native languages and punished for observing cultural practices. In addition to the trauma of forced separation and cultural repression, students often endured physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Many died from disease or injuries and never returned home. Separating enslaved Black families was a common and profitable practice from the 16th to the 19th centuries. It was also an intentional tool used by enslavers to control and punish. At auction, enslaved children were sold separately from their parents and siblings, sometimes at young ages. Enslavers regularly threatened to sell off family members to prevent enslaved people from escaping or rebelling. Historical evidence suggests that between one-third and two-thirds of Black children were separated from their families during slavery. After emancipation, many formerly enslaved people spent years searching for lost family members. Between 1854 and 1929, the Children’s Aid Society and other charities sent an estimated 200,000 children from Eastern cities on “orphan trains” to be placed with families in the Midwest. While framed as a humanitarian effort for orphans, most children on the trains were not parentless. The program primarily targeted the children of impoverished immigrant families, particularly Irish Catholics. Many of the children were not placed in loving homes but rather treated as a source of indentured labor. Mixed reviews and the rise of foster care as a preferred method for placing dependent children led to the end of the program. During World War II, Executive Order 9066 led to the forcible removal and incarceration of over 120,000 Japanese Americans in internment camps. The forced removal resulted in the separation of families and shattered communities. Although most children remained with their parents in the camps, some families were separated, and others were put under intense emotional strain. The trauma of incarceration and displacement created lasting intergenerational trauma. Even after the closure of orphanages, children continue to be separated from their families through the modern child welfare system. Social workers often conflate poverty with neglect, disproportionately removing children from low-income families,

especially those of color. In 2022, a Human Rights Watch report highlighted how poverty, rather than genuine unfit parenting, is frequently the basis for family separation. Black children, in particular, are nearly twice as likely as white children to be investigated by child services and separated from their families. In recent decades, US border and immigration policies have led to the widespread separation of migrant families. Under the Trump administration, a “zero tolerance” policy criminally prosecuted all adults crossing the border without authorization. This led to thousands of children being taken from their parents, often with no system in place to track or reunite families. Even after a court order ended the official policy, separations continued due to inconsistent record-keeping and a failure to protect asylum seekers. In total, more than 5,500 children were separated from their families. Researchers have documented severe and lasting psychological harm to the children and parents affected by these forced separations.

- “a process similar to parthenogenesis”: Parthenogenesis is a natural form of asexual reproduction in which growth and development of embryos occur without fertilization by sperm.
- “had once ridden with Napoleon almost to the gates of Moscow”: Napoleon’s invasion of Russia in 1812 reached Moscow, only to end in a winter retreat in which most of the Grande Armée was lost. To have ridden with him is to have shared an epic, doomed undertaking.
    - This is called the French invasion of Russia under Napoleon and is one of the most studied wars with an exceptional number of troop deaths. See Napoleon and Wellington.
- “cashiered from the Army or the Navy or both”: Cashiering is a ritual ceremony where the individual is dismissed for some form of misbehavior. Military veterans have historically been cashiered for misconduct related to gambling debts, though not typically for the debt itself. Instead, it is the dishonorable failure to pay, fraudulent acts to acquire gambling money, or other offenses undermining military discipline that lead to dismissal or cashiering.
- “the greatest Lady Macbeth”: Lady MacBeth is a leading character in Shakespeare’s play, MacBeth. Lady Macbeth goads her husband into committing regicide, after which she becomes queen of Scotland. After Macbeth becomes a murderous tyrant, she is driven to madness by guilt over their crimes, and commits suicide offstage. See Suicide in History and Literature.
    - Lord Banquo is a character in Shakespeare’s play MacBeth. He is at first an ally of Macbeth and they meet the Three Witches together. After prophesying that Macbeth will become king, the witches tell Banquo that he will not be king himself, but that his descendants will be. Later, Macbeth in his lust for power sees Banquo as a threat and has him murdered by three hired assassins. See Shakespeare.
- “a Wall Street broker who had not known he was a Wall Street broker”: The history of Wall Street brokers traces the evolution of securities trading from informal outdoor dealings to the high-tech, regulated global financial markets of today. The profession

has shifted from being a specialized service for the wealthy to a digitized industry, leading traditional brokers to focus on financial advising rather than trade execution. In the late 1700s, merchants and speculators met on Wall Street to trade U.S. government bonds and shares of early banks. Business was initially conducted informally, often taking place under a buttonwood tree outside 68 Wall Street or in nearby coffeehouses. To formalize their business and edge out the auctioneers who had previously dominated securities trading, 24 brokers signed the Buttonwood Agreement in 1792. This established a fixed commission rate and required them to give preference to each other in negotiations. This agreement became the foundation of what would later be the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE). As the market grew, trading split between the formal NYSE and an informal “curb” market for riskier stocks. For much of the 19th century, brokers who traded stocks for small, new, or speculative companies operated in the streets of lower Manhattan. These “curbstone brokers” specialized in securities for emerging industries like railroads, mining, and oil. The Open Board of Stock Brokers, founded in 1864 by former curb brokers, competed with the NYSE before merging with it in 1869. In 1921, the curb market moved indoors and eventually became the American Stock Exchange (AMEX). The introduction of the stock ticker in 1867 brought real-time stock prices to brokerage offices, a vast improvement over pneumatic tubes and runners. The “Roaring Twenties” and the crash of 1929 saw an explosion in brokerage activity and a dramatic increase in public participation in the market. Leaders of firms like Merrill Lynch began encouraging middle-class Americans to invest in common stocks, fueling market growth. Brokers aggressively promoted speculative investments and margin trading (borrowing money to buy stocks) to boost their commissions. This pushed stock prices to unsustainable levels. The stock market crash of 1929, triggered by panic selling after prices began to fall, led to widespread broker bankruptcies and financial ruin for many clients. In the aftermath, government regulation was introduced to prevent such events in the future. After the crash, the industry faced greater oversight and eventually underwent a technological transformation. The Securities Exchange Act of 1934 created the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) to regulate the securities industry and protect investors. New York’s municipal slave market, established by a Common Council law on 30 November 1711, stood on Wall Street between Pearl and Water Streets and auctioned enslaved people of African ancestry until 1762; enslaved workers, including people of Native American ancestry, were also hired out there as day laborers (NYC Parks historical marker, 2015). Miss MacIntosh visits the Stock Exchange to “make some imaginary money” in Chapter 66; see the Chapter 66 resources.

- “the Chase National Bank”: The Chase National Bank of New York was founded in 1877 by John Thompson and named for Salmon P. Chase, Lincoln’s Secretary of the Treasury; by 1930 it was the largest bank in the world. In 1955 it merged with the Bank of the Manhattan Company, which Aaron Burr had founded in 1799 under a charter to supply New York with clean water, to form the Chase Manhattan Bank.
- “the City Morgue”: The City Morgue is a hospital or place where human corpses wait for identification or burial.

- “My kingdom for a horse”: “A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!” cries Richard at Bosworth (Shakespeare, Richard III 5.4). See Shakespeare.
- “the king of Cracow”: may refer to Krakus, also known as Krak or Grakch, a legendary Polish prince and the presumed founder of Kraków. He is also credited with building Wawel Castle and slaying the Wawel Dragon. The first written mention of Krakus, under the name Grakch, dates back to 1190 in the Chronica seu originale regum et principum Poloniae.
- “a carbuncle from a maharajah’s crown”: is an obsolete term for a deep red, cabochon-cut almandine garnet, named after its resemblance to a glowing coal or a fire. Though originally applied to various red gemstones, the name most commonly referred to almandine garnets cut in a smooth, rounded fashion rather than faceted. Historically, carbuncles were valued for their beauty and were believed to possess magical and healing properties, with mentions in ancient texts and prominent use in Victorian jewelry.
- “the Tower of London and the ravens”: The ravens of the Tower of London are a group of at least six captive ravens (nine in 2021) resident at the Tower of London. Their presence is traditionally believed to protect the Crown and the Tower; a belief holds that “if the Tower of London ravens are lost or fly away, the Crown will fall and Britain with it.” Some historians, including the Tower’s official historian, believe the “Tower’s raven mythology is likely to be a Victorian flight of fantasy.” The earliest known reference to captive ravens at the Tower is an illustration from 1883.
- “januis clausis”: means the doors have been closed, behind closed doors, in secret.
- “crossing Rittenhouse Square”: Rittenhouse Square is in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and one of the most popular outdoor parks and is the center of the eponymous Rittenhouse neighborhood. The square is one of the five original open-space parks planned by William Penn and his surveyor Thomas Holme during the late 17th century. Together with Fitler Square, the Rittenhouse neighborhood and the square comprise the Rittenhouse-Fitler Historic District. In the early 19th century, as the city grew steadily from the Delaware River to the Schuylkill River, Rittenhouse Square became a highly desirable address. James Harper, a merchant and brick manufacturer who had recently retired from the United States Congress, was the first person to build on the square, buying most of the north frontage, erecting a stately townhouse for himself at 1811 Walnut Street. Having thus set the patrician residential tone that would subsequently define the Square, he divided the rest of the land into generously proportioned building lots and sold them. Sold after the congressman’s death, the Harper house became the home of the exclusive Rittenhouse Club, which added the present facade. From 1876 to 1929, Rittenhouse Square was home to several wealthy families including Pennsylvania Railroad president Alexander Cassatt, real estate entrepreneur William Weightman III, department store founder John Wanamaker, Philadelphia planning commission director Edmund Bacon.
- “leaving the Grand Central Station”: Grand Central Station or Grand Central Terminal is a commuter rail terminal in New York City. Grand Central Terminal’s history began with

railroad mergers creating the need for a central hub, evolving from the Grand Central Depot in 1871 to the current structure that opened in 1913, designed by Warren and Wetmore. After facing demolition threats in the 1970s, Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis helped secure its landmark status, and a significant restoration project in the 1990s brought the terminal back to its former glory. (Wikipedia)

- “outside the old opera house”: The Boston Opera House on Huntington Avenue opened in 1909 and was demolished in 1958.
- “walking along Pinckney Street”: Pinckney Street is in Boston, Massachusetts. Pinckney Street is a historic residential street in Boston’s Beacon Hill neighborhood, known for its Federal-style architecture and its connection to a significant African American community that emerged in the area before the Civil War. One of the oldest homes on the street, the George Middleton House, was built in the late 1780s and is a testament to the street’s long history. The area is notable for its role as a center for free Black residents and, later, as a place where people like Louisa May Alcott lived and wrote. See American Writers.
- “in the casbah”: The casbah is the walled citadel of many North African cities.
- “The Canadian Mounties”: The Canadian Mounties are the federal and national police service of Canada.
- “the Eskimo hunter”: Eskimo is a term used to refer to two closely related indigenous peoples: the Inuit and the Yupik of Siberia and Alaska.
- “the doorman at the Ritz”: The Ritz hotels, now a symbol of luxury, originated from the vision of Swiss hotelier César Ritz in the late 19th century. He partnered with chef Auguste Escoffier to create the first Ritz hotel in Paris in 1898, followed by the Ritz in London. These hotels redefined luxury hospitality, emphasizing personalized service and elegant accommodations, including en-suite bathrooms and telephones in every room, which were revolutionary at the time. In 1911, Albert Keller acquired the rights to franchise the Ritz name in North America, leading to the first Ritz-Carlton in New York City. The Ritz-Carlton brand, born from this expansion, continued to build upon Ritz’s original vision of refined elegance and impeccable service, establishing hotels in various locations.
- “the land of Catherine the Great”: Catherine the Great (1729-1796), born Sophie of Anhalt-Zerbst, ruled Russia from 1762 to 1796 after a coup against her husband, Peter III. She corresponded with Voltaire and other Enlightenment thinkers, reformed the law and the administration, founded schools, began the Hermitage collection, and took Crimea and much of Poland, making Russia a great European power. (Wikipedia)
- “Grand Russian Imperial stocks and bonds”: Grand Russian Imperial stocks and bonds were issued by Russia before the revolution. In 1918 they became useless. They are collectors items now.
- “the Wall Street Stock Exchange”: Wall Street Stock Exchange is the leading US money center for international financial activities.

- “old soap coupons”: B.T. Babbitt, a soap manufacturer, initiated a promotion where customers could send in 25 wrappers from his Sweet Home Laundry Soap to receive a set of color lithographs. This encouraged customers to buy and collect more bars of soap, establishing a connection between purchasing a product and receiving a premium, which is a precursor to modern couponing. Coupons for various products, including food and personal care items, began to appear in newspapers and magazines. During the 1930s, the coupon saw a surge in popularity as people looked for ways to save money.
- “some old Bolshevik”: Bolsheviks were a far-left, revolutionary Marxists faction founded by Vladimir Lenin.
- “a blind flower girl at a bridge”: In Charlie Chaplin’s City Lights (1931), the Tramp spends his last coin on a flower from a blind flower girl, who takes him for a rich man.
- “a mare clausum”: is a term used in international law to refer to a sea, ocean or other navigable body of water under the jurisdiction of a state that is closed or not accessible to other states. Mare clausum is an exception to mare liberum (Latin for “free sea”), meaning a sea that is open to navigation to ships of all nations. In the generally accepted principle of international waters, oceans, seas, and waters outside national jurisdiction are open to navigation by all and referred to as “high seas” or mare liberum. Portugal and Spain defended a Mare clausum policy during the Age of Discovery. This was soon challenged by other European nations.
- “Pinkerton’s men”: The Pinkerton National Detective Agency was founded about 1850 by Allan Pinkerton in Chicago and became the largest private law enforcement firm in the world; its emblem, an open eye over “We Never Sleep,” gave us the private eye.
- “though he had stolen only the jewel of time”: Foreshadowing of who Mr. Spitzer really is and the theft of “the great rajah’s jewel.” The jewel itself may refer to The Moonstone by Wilkie Collins in 1868. It is considered the first modern detective novel, and established many of the ground rules of the genre. A major theme of the novel is the intrusion of imperialism on everyday English life. Lynn Pykett argues that “the main narrative of The Moonstone concerns the disruption of the tranquility and order of genteel English life by a colonial legacy.” The events of the plot are set into motion by Colonel John Herncastle’s unlawful theft of the Moonstone in India, and, in leaving the diamond to Rachel Verinder in his will, he is perpetuating his crime. It is only when the diamond is returned to its rightful owners that the ‘curse’ can be lifted. Pykett also comments that the contradictory forces of feminine passion and silence provide the conflict of the novel, Sergeant “Cuff is defeated by the silence of women (Rachel and Rosanna), by feminine reticence (Lady Verinder), and the failure of individual women to conform to dominant stereotypes of femininity.”
- “a Channel swimmer had reached the other coast”: Captain Matthew Webb first swam the English Channel in 1875. Gertrude Ederle was the first woman to swim it, in 1926, nearly two hours faster than any man before her.
- “the interment of Peron Spitzer”: See Peron Spitzer.

- “a famous sportsman had been laid away”: Young told Studs Terkel that she “had such fun with the gambling part of the book, especially the gambler’s funeral, because Mr. Spitzer provided a marvelous funeral for his brother.” Terkel was reminded of Jack Teagarden singing “Gambler’s Blues,” a version of “St. James Infirmary” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “his brother’s mocking bird psychology”: The mockingbird mimics the songs of other birds, so a “mocking bird psychology” is a self made of borrowed voices, an echo without an original, fitting for twin brothers who mirror each other.
    - The mockingbird’s history in the US involves its initial decline due to the caged bird trade in the 19th century, its subsequent expansion northward after the trade ceased, and its cultural symbolism as a fighter for its home, its use in literature, and its adoption as state bird in several Southern states. English colonists brought the tradition of caging songbirds to America, and the Northern Mockingbird’s skill at mimicry made it a highly prized pet, leading to heavy trapping and population decline in the 19th century. Despite its diminishing numbers, it became a prominent symbol of the American South, celebrated in music and literature. After the cessation of the caged bird trade, the Northern Mockingbird population recovered and expanded its range northwards. The Northern Mockingbird is the official state bird of Arkansas, Florida, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Texas. Texas, in 1927, officially adopted it as the state bird due to its “fighter for the protection of his home” nature. In Hopi and other Pueblo tribes, the mockingbird is credited with teaching people to speak and serves as a diplomat in the Native American culture. (Wikipedia)
- “Pay to the bearer, with each box of Ivory soap flakes”: In 1840, the J.B. Williams Company in Glastonbury, Connecticut, manufactured soap under the name Ivorine. Williams decided to focus on its shaving soap and sold Ivorine to Procter & Gamble, which later developed Ivory. In 1879, James Norris Gamble, son of Procter & Gamble co-founder James Gamble and a trained chemist, developed an inexpensive white soap. The name Ivory was created by Harley Procter, the other founder’s son, who was inspired by the quote “[a]ll thy garments smell of myrrh and aloes and cassia out of the ivory palaces,” from Psalm 45 of the Bible. In September 1879, Procter & Gamble trademarked “Ivory” as the name of its new soap product. As Ivory is one of P&G’s oldest products it is sometimes called “Ivory Towers,” and its factory and research center in St. Bernard, Ohio, is named “Ivorydale.” Ivory’s first slogan, “It Floats!,” was introduced in 1891. The product’s other well-known slogan, “99+44⁄100% Pure,” which was in use by 1895, was based on the results of an analysis by an independent laboratory that Harley Procter hired to demonstrate that Ivory was purer than the castile soap available at the time. The original Ivory bar soap was whipped with air in its production and floated in water, although P&G discontinued this version of the soap in 2023, and the new version no longer floats. According to an apocryphal story, later discounted by the company, a worker accidentally left the mixing machine on too long, and the company chose to sell the “ruined” batch because the added air

did not change the basic ingredients of the soap. When appreciative letters about the new, floating soap inundated the company, P&G ordered the extended mix time as a standard procedure. However, company records indicate that the design of Ivory did not come about by accident. In 2004, over 100 years later, the P&G company archivist Ed Rider found documentation that revealed that James N. Gamble, who was a chemist, had discovered how to make the soap float and noted the result in his writings.

    - “American soap flake king” may refer to Procter & Gamble (P&G), founded by William Procter and James Gamble. They were a pivotal force in the American soap industry and its transition to soap flakes. While British manufacturer Lever Brothers were the first to produce flakes commercially, P&G popularized the product in the U.S., particularly with its Ivory soap brand. The American Civil War provided a major boost to P&G’s fortunes when the company secured contracts to supply the Union Army with soap and candles. After the war, returning soldiers created nationwide demand for P&G products. In the 1910s, P&G created Ivory Flakes, a shredded form of their popular Ivory soap. Unlike the harsh laundry soap of the era, the mild, pure Ivory Flakes were marketed for washing delicate items like baby clothes, silks, and nylons. The product’s success cemented P&G’s dominance in the market.
- “Gold Dust Scouring Twins”: were fictional, racially stereotypical black children who served as mascots for Fairbanks’ Gold Dust washing powder from the 1890s until 1960. Created by the N.K. Fairbanks Company, the twins, “Goldie” and “Dusty,” were depicted doing household chores and promoting the slogan “Let the Gold Dust Twins do your Work.” They were a highly successful, albeit controversial, marketing tool, appearing on packaging, in print, and eventually on a popular radio show, becoming as famous as other racially insensitive brands. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “majolica pavements”: is a type of tin-glazed pottery characterized by its thick white background glaze, on which colorful images are painted before firing to create a durable, vibrant, and often glossy finish. Originating in the Middle East and becoming famous in Italy during the Renaissance, the term “majolica” can also refer to colorful, naturalistic 19th-century earthenware, which was produced in England. The technique involves applying a tin oxide glaze to low-fired earthenware, then painting decorative designs onto the glaze before a second firing, which fuses the colors into the surface.
- “all four points were North upon this compass”: At the South Pole every direction is north. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “Bye, bye, blackbird”:
    - It is an American song published in 1926, with music by Ray Henderson and lyrics by Mort Dixon. Gene Austin’s recording topped the charts, and Josephine Baker’s 1927 recording in Paris made it popular in Europe. During World War II the German propaganda band Charlie and His Orchestra set new words to it to demoralize Allied troops, and some segregationists later played it to harass civil rights marchers. It returned in the films The Eddie Cantor Story (1954) and Pete Kelly’s Blues (1955), and Miles Davis’s 1956 recording on ’Round About Midnight made it a jazz

standard; Peggy Lee, Ringo Starr, and Paul McCartney recorded it too. (Wikipedia) See Music and Composers.

- “some old doodle bug writing in the sand”: The doodlebug is the larva of the antlion, which wanders through loose sand leaving winding trails like scribbles before it digs its pit trap.
- “unpopular with Red Caps”: A Redcap is a train station porter and helps passengers carry their luggage.
- “his high silk opera hat”: An opera hat is a top hat variant that collapses with a spring system if a man went to the theater or the opera since it was usually five inches tall.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Adventitious

Happening by chance; not essential or built in.

Ambivalently

With mixed or contradictory feelings or meanings.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Ancien régime

The old order; the French monarchy before the Revolution of 1789.

Aperture

An opening.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Archaic

Very old; belonging to a much earlier time.

Assuage

To ease or soothe.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Belfry

A bell tower, or the room in a tower where the bells hang.

Belligerence

Hostility; eagerness to fight.

Bisect

To cut or divide into two parts.

Bonanza

A sudden source of great wealth, from a rich vein of ore.

Bookie

A bookmaker, who takes bets and pays off the winners.

Boutonniere

A flower worn in a buttonhole.

Bravado

A show of boldness.

Buttress

A projecting support built against a wall; a flying buttress arches from a pier to the wall.

Calliope

A keyboard instrument of steam whistles, heard on showboats and at fairs.

Cashiered

Dismissed from the armed forces in disgrace.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Chagrin

Distress or annoyance at having failed or been humiliated.

Cheroot

A cigar cut square at both ends.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Concave

Curved inward.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Conscientious

Careful to do what is right; thorough.

Convex

Curved outward.

Cosmography

A description or map of the whole universe, both heavens and earth.

Cowl

A hood; also a hooded cap on a chimney that turns with the wind.

Crescendo

A gradual increase in loudness.

Cupola

A small dome on a roof.

Debilitated

Weakened.

Defunct

No longer living or in existence.

Demented

Out of one’s mind.

Derangement

Disorder, especially of the mind.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Devious

Winding; straying from the direct way.

Diffident

Shy; lacking confidence.

Diminuendo

A gradual softening in music.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Doge

The elected ruler of Venice.

Dour

Stern and gloomy.

Drachma

A silver coin of ancient Greece.

Droshky

A low, open, four-wheeled Russian carriage.

Echoic

Echoing.

Effaced

Erased; wiped out.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Elixir

A medicine sold as a cure-all.

Enigmatic

Mysterious; puzzling.

Ennui

Weariness and boredom from lack of interest.

Ephemeral

Lasting a very short time.

Equerry

An officer of a royal household who attends the sovereign.

Equivocation

The use of vague or double-edged words to avoid committing oneself.

Erratically

Unpredictably; irregularly.

Escarpment

A long, steep slope or cliff.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Expiration

A last breath; death.

Extradition

The handing over of an accused person to the country where the crime was committed.

Fishmonger

A seller of fish.

Flaccid

Soft and limp.

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Foolhardy

Recklessly bold.

Four-in-hand

A carriage drawn by four horses driven by one person; also a necktie knotted the same way.

Gable

The triangular upper end of a wall under a pitched roof.

Galleon

A large, many-decked sailing ship of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Gibbet

A gallows on which a body was hung in chains.

Gratuitous

Uncalled for; without cause.

Gregarious

Fond of company; sociable.

Griffin

A mythical beast with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.

Grudgingly

Unwillingly.

Haberdasher

A dealer in men’s furnishings, such as hats and shirts; in Britain, in small sewing goods.

Hackney

A carriage for hire.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Heterogeneous

Made of unlike parts; mixed.

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Hophead

A drug addict, especially one who uses opium.

Hypothetical

Supposed; existing only as an idea.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Imperceptibly

So slowly or slightly as to go unnoticed.

Impresario

The manager of an opera or concert company.

Inanition

Exhaustion caused by lack of nourishment, or lack of mental or spiritual vigor and enthusiasm.

Inarticulate

Unable to express oneself clearly.

Incipient

Just beginning.

Inclement

Of weather: cold, wet, or stormy.

Incorruptible

Not subject to decay or to bribery.

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Infinitesimal

Extremely small.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Inveterate

Long settled in a habit and unlikely to change, as in “inveterate gambler.”

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Jaunty

Lively and self-confident; set at a rakish angle.

Lacuna

A blank space or missing part; plural lacunae.

Larboard

The old word for the left side of a ship.

Livery

The uniform worn by a servant, such as a coachman.

Lodestar

A guiding star, especially the polestar.

Lope

A long, easy, bounding stride.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Mace

A heavy club carried as a weapon or a symbol of authority; also the early stick used in billiards.

Maharajah

A great king or prince in India. From the Sanskrit for “great king.”

Maidenhair

A delicate fern with fan-shaped leaflets on dark, hair-thin stalks.

Mansard

A roof with two slopes on each side, the lower one steep, named for François Mansart.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Mesa

A flat-topped hill with steep sides. Young writes of a “mesa of snow.”

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Minuscular

Tiny. Young’s form of minuscule.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Mitre

The tall pointed hat of a bishop.

Monocle

A single eyeglass held in place by the muscles around the eye.

Morgue

A place where the bodies of the dead are kept for identification.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mummer

An actor in a masked pantomime or folk play.

Munificence

Lavish generosity.

Ne’er-do-well

A lazy, worthless person.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Obtuse

Slow to understand.

Octave

The interval of eight notes between two tones of the same name.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Pacific

Peaceful.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Pecuniary

Having to do with money.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Pompous

Self-important; puffed up.

Portfolio

A flat case for carrying loose papers and documents.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Primogeniture

The right of the first-born son to inherit the whole estate.

Proffered

Held out; offered.

Psyche

A tall mirror that swings in a frame; also the soul.

Quavering

Trembling, as a voice.

Quitclaim

A legal release of a claim or right.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Saffron

Orange-yellow, the color of the spice.

Samovar

A metal urn used, especially in Russia, to boil water for tea.

Sand dollar

A flat, round sea urchin whose white skeleton is found on beaches.

Scrutiny

Close, searching examination.

Scudding

Moving fast before the wind.

Secretary

A writing desk with drawers and pigeon-holes; also a person who handles another’s letters.

Sentinel

A guard or watchman.

Serf

A peasant bound to the land and to its lord.

Snowbird

Slang for a cocaine user; also a small finch of winter.

Sonata

An instrumental composition, usually in three or four movements.

Sonorous

Deep and full in sound.

Sostenuto

Sustained; a direction to hold the notes for their full value.

Spats

Short cloth gaiters worn over the instep and ankle.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Steeplechase

A horse race over fences, ditches, and water jumps, first run cross-country from one church steeple to another.

Steppe

A vast, treeless grassland, as in Russia.

Stirrup cup

A last drink taken in the saddle before riding off.

Surmise

A guess, without proof.

Surreptitiously

Secretly, by stealth.

Taffeta

A crisp, shiny silk.

Tarpaulin

A heavy waterproof cloth for covering things.

Tatterdemalion

A ragged person; tattered.

Tenement

A crowded, run-down apartment building.

Tertium quid

A third something, neither one thing nor the other (Latin).

Threadbare

Worn so thin the threads show.

Timorous

Timid.

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists’ dream of turning base metal into gold.

Trepidation

Fear and trembling.

Tributary

A stream or river that flows into a larger one.

Troika

A Russian carriage or sleigh drawn by three horses abreast.

Tumult

A loud, confused uproar.

Velocity

Speed in a given direction.

Ward-heeler

A minor political worker who canvasses a city ward for a party boss.

Weathercock

A weathervane shaped like a rooster; also, a person who changes with every wind.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Winding sheet

The cloth a corpse is wrapped in for burial.

Windlass

A winch for hauling or hoisting.

Wraith

A ghost; a faint, pale shape.

Chapter 55

Content note: *This chapter mentions the suicide of Mr. Spitzer's twin brother, Peron.*

Summary

Mr. Spitzer imagines the life he would have led if his brother had died first: his theoretical music, his butterflies and postage stamps, safe investments in sunken ships and dead Russian bonds, and a tenth symphony that would begin where other composers had ended their lives. He remembers the twin house he designed so that each brother had his half, every portrait, garden, and mirror repeated, and how Peron mocked it, moved the furniture, forged Joachim's checks, and never did him a single favor. Since Peron's death his eyes see double, the small things large and the great things small; he sleeps with his eyes open and wakes in the wrong carriage, the wrong passenger behind a skeleton coachman. Peron lived by carpe diem, Joachim by hoc opus, hic labor est. The walls of the twin house have been knocked down, and Mr. Spitzer, broken by the funeral and its debts, lives in an old beach-comber's house, "still wondering whose funeral it was."

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Duality and Doubles · Identity and the Self · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · Society, Class, and Race

Symbols: Butterflies and Moths · Clouds and Storms · Eyes and Blindness · Horses and Carriages · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · Music and Instruments · Silence and Deafness · The House · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Aristotle · Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Augustine and Christian Theology · Plato and Platonism · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres · Spinoza

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Exploration and the Poles · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- Mr. Spitzer contemplates how he might have lived had his brother died earlier. It describes his orderly, carefully planned life dedicated to music, philately, and collecting

rare artifacts. It shows his desire for certainty, order, and a calm pursuit of immortality through art, contrasting with the chaos brought by his brother. This sets up the fundamental tension between the brothers' lives and personalities.

- Mr. Spitzer's conservative financial choices are described in detail. This symbolizes his attempt to secure an immutable future for his music and life, despite the apparent futility, reflecting his cautious and meticulous nature opposed to his brother's recklessness.
- The contrast between Joachim (Mr. Spitzer) and Peron are deeply explored as to their opposing characters. Joachim is altruistic, restrained, careful, and Peron was egotistical, reckless, and dismissive of Joachim's order and sacrifices. It highlights Peron's irresponsibility, including borrowing and forging checks in Joachim's name, which caused Joachim's financial ruin. The passage reveals Joachim's feelings of invisibility, neglect, and resentment toward Peron, who never acknowledged or appreciated him.
- The detailed description of the house, its symmetrical twin halves, and the doubled portraits and artifacts symbolize the intertwined yet opposed lives of the brothers. The house, with its precise architectural layout and mirrored rooms, reflects Joachim's desire for balance and control, while Peron's disregard for these arrangements symbolizes chaos and disruption. This metaphor extends to their personalities and fates.
- Mr. Spitzer's impaired perception and mental state is described as well as his physical and mental fragility. His difficulty distinguishing reality from hallucination or dream highlights his profound grief and alienation. His inability to fully "awaken" or "sleep" reflects his liminal, haunted existence after his brother's death.
- Mr. Spitzer's wandering through memories and dreams, confusion over past and present, and his search for meaning in his fragmented life are poignantly rendered as an existential reflection on time, memory, and identity. He struggles with questions of identity, the passage of time as a fluid concept, and the absence of harmony connecting his life's beginning and end. His experience of living "only at the end of time" and being lost between reality and illusion underscores the theme of existential disorientation.
- The image of Mr. Spitzer unknowingly traveling in the wrong carriage, as the wrong passenger, driven by a skeletal coachman through unfamiliar landscapes, symbolizes his loss of control and direction in life. This haunting metaphor emphasizes his disconnection from reality and his brother's lingering presence or shadow in his life.
- The chapter contrasts Peron's carefree motto "carpe diem" (seize the day) with Joachim's solemn motto "hoc opus, hic labor est" (this is the work, this is the labor). This highlights their fundamental differences between Peron's reckless enjoyment of the moment versus Joachim's dedication to a difficult, serious artistic mission. It underscores the tragedy of their opposing paths and the sacrifices Joachim made for a legacy unappreciated by Peron.

- The closing passage reflects Mr. Spitzer’s sense of isolation, the fading of the twin house and the life he once had, his confusion about his own identity, and his unresolved mourning for Peron who never mourned him. It is a reflection on loss, survival, and unresolved grief. It also evokes the futility and purposelessness he feels, despite his efforts to maintain order and shelter from life’s storms. The passage is a powerful summation of the chapter’s themes of loss, memory, and the fragile persistence of life.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “If his brother had died, Mr. Spitzer would have lived.” What life does he imagine, and why does Young begin with a life that never happened?
- “Silence was more beautiful than music, for the echo was more beautiful than the sound.” Why would a composer prefer silence?
- “The morning had been the dream, and the night had been real.” What did the long winter night do to Mr. Spitzer?

Characters

- Peron mocked “the mad man’s dream of absolute equality.” Why does the twin house offend him?
- The bank teller “insisted that there was only one brother.” Was the teller wrong?
- Peron lived by carpe diem and Joachim by hoc opus, hic labor est. Which motto does Mr. Spitzer live by now?

Connections

- Mr. Spitzer wakes “in the wrong carriage” as “the wrong passenger.” How does his journey echo Vera’s bus ride?
- “Could not the recording angel have made, also, a grand mistake?” Where else in the novel do ledgers, wills, and debts try to measure a life?
- “After Peron’s death, he had dreamed he was two brothers, and one was dead.” Where else does one character carry another inside?

Reflection

- “He had gone on when he could not go on.” What keeps a person going?
- “If his goal had been realized, even for a moment, it would have ceased to be the object of his quest.” Is a goal worth more unreached?

- Without Peron’s chaos “there would have been such perfect justice that there would have been a frozen world and nothing moving.” Does life need chance?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer (Joachim)

- A man of order, methodical, cautious, and devoted to a grand musical project he calls his “opus” or “dirge.”
- Represents stability, intellectual rigor, and a desire for certainty in an uncertain world.
- Lives a life of sacrifice, burdened by his brother’s recklessness and debts.
- Suffers from physical and mental impairments, including distorted vision and a fragile body, symbolic of his fragile mental state.
- Haunted by his brother’s absence and the loss of a shared past, struggling with identity and reality.
- Symbolizes the rational, structured side of human nature, trying to impose order on chaos.

Peron (Mr. Spitzer’s Brother)

- A gambler, extrovert, and embodiment of chaos, risk, and unpredictability.
- Lives a life of abandon, irresponsibility, and indifference to consequence.
- His death leaves Joachim to bear the burdens and debts he left behind.
- Represents the impulsive, irrational, and destructive forces in life, contrasting sharply with Joachim’s order.
- His laughter and ghostly presence continue to haunt Joachim.

Research: Themes

Duality and Mirror Imagery

See: Duality and Doubles

- The chapter repeatedly emphasizes twins, mirrors, and reflections: twin portraits, twin gardens, twin portraits of historical figures, and the divided house.
- Symbolizes the split between order (Joachim) and chaos (Peron), reason and passion, life and death.
- The mirroring extends to the psychological level where the brothers are halves of one whole, each incomplete without the other.

Memory and Identity

See: Memory and the Past · Identity and the Self

- Joachim’s identity is fragmented; his memory is unreliable, altered by grief and loss.
- He questions whether he is himself or his brother, and whether he is awake or dreaming.
- His life is a continuous search for meaning in the past and the present, often blurred and confused.

Order versus Chaos

See: Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- Joachim’s life is governed by plans, maps, and precise arrangements designed to exclude chance and disorder.
- Peron’s life is the antithesis: reckless, chaotic, and unpredictable.
- The tension between these forces creates conflict and tragedy, illustrating the human struggle to balance these aspects.

Mortality and Immortality

See: Death and Mortality

- Joachim views his music as a tomb, an immortal legacy that will outlive his physical existence.
- Peron’s death and presumed freedom contrast with Joachim’s struggle to survive and find meaning.
- The chapter meditates on death, mourning, and the desire for lasting significance.

Alienation and Isolation

See: Isolation and Connection

- Joachim feels alienated from himself, others, and reality.
- His impaired vision and mental confusion symbolize his estrangement from the world.
- He lives in a liminal state, neither fully awake nor fully asleep, caught between life and death.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Twin House and Mirroring Rooms

See: Mirrors and Reflections · The House · Twins and Doubles

- Symbolize the divided self and fractured identity; also the attempt to impose order on life’s chaos.

Music and Silence

See: Music and Instruments · Silence and Deafness

- Music is both a creative act and a tomb; silence and echo represent memory and death.

The Butterfly Collection and Stamps

See: Butterflies and Moths

- Represent delicate beauty, memory, and past achievements, threatened by Peron’s recklessness.

The Coach and Horses

See: Horses and Carriages

- Symbolize the journey of life and death; Joachim often finds himself in the wrong carriage, lost in time and space.

The Candle Flames and Snuffers

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Represent life and death, consciousness and oblivion; the snuffer putting out stars is a metaphor for fading life.

Visual Impairments

See: Eyes and Blindness

- Joachim’s double vision and shifting perspectives symbolize his mental confusion and the instability of perception.

Research: Resources

- “such a thing as a non-aural music”: Pythagoras taught that the planets make a music by their motion that human ears cannot hear. Boethius divided music into three kinds, the music of the world, the music of the human being, and the music of instruments, and only the last can be heard (Boethius, De institutione musica 1.2, about 510). See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres.
- “his great emperors and queens, his pearl-bordered moths”: Young’s collection is made of real butterflies and moths: the purple emperor, the queen, the pearl-bordered fritillary, the pebble prominent, the marbled white, and the mourning cloak, which the

English call the Camberwell beauty. See The mourning cloak butterfly hibernating and Butterflies and Moths.

- “his china shepherdesses for his twin marble chimney pieces”: may refer to the China shepherdesses that were popular for the wealthy in the nineteenth century and were often found on fictional mantels and compared in looks to the beauty of a female character.
  - Porcelain shepherdesses were made in pairs to stand at the two ends of a mantelpiece, by Meissen from the 1740s and by Chelsea, Derby, and Staffordshire potters into the nineteenth century.
- “for he had been a great philatelist”: A philatelist is a person who collects and studies postage stamps, a practice also known as philately. The term combines the Greek roots “phil-“ (loving) and “ateleia” (tax-exemption), referring to the freedom from charges granted by a stamp. A philatelist may focus on the historical or artistic value of stamps, organizing their collections thematically or by country. The French collector Georges Herpin coined the word in 1864.
- “a remarkable collection of triangles, monuments, commemoratives”: Collectors sort stamps by subject. The Cape of Good Hope triangulars of 1853 were the first triangular stamps, and the first United States commemoratives were the Columbian issue of 1893, marking four hundred years since Columbus’s first voyage.
- “that the oldest coachman will stop and take on another passenger”: “Because I could not stop for Death – / He kindly stopped for me – / The Carriage held but just Ourselves – / And Immortality” (Emily Dickinson, “Because I could not stop for Death,” about 1862, published 1890). See The Black Coachman and American Writers.
- “never have consulted Blackstone”: Sir William Blackstone’s Commentaries on the Laws of England (four volumes, 1765-1769) was the standard guide to the common law in England and America; Abraham Lincoln taught himself law from it.
- “The other great composers had written only their ninth symphonies”: Curse of the ninth is a superstition connected with classical music. It is the belief that the ninth symphony is destined to be the composer’s last. After finishing it the composer is fated to die before finishing a tenth. Beethoven, Dvořák, and Bruckner each died with nine numbered symphonies, and Gustav Mahler, who feared the curse, left his Tenth unfinished at his death in 1911. See On the curse of the ninth and Music and Composers.
- “as dead as Grand Russian Imperials today”: Imperial Russian government bonds, sold widely in France and abroad before 1917, became worthless when the Soviet government repudiated the tsarist debts in 1918. See the Grand Russian Imperial stocks and bonds in the Chapter 54 resources.
- “the iron bells of old Czar Kolokol”: The Tsar Bell, also known as the Tsarsky Kolokol, Tsar Kolokol III, or Royal Bell, is a bell on display on the grounds of the Moscow Kremlin. The bell was commissioned by Empress Anna Ivanovna, niece of Peter the Great. It has never been in working order, suspended, nor rung. It was cast in bronze

in 1733-1735 and cracked in the Kremlin fire of 1737, when an eleven-ton piece broke off. (Wikipedia)

- “some old watered bond issues of the Lost Atlantis”: “Lost Atlantis” is a mythical island civilization described by Plato in his dialogues as a powerful, technologically advanced society that was destroyed by earthquakes and sank beneath the sea. While the story is a well-known myth and has inspired theories about real locations and even modern technological advancements, most historians and scientists believe Atlantis was a philosophical allegory created by Plato to serve as a cautionary tale against hubris. See Plato and Platonism. Watered stock is stock issued for far more than the company’s assets are worth, after the drovers said to have fed their cattle salt and let them drink before they were weighed for sale.
- “sunken Roman galleys, Phoenician traders, Etruscan skills, Etruscan boatmen”: “Roman galleys” A galley is a type of ship optimised for propulsion by oars. Galleys were historically used for warfare, trade, and piracy mostly in the seas surrounding Europe. It developed in the Mediterranean world during antiquity and continued to exist in various forms until the early 19th century. Galleys were the primary warships used by the ancient Mediterranean naval powers, including the Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans. (Wikipedia)
  - “Phoenician traders” were ancient Mediterranean seafarers who established an extensive trade network from about 1550 to 300 B.C.E., exchanging goods like Tyrian purple dye, textiles, metalwork, and glass for raw materials such as copper, tin, ivory, and silver. They were skilled in navigation, shipbuilding, and craft production, establishing colonies and trading posts across the Mediterranean, from the Levant to Iberia and North Africa. Their innovations included the development of the alphabet and early forms of complex trading mechanisms like written contracts, weights, and even coins.
  - “Etruscan skiffs” is a general term used for the smaller, likely less complex boats associated with the Etruscan civilization, contrasted with their larger warships and merchant vessels. Evidence for these types of smaller boats comes from tomb paintings, like those in the Tomb of the Ship in Tarquinia, and clay models, though direct archaeological finds of Etruscan-specific small craft are scarce. These smaller vessels likely served for activities such as fishing, local transport, and possibly supporting larger ships.
  - “Etruscan boatman,” known as Charun or Charu, was a demon of the dead who ferried souls across a boundary to the afterlife, similar to the Greek Charon. Etruscan Charun was distinctively depicted with a hooked nose, hammer, and sometimes animal features like wings, and his presence on tombstones and funerary urns indicated the soul’s journey to the underworld ruled by Aita.
- “the muted murmur of the paper nautilus”: The paper nautilus, or argonaut, is an octopus whose female makes a thin, paper-white shell to carry her eggs; Aristotle and Pliny believed she raised two arms as sails and sailed the sea in it. See Aristotle.

- “The golden fleece would have turned to a grey beard”: Jason and the Argonauts sailed to Colchis for the Golden Fleece, the fleece of the winged ram, guarded by a dragon. See Greek Mythology.
- “Should the alteration recognize that it was altered?”: Young turns Shakespeare’s “Love is not love / Which alters when it alteration finds” (William Shakespeare, Sonnet 116, 1609). See Shakespeare.
- “leaving Joachim to face the music, pay the piper”: To pay the piper is to bear the cost, as in the proverb “he who pays the piper calls the tune.” The Pied Piper of Hamelin, cheated of his fee for ridding the town of rats, piped its children away.
- “poor as a Skid Row bum”: See Skid Row in the Chapter 52 resources.
- “a dead cue-ball artist”: See the billiards legend of Louis Fox in the Chapter 53 resources. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “twirled the bare-ribbed bird-cages”: In chuck-a-luck, also called birdcage, three dice tumble in an hourglass-shaped wire cage, and players bet on the numbers that come up. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “as if it were a sea of glass which had no end”: “And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal” (Revelation 4:6, KJV). See The Bible.
- “all money was counterfeit even like the sun, moon, stars turned out at the great Mint”: Money, though officially minted, is worth what people agree it is worth, and Young sends the sun, moon, and stars to the same great Mint.
    - Before coins came barter and commodity money: cattle from about 9000 BC, and from about 1200 BC cowrie shells, the most widely and longest used currency in history, especially in Asia and Africa. Standard weights of gold and silver were used in Egypt and Mesopotamia by the third millennium BC. Lydia struck the first stamped coins of electrum about 650-600 BC, while Chinese mints cast coins shaped like spades and knives. Chinese merchants used paper receipts called “flying money,” and the Song government issued the first official paper currency in the 1020s; Sweden issued Europe’s first banknotes in 1661. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries governments tied paper money to gold. (Wikipedia)
    - The first minting facility, or mint, was likely established by the Lydians in the 7th century BC for coining precious metals, a practice that spread to Greece, Rome, and beyond, with modern countries often operating one national mint. Coinage spread from Lydia to the Aegean Islands, Italy, Persia, and India, with Romans developing modern minting techniques by the 4th century BC. The first national mint in the United States was established by the Coinage Act of 1792 in Philadelphia.
    - Counterfeit money is currency produced outside of the legal sanction of a state or government, usually in a deliberate attempt to imitate that currency and so as to deceive its recipient. Producing or using counterfeit money is a form of fraud or forgery, and is illegal in all jurisdictions of the world. The business of counterfeiting money is nearly as old as money itself: plated copies (known as Fourrées) have been found of Lydian coins, which are thought to be among the first Western coins.

Before the introduction of paper money, the most prevalent method of counterfeiting involved mixing base metals with pure gold or silver. During World War II, the Nazis forged British pounds and American dollars. Traditionally, anti-counterfeiting measures involved including fine detail with raised intaglio printing on bills which allows non-experts to easily spot forgeries. On coins, milled or reeded (marked with parallel grooves) edges are used to show that none of the valuable metal has been scraped off. (Wikipedia)

- “could certainly never have employed a Seeing Eye bookkeeper”: The Seeing Eye, the first guide dog school in the United States, was founded in 1929 by Dorothy Harrison Eustis, who had trained German shepherds for the Swiss army and police; it moved to Morristown, New Jersey, in 1931. See Eyes and Blindness.
- “could not the recording angel have made, also, a grand mistake”: In Laurence Sterne’s Tristram Shandy, a book Young named among her influences, Uncle Toby swears an oath out of pity for the dying Le Fever, and “the ACCUSING SPIRIT, which flew up to heaven’s chancery with the oath, blush’d as he gave it in;—and the RECORDING ANGEL, as he wrote it down, dropp’d a tear upon the word, and blotted it out for ever” (Laurence Sterne, Tristram Shandy, vol. 6, ch. 8, 1762).
- “from vastly towering cumulo-nimbus to darkening alto-stratus”: Cumulonimbus are the towering thunderheads; altostratus is the grey sheet of mid-level cloud that comes before steady rain or snow. The Latin cloud names go back to Luke Howard’s Essay on the Modifications of Clouds (1803). See Clouds and Storms.
- “the long streamers of Aurora Borealis”: See the northern and southern lights in the Chapter 54 resources. See Astronomy and Exploration and the Poles.
- “an old croupier, perhaps at the wrong wheel”: A croupier is the person in charge of a gaming table, gathering in and paying out money or tokens. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “Gilts and Estates”: A gilt is a British government bond, called “gilt-edged” for its safety, since the government has never missed a payment. An estate is everything a person owns and owes at death, distributed by will or, without one, by law.
- “Last Bequests”: a bequest is a gift of property, money, or other assets made from an estate to a specific individual, organization, or trust through a will or other estate planning document. It is essentially a legacy designated to be distributed after the estate owner’s death. Bequests are a flexible way to support loved ones and charitable causes, with different types including specific gifts of particular items, general cash amounts, or a percentage of the remaining estate.
- “Progress of Probate”: involves filing the will and petition with the court, identifying and appraising assets, notifying interested parties, paying debts and taxes, and finally distributing the remaining property to beneficiaries. The timeline for this process varies by state and the complexity of the estate, typically ranging from several months to over a year, with complications like will contests or estate taxes extending the duration.
- “Authenticity of Will”: A will’s authenticity is established by confirming the testator’s intent and capacity at the time of creation, and by verifying the proper execution under

state law, which generally requires a written document signed by the testator and two witnesses (unless it's a handwritten "holographic will," which is valid in many states without witnesses). A self-proving affidavit, signed by the testator, witnesses, and a notary, simplifies probate by attaching the will to the affidavit, making the process easier and saving time and money.

- "Will of the Dead": may refer to a legal will and testament, a legally binding document that specifies how a person's property should be distributed after their death. In a spiritual or metaphorical context, it could refer to the concept of the deceased having continued influence or wishes, such as in Jesus's "let the dead bury their dead" (Matthew 8:22), which turns attention to the living. In the New Testament the covenant is a will that takes effect at a death: "For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator" (Hebrews 9:16).
- "Cases in Chancery": are legal matters handled by a type of court, originally established in England, that focuses on fairness and equity rather than strictly applying common law rules. These courts typically address issues like trusts and estates, corporate and partnership disputes, real estate and mortgage foreclosures, adoptions and guardianships, and requests for equitable remedies such as injunctions and specific performance of contracts. Unlike criminal cases, chancery courts resolve civil disputes, and they often involve complex personal, financial, and familial relationships.
- "Laws Governing New England Fishing": the regulation of New England fishing was a fragmented mix of international treaties, state-level rules, and early federal actions that lacked comprehensive conservation measures. The period was defined by escalating conflicts, increasing fishing efficiency, and a growing understanding of resource depletion, all of which would eventually necessitate stronger federal oversight in the 1970s.
- "Laws Governing Whaling": Whaling was a largely unregulated industry until the start of loose agreements in the 1930s and culminating in the formation of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) in 1946. These laws attempted to manage whale stocks but struggled with enforcement and compliance.
- "that the man who found the whale was its owner": Young reverses the whalemen's own law. In Moby-Dick, "A Fast-Fish belongs to the party fast to it," and "A Loose-Fish is fair game for anybody who can soonest catch it" (Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, ch. 89, "Fast-Fish and Loose-Fish," 1851). In Swift v. Gifford (1872), a Massachusetts federal court held that a whale belonged to the ship whose harpoon first struck it, not to the ship whose crew later killed and took it. See American Writers.
- "The Musical Sensibilities of the King Walrus": may refer to Lewis Carroll's poem "The Walrus and the Carpenter" which first appeared in 1871. Its rhythmic narrative has been set to music multiple times over the decades, including the 1951 Walt Disney film Alice in Wonderland. There it is sung by J. Pat O'Malley in a vaudeville style, and the charming Walrus eats the oysters.
- "Burke's Peerage in the Penguin World": may refer to Burke's Peerage Limited, a British genealogical publisher, considered an authority on the order of precedence of

noble families and information on the lesser nobility of the United Kingdom. It was founded in 1826, when the Anglo-Irish genealogist John Burke began releasing books devoted to the ancestry and heraldry of the peerage, baronetage, knightage and landed gentry of Great Britain and Ireland. His first publication, a Genealogical and Heraldic Dictionary of the Peerage and Baronetage of the United Kingdom, was updated sporadically until 1847, when the company began publishing new editions every year as Burke's Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage (often shortened and known as Burke's Peerage). Other books followed, including Burke's Landed Gentry, Burke's Colonial Gentry, and Burke's General Armory. In addition to its peerage publications, the Burke's publishing company produced books on Royal families of Europe and Latin America, ruling families of Africa and the Middle East, distinguished families of the United States and historical families of Ireland. (Wikipedia)

- "New England Mortality Rates": Historically, New England mortality rates were characterized by significant changes over time, from periods of exceptionally high colonial-era life expectancy to high urban death rates in the 19th century, before undergoing a sharp decline in the early 20th century. Contrary to popular belief, 17th-century New England colonists enjoyed a long life expectancy, averaging 65 to 70 years. This was 15 to 20 years longer than in England at the time and was attributed to the healthy climate and spaced-out communities. Studies of early New England towns show surprisingly high child survival rates. For example, in Andover, Massachusetts, between 1640 and 1669, 87% to 91% of children survived to age 20 (Philip J. Greven Jr., Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts, 1970). These long lifespans were frequently interrupted by devastating epidemics, such as outbreaks of smallpox, measles, and influenza. Because of low population density and less frequent exposure, community immunity would wane, leading to cyclic, highly destructive epidemics when a new disease was introduced. Europeans brought diseases like smallpox, measles, and cholera, to which Native Americans had no immunity. These outbreaks killed up to 90% of the Indigenous population in parts of New England. While overall U.S. mortality was low compared to Western Europe, urban areas saw a significant "mortality penalty." By the early 1900s, the life expectancy for white people in New England's urban areas was 46 years, compared to 54.7 years in rural areas. As towns grew, infectious diseases spread rapidly due to poor sanitation and crowded living conditions. As the leading cause of death in the 19th century, tuberculosis was a scourge in New England, affecting multiple members and generations of families. Diphtheria, scarlet fever, and whooping cough were major threats to children, contributing to high infant and child mortality rates. Cholera and typhoid fever also emerged as epidemic threats, particularly impacting port cities like Boston. The early 20th century saw a dramatic decline in mortality, largely due to public health measures and improved living standards, rather than new medical interventions.
- "Actuarial Statistics": is the application of statistical theory and probability analysis to evaluate and manage financial and other risks for organizations, particularly in the insurance, finance, and healthcare industries. Actuaries use statistical models and mathematical tools to quantify the likelihood and financial impact of uncertain events,

enabling businesses to forecast outcomes, price products, manage capital, and allocate funds to cover potential losses.

- “The Habits of the Night-Crowned Kingfisher”: “The Habits of the Night-Crowned Kingfisher” is an invented title. It may blend the kingfisher with the black-crowned night heron, a nocturnal fishing bird whose Latin name, Nycticorax, means night raven, for its harsh, crow-like call.
- “The Life of the Sphinx Moth”: The life of a sphinx moth involves four stages: egg, larva (caterpillar), pupa, and adult. After mating, the adult female lays eggs on a host plant, which hatch into ravenous caterpillars that feed and grow, molting multiple times. Once fully grown, the caterpillar burrows into the soil or leaf litter to form a pupa, overwintering in this stage. The following spring, or later if delayed, the pupa transforms into an adult moth, which emerges, feeds on nectar using its proboscis, mates, and then lays eggs to begin the cycle anew.
- “the seraph with his wings folded across his eyes”: “Above it stood the seraphims: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly” (Isaiah 6:2, KJV). See The Bible.
- “his tortoise harp with the gut string stretched inside its empty shell”: The baby Hermes made the first lyre from a tortoise shell strung with gut, then gave it to Apollo (Homeric Hymn to Hermes). See Greek Mythology.
- “each with its blind boy cupid”: See blind Cupid in the Chapter 52 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “twin Corinthian columns and black and white parterres”: “Corinthian columns” are the most ornate of the three classical Greek orders, distinguished by their slender, fluted shafts and elaborate, bell-shaped capitals adorned with two rows of stylized acanthus leaves and scrolls. Named after the ancient city of Corinth, these columns are considered the most refined and elegant, often signifying wealth and prestige through their intricate, decorative design.
    - “parterres” is a level space in a garden or yard occupied by an ornamental arrangement of flower beds or in North America a part of the ground floor of an auditorium in the rear and on the sides, especially the part beneath the balcony.
- “two pale cavaliers riding two pale horses”: “And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him” (Revelation 6:8, KJV). See The Bible.
- “the twin Lady Hamiltons”: “Lady Hamiltons” Dame Emma Hamilton, known upon moving to London as Emma Hart, and upon marriage as Lady Hamilton, was an English maid, model, dancer and actress. She began her career in London’s demi-monde, becoming the mistress of a series of wealthy men, culminating in the naval hero Lord Nelson, and was the favourite model and muse of the portraitist George Romney. In 1791, at the age of 26, she married Sir William Hamilton, British ambassador to the Kingdom of Naples, where she was a success at court, befriending the queen who was a sister of Marie Antoinette, and meeting Nelson. (Wikipedia)

- “the twin George Washingtons fording the twin Delawares”: “George Washingtons fording the twin Delawares” Washington Crossing the Delaware is the title of three 1851 oil-on-canvas paintings by the German-American artist Emanuel Leutze depicting General George Washington’s crossing of the Delaware River with the Continental Army on the night of December 25-26, 1776, during the American Revolutionary War. Washington’s covert crossing the Delaware River that night was the first of several moves, leading to a surprise attack and victory against Hessian forces at the Battle of Trenton in New Jersey on the morning of December 26. The original, in the Kunsthalle in Bremen, was destroyed by bombing in 1942; another version hangs in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. (Wikipedia)
- “the twin Duchesses of Devon ascending the twin high-wheelers”: “Duchesses of Devon” There have been many Duchesses of Devonshire throughout history, including Georgiana Cavendish (1757-1806), a famous socialite and political activist known for her style and charisma, and Deborah Cavendish (1920-2014), a member of the well-known Mitford family and a writer and socialite. Other notable Duchesses include Mary Cavendish (1895-1988), who served as Mistress of the Robes to Queen Elizabeth II, and Amanda Cavendish (born 1944), the current wife of the 12th Duke. Flag: after 1964, the later duchesses.
  - Gainsborough’s portrait of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire, was stolen from Agnew’s gallery in London in 1876 by the thief Adam Worth and not recovered until 1901.
  - The high-wheeler, or penny-farthing, was the bicycle of the 1870s and 1880s, long after Georgiana’s death in 1806.
- “the twin President Monroes, each signing the Monroe Doctrine”: “President Monroes” James Monroe (1758-1831), the last Founding Father to be president, served as the fifth president from 1817 to 1825, the Era of Good Feelings. He signed the Missouri Compromise, which admitted Missouri as a slave state, and in 1823 announced the Monroe Doctrine, opposing European intervention in the newly independent countries of the Americas. He belonged to the American Colonization Society, which sent freed Black Americans to Africa, and Liberia’s capital, Monrovia, is named for him. He died on July 4, 1831. (Wikipedia)
  - “Monroe Doctrine” was a U.S. foreign policy statement in 1823 by President James Monroe that opposed European colonialism and interference in the Western Hemisphere. It essentially divided the world into two spheres of influence: Europe and the Americas, with the U.S. pledging not to interfere in European affairs in exchange for European powers staying out of the newly independent nations of the Western Hemisphere. While initially not taken seriously by Europe, it evolved into a cornerstone of American foreign policy and was later extended by Theodore Roosevelt’s Corollary to justify U.S. intervention in Latin America.
  - Monroe did not sign a doctrine. He announced it in his annual message to Congress on 2 December 1823, in words largely drafted by his Secretary of State, John Quincy Adams.

- “the twin British Red Coats”: “British Red Coats” refers to soldiers of the British Army, particularly those who wore distinctive red coats, primarily during the 17th to the early 20th centuries. The term gained notoriety in the United States due to their role as the opposing force during the American Revolution. While the red coat is strongly associated with the British, it was also adopted by other armies and has a history tied to practicality and symbolism.
- “the twin belles of old New York”: may refer to The Dolly Sisters. Hungarian-American identical twins Rosie and Jenny Dolly were well-known dancers, singers, and actresses in New York City’s vaudeville and theater scene in the 1910s and ‘20s. They were famously successful on Broadway and became international celebrities. Their lives were later turned into the 1945 film The Dolly Sisters. There is also a popular Greenwich Village legend that tells the story of two feuding twin sisters who were the original inhabitants of the twin antebellum houses at 39 and 41 Commerce Street. According to the story, a sea captain built the identical houses for his twin daughters, giving them a shared garden but few windows facing each other to keep them apart. This version of the houses’ history is not supported by evidence. The houses were actually built in the 1830s by a New Jersey milkman as an investment property.
- “the twin President Garfields”: “twin President Garfields” James Abram Garfield (1831-1881), born in a log cabin in Ohio, was a preacher, a Union general, and a congressman before he became the 20th president in March 1881. He published his own proof of the Pythagorean theorem (1876) and spoke for civil rights for African Americans and civil service reform. Charles J. Guiteau shot him on July 2, 1881, and he died on September 19, of infection caused by his doctors’ unsanitary methods. (Wikipedia)
- “the twin Roman senators addressing the twin Roman senates”: “Roman senators” In the 3rd century BCE, Roman senators were members of a life-long, elite body that held significant power by advising magistrates and the Roman people. Membership was exclusive, initially consisting of patricians but later expanding to include plebeians who had held senior magistracies. The Senate’s authority stemmed from the collective prestige of its members, who were typically from wealthy, landowning families, and the Senate’s advisories (senatus consulta) were often followed in practice. The senate then numbered around 300 members. Famous Roman senators of the 3rd century BC include Marcus Claudius Marcellus, a renowned general and consul, and Cato the Elder, a staunch conservative statesman and military leader. Another key figure was Gaius Flaminius, a consul and politician known for his land reforms and his death at the Battle of Lake Trasimene.
- “the twin St. Bernard dogs”: “St. Bernard dogs” became famous for rescuing alpine travelers by working with monks at the Great St. Bernard Hospice in the Alps, where they were bred for their strength, endurance, and keen sense of smell to find people buried under snow and avalanches. Working in pairs, one dog would locate and provide warmth and comfort to the stranded individual while the other returned to the hospice to alert the monks. The most famous of these dogs was Barry, credited with

saving over 40 lives, with his preserved body now at the Natural History Museum of Bern.

- “the twin Queen Isabellas of Spain bidding farewell to Christopher Columbus”: “Queen Isabellas of Spain” Isabella I of Castile (1451-1504), with her husband Ferdinand of Aragon, united Spain as the Catholic Monarchs. In 1492 they took Granada, ending Muslim rule in Spain, issued the Alhambra Decree expelling the Jews, and financed Columbus’s voyage; they also began the Spanish Inquisition. (Wikipedia)
  - “Christopher Columbus” was an Italian explorer and navigator, sponsored by the Spanish monarchs, who led four transatlantic voyages between 1492 and 1504, opening the door for widespread European colonization of the Americas. His expeditions began a new era of European exploration, but also brought disease and conquest to the Indigenous populations of the Americas.
  - The legend that Columbus died a pauper is not true. He died in Valladolid in 1506 with an income from the Indies, though still petitioning the crown for the titles and share he had been promised, and still believing he had reached Asia.
- “had never seen the Chrysler Building”: “Chrysler Building” is a 1,046-foot Art Deco skyscraper at Lexington Avenue and 42nd Street in Manhattan, commissioned by Walter Chrysler. When it was completed in 1930 it was the tallest building in the world, for eleven months, until the Empire State Building. (Wikipedia)
- “the old Flatiron Building”: “old Flatiron Building,” originally the Fuller Building, is a 22-story triangular skyscraper at Fifth Avenue, Broadway, and 23rd Street in Manhattan, designed by Daniel Burnham and opened in 1902. Its name comes from its shape, like a cast-iron clothes iron, and it anchors the south end of Madison Square. (Wikipedia)
- “the old Fishback Building”: “old Fishback Building” may refer to the building in Indianapolis it was the start of Frank Fishback’s coffee roasting business in the late 1880s and by the 1910s it also sold Virginia Sweet brand foods. The company closed in the 1930s. The Fishback family is a family in America that can be traced back to John Fishback, an immigrant from Germany in 1714 who settled in Virginia with Governor Spottswood’s colony. Extensive genealogical records, including the 1914 book Genealogy of the Fishback Family in America, document the family’s history and its descendants’ migration across the United States, with significant populations historically in Kentucky and other states. See the Fishback Building in the Chapter 54 resources. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “had never seen Boston Common”: “Boston Common” is a public park in downtown Boston, Massachusetts. It is the oldest city park in the United States. Boston Common consists of 50 acres of land bounded by five major Boston streets: Tremont Street, Park Street, Beacon Street, Charles Street, and Boylston Street. The Common is part of the Emerald Necklace of parks and parkways that extend from the Common south to Franklin Park in Jamaica Plain, Roxbury, and Dorchester. The visitors’ center for the city of Boston is located on the Tremont Street side of the park. The Central Burying Ground is on the Boylston Street side of Boston Common and contains the graves of artist Gilbert Stuart and composer William Billings. Also buried there are Samuel

Sprague and his son Charles Sprague, one of America's earliest poets. Samuel Sprague was a participant in the Boston Tea Party and fought in the Revolutionary War. The Common was designated as a Boston Landmark by the Boston Landmarks Commission in 1977. (Wikipedia)

- "the old Third Avenue El": "old Third Avenue El" may refer to the now defunct IRT Third Avenue Line. The IRT Third Avenue Line, commonly known as the Third Avenue Elevated, Third Avenue El, or Bronx El, was an elevated railway in Manhattan and the Bronx, New York City. Originally operated by the New York Elevated Railway, an independent railway company, it was acquired by the Interborough Rapid Transit Company (IRT) and eventually became part of the New York City Subway system. The first segment of the line, with service at most stations, opened from South Ferry to Grand Central Depot on August 26, 1878. Service was extended to Harlem in Manhattan on December 30. In 1881 this line already began 24/7 service. Service in Manhattan closed on May 12, 1955, and it was the last elevated line in Manhattan to run, a frequent backdrop for movies. (Wikipedia)
- "mystical laundry signs of old Chinatown": "Chinatown" U.S. Chinatowns were ethnic enclaves, primarily in the West, established in the mid-19th century by immigrants drawn by the Gold Rush and railroad jobs, but were devastated by the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act which banned further immigration and caused populations to decline. By the early 20th century, Chinatowns were predominantly male-dominated communities centered on social societies, gambling, and opium dens, but after the 1943 Magnuson Act repealed the exclusion laws, populations began to rise again, leading to changes in the established communities.
    - Shut out of most work by law and prejudice, many Chinese immigrants ran hand laundries, whose painted signs in Chinese characters Young calls mystical. See Society, Class, and Race.
- "received a shower of ticker tape": New York's first ticker-tape parade, on 28 October 1886, celebrated the dedication of the Statue of Liberty, when office workers on Wall Street threw stock-ticker tape from their windows.
- "the old-time Hoboken ferry boats": "Old-time Hoboken ferry boats" may refer to the Hoboken Ferry Company, which began operations in 1822 as one of several ferry lines across the Hudson River. The Hoboken Ferry operated until 1967 and saw significant developments like the 1907 opening of the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad's Hoboken Terminal, which the ferry served, and the introduction of various ferryboats like the double-ended, vehicle-carrying Binghamton in 1905. The ferries carried thousands of commuters daily until the Hudson and Manhattan Railroad tubes under the river opened in 1908 and took much of their trade. Flag: after 1964, the closing of 1967.
    - Here the Jersey shore is the New Jersey bank of the Hudson River, where the ferries left Hoboken for Manhattan, not the resort coast called the Jersey Shore.
- "many mementos moris of Joachim's life": Memento mori is an artistic or symbolic trope acting as a reminder of the inevitability of death.

- “The divine Melba sings”: The divine Melba sings may refer to Dame Nellie Melba who was an operatic soprano. See Music and Composers.
- “Jenny Lind will sing tonight”: Jenny Lind may refer to Johanna Maria “Jenny” Lind who was a Swedish opera singer. P. T. Barnum brought her to America for a tour that opened at Castle Garden, New York, in September 1850. See Music and Composers.
- “First American performance of Ole Bull”: Ole Bull may refer to Ole Bornemann Bull who was a Norwegian virtuoso violinist and composer. He first toured America in 1843 and in 1852 founded Oleana, a short-lived Norwegian colony in Pennsylvania. See Music and Composers.
- “Boston debut of the Swiss bell-ringers”: “Swiss bell ringers” refers to both a popular form of American entertainment in the 19th and early 20th centuries, featuring musical performances with handbells and cowbells, and the generic term for handbell choirs that became popular as a result of these shows. These performing groups, which were not necessarily actually from Switzerland, brought a unique sound and visual spectacle to audiences, contributing to a lasting tradition of handbell music. In the 1840s Swiss bell-ringing acts, likely featuring family troupes, gained popularity in the United States after appearing in larger entertainment shows, like P.T. Barnum’s American Museum. Groups like the Spaulding Brothers’ Swiss Bell Ringers and the Peak Family Swiss Bell Ringers created elaborate performances, often including other musical instruments and vocalists. The name “Swiss” added a touch of exotic charm and a connection to the romanticized imagery of the Swiss Alps, influencing their popularity. Mr. Spitzer has a good ear: the first “Swiss” bell ringers to tour America, under P. T. Barnum in the 1840s, were English handbell ringers from Lancashire.
- “the hitching posts which were little black boys with golden turbans”: “little black boys with golden turbans” The earliest versions of lawn jockeys, used as hitching posts, were created in the 1850s or early 1860s. There are several legends about the black lawn jockeys. The Jim Crow Museum of Racist Memorabilia writes that “there is very little, if any, primary source material for the claim that lawn jockeys were used as signaling devices for escaping slaves on the Underground Railroad.” It is featured in two stories: Raymond Chandler’s 1942 Philip Marlowe novel, The High Window, and a short story by Flannery O’Connor in 1955, The Artificial Nigger. The story suggests that people are not intrinsically racist: rather, racist views are handed down from generation to generation because some people stand to profit from racism. O’Connor said that it was her favorite story she had written. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “His memory was become like an Aeolian harp”: “Aeolian harp” (also wind harp) is a musical instrument that is played by the wind. Named after Aeolus, the ancient Greek god of the wind, the traditional Aeolian harp is essentially a wooden box including a sounding board, with strings stretched lengthwise across two bridges. It is often placed in a slightly opened window where the wind can blow across the strings to produce sounds. The strings can be made of different materials (or thicknesses) and all be tuned to the same pitch, or identical strings can be tuned to different pitches. Besides being the only string instrument played solely by the wind, the Aeolian harp is also the only string instrument that plays solely harmonic frequencies. They are recognizable by

the sound which is a result of this property, which has been described as eerie and ethereal. The Aeolian harp, already known in the ancient world, was first described by Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680) in his books. It became popular as a household instrument during the Romantic era, and Aeolian harps are still hand-crafted today. Some are now made in the form of monumental metal sound sculptures located on the roofs of buildings and windy hilltops. (Wikipedia) Coleridge's "The Eolian Harp" (1795) made it the Romantic emblem of a mind played on by nature. See Romantic Poets.

- "could not and never had been able to distinguish between two spots and three spots": The spots are the pips on dice and playing cards. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- "He suffered from retinal rivalry": In binocular, or retinal, rivalry, when each eye sees a different image the brain does not fuse them but switches back and forth between them; Charles Wheatstone described it in 1838. See Eyes and Blindness.
    - Mr. Spitzer is describing several maladies: tinnitus, diplopia, micro/macropsia (Alice in Wonderland syndrome) that can be caused by different things, including psychological. See Alice in Wonderland.
- "to be semper fidelis, semper idem, semper paratus": Semper fidelis is Latin for always faithful or loyal. It is the motto of the US Marine Corp.
    - Semper idem is Latin for always the same; Elizabeth I took the feminine form, semper eadem, as her motto.
    - Semper paratus is Latin for always ready. It is used by different organizations including the US Coast Guard.
    - There are now three different mottos hinting at three different personalities in this chapter. Peron is carpe diem; seize the day. Joachim is hoc opus, hic labor est; this is the task, this is the labor. Mr. Spitzer's is semper fidelis, semper idem, semper paratus; always faithful, always the same, always ready.
- "life in the midst of death, death in the midst of life": "In the midst of life we are in death" (The Book of Common Prayer, 1662, The Burial of the Dead).
- "or was he the tailor retailored": Sartor Resartus is Latin for "the tailor retailored." Thomas Carlyle's book of that name (1833-1834) is a philosophy of clothes, and Young said she took Carlyle as her master when she turned from poetry to prose. See Young's Interviews Analyzed.
- "sub specie aeternitatis": Sub specie aeternitatis is Latin for under the aspect of eternity or that which is universally and eternally true. See Spinoza.
    - "sub specie aeternitatis, under the aspect of eternity, in its essential or universal form" Mr. Spitzer asks whether he is "the tailor retailored," seen from eternity rather than as one man bound by time.
    - It is an honorific expression denoting what is considered to be universally and eternally true, without any reference to or dependence upon temporal facets of reality. The Latin phrase can be rendered in English as "from the perspective of the eternal." More loosely, it is commonly used to refer to an objective (or theoretically possible alternative) point of view. Spinoza's "eternal" perspective is reflected in his

Ethics (Part V, Prop. XXIII, Scholium), where he applies Euclid's method (with the use of geometry) to philosophical inquiry, starting with God and nature, before moving to human emotions and the human intellect to reach an understanding of moral philosophy. By proceeding sub specie aeternitatis, Spinoza sought to arrive at an ethical theory that is as precise as Euclid's Elements. In the history of philosophy, this way of proceeding may be contrasted with Aristotle's. Aristotle's methodological differentiations in his "philosophy of human affairs" and his natural philosophy are grounded in the distinction between what is "better known to us" and things "better known in themselves," or what is "first for us" and what is "first by nature," a distinction that is deliberately discarded by Spinoza, and also by other modern philosophers. (Wikipedia)

- "the Newport polka": No piece called the Newport polka turned up. Newport's grand hotels had their own dance music in the 1850s, among them the Fillmore House Polka and Carl Bergmann's Ocean House Polka Redowa, played by the Germania Musical Society (Historic Music of Newport, "The Music of the Grand Hotels of Newport"). The term can also refer to notated music sheets or other polka compositions from or related to Newport.
- "He had never danced the schottische, the polka, or the minuet": "schottische" is a 19th-century German partnered country dance, similar to a slower polka, that involves sidesteps and a slow turn, or sometimes a hop. Also known as the "Scottish dance," it originated in Bohemia and became a popular European and American folk dance, influencing various regional styles and music like Argentina's chotis and Finland's jenkka. It is typically performed to music in 4/4 time and is still a part of folk dance traditions worldwide.
    - "polka" is a lively, 19th-century Bohemian (Czech) dance and dance music genre characterized by couples dancing to music in 2/4 time with a basic pattern of quick steps and a hop. Popularized across Europe and the Americas, the name likely derives from the Czech word "půlka," meaning "half-step," though it has also been mistakenly linked to Polish women due to the similar-sounding Czech word.
    - "minuet" is a social dance of French origin for two people, usually written in 3/4 time. The English word was adapted from the Italian minuetto and the French minuet. The term also describes the musical form that accompanies the dance, which subsequently developed more fully, often with a longer musical form called the minuet and trio, and was much used as a movement in the early classical symphony. While often stylized in instrumental forms, composers of the period would have been familiar with the popular dance. (Wikipedia)
- "a little mother-of-pearl Venus comb": "mother-of-pearl Venus comb" is a species of large predatory sea snail, a marine gastropod mollusk in the family Muricidae, the rock snails or murex snails. The shell of this Indo-Pacific species has a very long siphonal canal and numerous spines. Perfect specimens of the shell are not easily found because of the fragility of the numerous long spines.

- “cast off, as he would say, these mortal coils”: “When we have shuffled off this mortal coil, / Must give us pause” (William Shakespeare, Hamlet, 3.1). See Shakespeare.
- “the theft of the great carbuncle from the rajah’s crown”: See the carbuncle from a maharajah’s crown in the Chapter 54 resources. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s tale “The Great Carbuncle” (Twice-Told Tales, 1837) follows seekers who waste their lives hunting a legendary gem in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. See American Writers.
- “when he had found himself talking to Mozart”: “Mozart” Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart was a prolific and influential composer of the Classical period. Despite his short life, his rapid pace of composition and proficiency from an early age resulted in more than 800 works representing virtually every Western classical genre of his time. (Wikipedia) Born in Salzburg in 1756, he played keyboard and violin and composed by the age of five, and toured Europe as a child with his father, Leopold, and his sister, Nannerl. In Vienna from 1781 he wrote The Marriage of Figaro, Don Giovanni, Così fan tutte, The Magic Flute, the Jupiter Symphony, and many piano concertos, and he died at 35 in 1791, leaving his Requiem unfinished. Nannerl was a celebrated keyboard prodigy whose touring career ended at 17, when she was kept at home; she later taught and performed in Salzburg. She is known to have composed works of music, though no manuscripts survive. In her later years she contributed to the biographical study of her late brother. (Wikipedia) See Music and Composers.
- “a mere hieroglyph which had dropped from the alphabet of heaven”: “hieroglyph” a stylized picture of an object representing a word, syllable, or sound, as found in ancient Egyptian and other writing systems. See Ancient Egypt.
- “For what was time?”: Augustine asked the same question: “What then is time? If no one asks me, I know: if I wish to explain it to one that asketh, I know not” (Augustine, Confessions 11.14, trans. E. B. Pusey, 1838). See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “old-fashioned Maxwell autos”: Maxwell autos may refer to Maxwell Motor Company which ran from 1904 to 1925 and which later became Chrysler. See the Maxwell automobile in the Chapter 54 resources.
- “siste viator”: is a Latin phrase meaning “Stop, traveler,” commonly used as an inscription on Roman roadside tombs. The phrase itself is an epitaph, a warning to passersby, encouraging them to pause and consider mortality and their own inevitable end. It invokes themes of mortality, transience, and the universality of death, a common motif in Roman funerary practices.
- “He had gone on when he could not go on”: Compare the last words of Samuel Beckett’s The Unnamable (1953): “you must go on, I can’t go on, I’ll go on.”
- “his caput mortuum”: Caput mortuum, dead head, was the alchemists’ name for the worthless residue left in the flask after distillation; painters also gave the name to a dark violet iron-oxide pigment. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.
- “carpe diem”: Peron’s motto was carpe diem. Carpe diem is Latin for seize the day. The phrase is from Horace: “carpe diem, quam minimum credula postero,” seize the day, trusting as little as possible in tomorrow (Horace, Odes 1.11, 23 BC).

- “hoc opus, hic labor est”: Hoc opus, hic labor est is Latin for “this is the task, this is the labor.” In Virgil’s Aeneid the Sibyl tells Aeneas that the descent to the underworld is easy, but to retrace one’s steps and escape to the upper air, this is the task, this is the labor (Virgil, Aeneid 6.126-129).
    - There are now three different mottos hinting at three different personalities in this chapter. Peron is carpe diem; seize the day. Joachim is hoc opus, hic labor est; this is the task, this is the labor. Mr. Spitzer’s is semper fidelis, semper idem, semper paratus; always faithful, always the same, always ready.
- “his little salts and peppers winging through the mist”: The peppered moth is speckled black and white like salt and pepper; in sooty industrial England a black form all but replaced it, a famous case of natural selection. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “In every gambler’s make-up”: Gambling or betting or gaming is the wagering of something of value on an event with an uncertain outcome with the intent of winning something else of value. Gambling dates back to the Paleolithic period, before written history. Financial Investments are generally not considered gambling when they meet certain criteria. Studies show that though many people participate in gambling as a form of recreation or to earn an income, gambling, like any behavior involving variation in brain chemistry, can become a behavioral addiction. Behavioral addiction can occur with all the negative consequences in a person’s life minus the physical issues faced by people who compulsively engage in drug and alcohol abuse. Problem gambling has multiple symptoms. Gamblers often gamble to try to win back money they have lost, and some gamble to relieve feelings of helplessness and anxiety. Gamblers may exhibit a number of cognitive and motivational biases that distort the perceived odds of events and that influence their preferences for gambles. Addiction by Design by Natasha Dow Schull shows how the manipulation of gambling pulls players into a trancelike state in which daily worries, social demands, and even bodily awareness fade away. Once in the zone, gambling addicts play not to win but simply to keep playing, for as long as possible, even at the cost of physical and economic exhaustion. Gamblers seek to lose themselves while the gambling industry seeks profit. Schull describes how the industry designs systems to profit from the maximum amount from gamblers and manipulates human psychology. Flag: after 1964, Natasha Dow Schüll’s Addiction by Design (2012). See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “alack and a day”: is an archaic interjection used to express sorrow, regret, grief, or a sense of misfortune, essentially meaning “woe to the day!” or “shame to the day!” the event occurred. It’s a longer form of the word “alack,” which itself functions similarly to “alas.”
- “playing the bones”: Dice were first made of bone, so gamblers still call them bones; to play or roll the bones is to shoot dice. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “coming when the groundhog came not”: On Groundhog Day, 2 February, the groundhog is said to come out of its burrow; if it sees its shadow, there will be six more weeks of winter. Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, has kept the day since 1887.

- “crazy as the old bank-teller or parimutuel man”: Parimutuel is a betting system in which all bets of a particular type are placed together in a pool; taxes and the house-take, or vigorish, are deducted, and payoff odds are calculated by sharing the pool among all winning bets. In some countries it is known as the tote after the totalisator, which calculates and displays bets already made. The parimutuel system is used in gambling on horse racing, greyhound racing, jai alai, and other sporting events of relatively short duration in which participants finish in a ranked order. A modified parimutuel system is also used in some lottery games. Parimutuel betting differs from fixed-odds betting in that the final payout is not determined until the pool is closed, in fixed-odds betting, the payout is agreed at the time the bet is made. Parimutuel gambling is frequently state-regulated, and it is offered in many places where gambling is otherwise illegal. Parimutuel gambling is often also offered at off-track facilities, where players may bet on the events without actually being present to observe them in person. (Wikipedia) The Paris entrepreneur Joseph Oller invented it in 1867. See Gambling and Playing Cards.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Adventitious

Happening by chance; not essential or built in.

Altruist

One who acts for the good of others rather than for oneself.

Archaic

Very old; belonging to a much earlier time.

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Avant-courier

One sent ahead to announce what is coming; a herald (French).

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Bisect

To cut or divide into two parts.

Boutonniere

A flower worn in a buttonhole.

Candelabra

A branched candlestick.

Capacious

Roomy; able to hold much.

Cavalier

A horseman or gallant gentleman; also offhand and disdainful.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Chancery

A court of equity, as distinct from a court of common law; in England, the Lord Chancellor’s court.

Chrysalis

The hard case in which a caterpillar becomes a butterfly or moth.

Cockle

A small saltwater clam with a ribbed, heart-shaped shell. A cockleshell boat is a small, flimsy one.

Coif

A close-fitting cap, such as the white headdress a nun wears under her veil.

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Conscientious

Careful to do what is right; thorough.

Coxcomb

The red crest of a rooster, or the jester’s cap shaped like one; also a vain, foolish man.

Croupier

The attendant who runs a gambling table.

Deluge

A great flood or downpour. The Deluge is Noah’s flood.

Demented

Out of one’s mind.

Demoniac

Wild and frenzied, as if possessed by a demon.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Discursive

Rambling from one subject to another.

Distraught

Deeply upset.

Domino

A loose hooded cloak worn with a half mask at a masquerade.

Dominoes

A game played with small oblong tiles marked with spots.

Dovecote

A house for doves or pigeons.

Egotist

One who thinks mainly of oneself.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Equable

Even-tempered; not easily disturbed.

Errant

Wandering; straying from the proper course.

Escarpment

A long, steep slope or cliff.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Extrovert

An outgoing person who draws energy from others.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Flagstone

A flat paving stone.

Fritillary

A butterfly with orange wings checked with black, often silver-spotted beneath.

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Imperceptibly

So slowly or slightly as to go unnoticed.

Impoverished

Made poor.

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Inclemency

Harshness, especially of weather.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Inscrutably

In a way that cannot be understood.

Interlocutor

A person who takes part in a conversation.

Irrevocably

In a way that cannot be undone.

Isocheim

A line on a map joining places with the same average winter temperature.

Jersey

A soft knitted cloth.

Lethargic

Sluggish and drowsy.

Liqueur

A strong, sweet, flavored spirit taken after dinner.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Mauve

A pale purple.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Minuet

A slow, stately dance in triple time for couples, and the music written for it.

Minuscular

Tiny. Young's form of minuscule.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Morceau

A short piece of music or writing (French, a morsel).

Mortality rate

The number of deaths in a population over a given period.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mourning cloak

A dark butterfly with pale-edged wings that survives the winter as an adult; also a black cloak worn in mourning.

Nautilus

A sea creature with a spiral shell. The paper nautilus is a small octopus whose female makes a thin, papery shell.

Nether

Lower; under.

Nimbus

A halo or glow of light.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Parallelogram

A four-sided figure whose opposite sides are parallel.

Parimutuel

A form of betting in which the winners share the total amount bet.

Parsimonious

Very unwilling to spend money; stingy.

Parterre

An ornamental garden of flower beds laid out in a pattern. A parterred floor is inlaid in patterned sections.

Patrimonial

Inherited from one’s father.

Patrimony

Property inherited from one’s father or ancestors.

Pauperdom

The state of being a pauper; poverty.

Philatelist

A stamp collector.

Plinth

The square block at the base of a column, pedestal, or statue.

Polka

A lively couple dance from Bohemia.

Porte-cochere

A covered entrance where a carriage stops to let passengers out.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Presentiment

An intuitive feeling that something is about to happen.

Problematical

Doubtful; hard to settle.

Proffered

Held out; offered.

Proximity

Nearness.

Psyche

A tall mirror that swings in a frame; also the soul.

Pulverized

Ground to powder.

Quadrant

An instrument for measuring the height of stars, used in navigation and surveying.

Quavering

Trembling, as a voice.

Resonant

Echoing; deep and full in sound.

Sand dollar

A flat, round sea urchin whose white skeleton is found on beaches.

Sarcophagus

A stone coffin, often carved, placed above ground. The plural is sarcophagi.

Satire

The use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize folly or vice.

Schottische

A round dance like a slow polka, popular in the nineteenth century.

Sequestration

Seclusion; a setting apart.

Seraphim

The highest order of angels, each with six wings. The singular is seraph.

Snuffers

A scissor-like tool for trimming or putting out a candle.

Speculative

Thoughtful and wondering; based on guesswork.

Steeplechase

A horse race over fences, ditches, and water jumps, first run cross-country from one church steeple to another.

Sulky

A light two-wheeled cart for one driver, used in harness racing.

Surrey

A light four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with two seats, often with a fringed canopy on top.

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Tendon

A tough cord that joins muscle to bone.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Tremulous

Trembling; quivering.

Tumult

A loud, confused uproar.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Tympanum

The eardrum; also the space within an arch above a door.

Vaporous

Full of mist or vapor.

Viol

A bowed stringed instrument of the Renaissance and Baroque, usually with six strings and frets, held upright.

Virginal

A small, legless harpsichord set on a table, popular in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Zither

A stringed instrument with a flat soundboard, played lying flat.

Chapter 56

Content note: *This chapter mentions the suicide of Mr. Spitzer's twin brother, Peron.*

Summary

Mr. Spitzer remembers dressing Peron for burial in a black swallow-tail suit cut like his own, with a red rose to be known by at the gates of the great city, two coins for the ferryman, poker chips, dice showing only sevens and elevens, a racing form, and the six of hearts. A one-armed violinist and the track bugler played at the grave. Over the years he gave Peron's enormous wardrobe to the tramps of Boston, Savile Row suits, hats of every kind, and twelve jockeys' silks, and found among them the tiny suit of a little man no one could explain. He mourns for everything that changes, from the dew on a flower to the Dog Star, and comes to believe that reality is only clothing on a dream. He is a tailor's dummy, a puppet whose puppeteer is dead, the scraps and patches of a man who does not know whether he is living or dead. He still carries the golden key to a door that is no more, and the dead musician in him will not stop singing.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · The Great Tailor

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Fate and Chance · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Madness and Sanity

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Clouds and Storms · Horses and Carriages · Mirrors and Reflections · Music and Instruments · Roses and Flowers · The Sea and Water

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · American Writers · Astronomy · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Milton · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- Mr. Spitzer meticulously arranges his brother's funeral, dressing the corpse with the utmost sartorial elegance, symbolizing death as a formal occasion requiring proper attire and ritual. The detail about placing poker chips, dice, and a playing card in the grave represents the interplay of chance and fate in life and death. The presence of a violinist with an empty sleeve and an official track bugler who had played at renowned venues emphasizes the blending of the theatrical, the musical, and the ceremonial in

mourning. Mr. Spitzer’s identity and grief are deeply intertwined with this performance of death, as he leaves only the red rose to Peron, symbolizing recognition at “the portals of the great city.”

- Peron is portrayed as an elusive, shape-shifting figure, likened to a squid that evades capture by producing an inky cloud, while Mr. Spitzer is the shadow to Peron’s substance. This metaphor illustrates their complex, intertwined identities. Mr. Spitzer clings to his threadbare suit as a sign of his enduring self amidst chaos, while recognizing that both brothers have become all others except themselves by reflecting on themes of identity dissolution and the fluidity of self.
- The act of giving away Peron’s lavish wardrobe to the homeless and the poor is laden with symbolic significance. Clothing, representing identity and presence, is dispersed, highlighting the transience of life and the fading of memory. The detailed description of the various garments and hats, especially the jockeys’ suits, connects Peron’s past life and interests to the present dispersal, symbolizing the scattering of a once vibrant existence into fragments of color and fabric.
- Mr. Spitzer’s grief extends beyond personal loss to a cosmic mourning for all changing and ephemeral things: flowers, animals, natural phenomena, moments, and even the future. His grief is universal and diffuse, capturing an almost pantheistic sorrow for impermanence and transformation. The imagery of tides, stars, moths, and flowers conveys a deep connection between human sorrow and the natural world.
- Mr. Spitzer’s philosophical reflections reveal his skepticism about reality, suggesting that what we call reality is merely appearances and dreams layered upon each other. He questions the existence of a stable self or a divine author, concluding that life and death might be inseparable or aspects of the same experience. The motifs of clothing, masks, and shadows reinforce the theme of identity as a fragile and mutable construct. Mr. Spitzer’s feeling of being a “dead man walking” clad in his black suit symbolizes his liminal state between life and death.
- The imagery of Mr. Spitzer as a puppet, a tailor’s dummy, and a cloud with seams unraveling captures his fragmented existence and loss of agency. He is a “poor copy” of himself, patched and fragile, caught between madness and reality. His body and mind are portrayed as disconnected, with his identity slipping away like a dream or a reflection in a dark glass. This passage powerfully conveys the disintegration of self and the ephemeral nature of being.
- Mr. Spitzer contemplates madness not merely as illness but as a state that blurs the boundaries between life and death, sustaining the semblance of health even as the mind is annihilated. This duality suggests that madness may be the only life possible for the dead, reflecting the profound ambiguity of existence in the aftermath of loss.
- In the closing passage, Mr. Spitzer laments the absence of a guiding author or architect of being. The world is a place without an ordered design, and he carries the “golden key to the door that was no more,” symbolizing lost access to meaning or transcendence. The final image of the “dead musician” who lives despite attempts to

silence him encapsulates the persistence of art, memory, or spirit amid chaos and decay.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “Death was a formal occasion, one for which a man should always be properly dressed.” Why does Mr. Spitzer dress his brother like himself?
- “Reality was that which was unreal and was clothed with the dream of reality.” What does clothing have to do with reality in this chapter?
- Mr. Spitzer “mourned for everything.” How does grief for one person spread to the whole world?

Characters

- Peron was “the man of many coats and hats.” What do his clothes reveal about him?
- Among Peron’s clothes is “the miniature suit of a tiny dwarf.” Who might the little man be?
- “He only knew that he was Peron, his dead brother.” Has Mr. Spitzer become his brother?

Connections

- “Ah, what mad tailor had tailored Mr. Spitzer.” How does this tailor echo the tailor retailored of Chapter 55?
- “The great puppeteer was dead.” Where else in the novel do people keep moving after what moved them is gone?
- “Those were pearls that were his eyes.” Why does Young bring in the drowned father of The Tempest here?

Reflection

- “How sad it was, Mr. Spitzer remarked, when the body was no more, and only the clothing remained like the memory of a man.” What do the belongings of the dead mean to the living?
- “Perhaps madness was the only life possible for the dead.” Can grief keep a person alive?
- “There was no bridge but that bridge one built by walking where there was no bridge.” How does a person go on without a guide?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- Mr. Spitzer is the grieving brother, depicted as a man shattered by loss, struggling with his identity and the nature of reality. He clings to his old, threadbare clothes as symbols of himself and his grief.

Peron

- Peron is Mr. Spitzer's deceased brother, described as eccentric with a flamboyant lifestyle, many coats and hats, and a lavish wardrobe. Peron's death triggers Mr. Spitzer's existential reflections.

The Tailor

- The Tailor (mad tailor) is a metaphorical figure representing the forces shaping Mr. Spitzer's identity and existence, questioning who "tailored" him in this strange life and afterlife.

Research: Themes

Death and Mourning

See: Death and Mortality · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Death is portrayed as a formal, solemn occasion requiring proper dress and ritual, exemplified by the funeral preparations and symbolic items placed with Peron (poker chips, dice, playing cards, racing forms).
- Mr. Spitzer's grief is all-encompassing, extending beyond his brother to encompass all things transient and ephemeral (flowers, moths, tides, stars, moments).
- The boundary between life and death is blurred; Mr. Spitzer often questions whether he is alive or dead, and whether life and death are two sides of the same experience.

Identity and the Self

See: Identity and the Self

- Mr. Spitzer struggles with his identity, feeling like a shadow or a poor copy of his brother, or even a puppet controlled by unknown forces.
- He questions the nature of selfhood, pondering whether he might become his brother by adopting his clothing and mannerisms.
- The metaphor of clothing is powerful: Peron's elaborate wardrobe symbolizes identity and social roles, while Mr. Spitzer's threadbare suit symbolizes decay, loss, and continuity of self.

Reality versus Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality

- Reality is depicted as an illusion, a dream clothed in appearances.
- Mr. Spitzer’s literal-mindedness causes him to confuse abstract qualities (love, beauty, truth) with physical objects, illustrating his disorientation.
- He philosophizes that reality might be “unreal” and that existence is layered with dreams and shadows, making existence fragile and unstable.

Madness and Sanity

See: Madness and Sanity

- Madness is presented ambiguously as both a form of death and a form of life, sustaining illusion and preventing the advance of time.
- Mr. Spitzer’s mental state deteriorates as he questions who controls him, who “tailored” his existence, and whether he is merely a puppet or a phantom.
- His inability to distinguish between reality and imagination is a symbol of his psychological collapse.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Clothing and Tailoring

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Represent identity, social roles, and continuity/death. Peron’s lavish suits contrast with Mr. Spitzer’s threadbare suit, symbolizing life and decay.

White and Red Roses

See: Roses and Flowers

- The white rose worn by Mr. Spitzer symbolizes passing beyond life (death or transcendence), while Peron’s red rose is a signifier of identity and remembrance.

The Mirror and Reflection

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- Symbolize self-perception and identity confusion; often Mr. Spitzer sees distorted or absent reflections.

Clouds, Sea, and Tides

See: The Sea and Water · Clouds and Storms

- Recurring natural motifs representing impermanence, change, and the fluid boundary between life and death.

Music and Instruments

See: Music and Instruments

- The funeral bugler and violinist evoke the ceremonial aspect of death and a connection to the past.

Animals and Nature

- Moths, barnacles, starfish, whales, and birds symbolize fragility, transformation, and the natural cycle of life and death.

Research: Resources

- “only the red rose by which he should be recognized”: See On the red rose and white rose and Roses and Flowers.
- “when he came to the portals of the great city”: “And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass” (Revelation 21:21, KJV). See The Bible.
- “two coins in his brother’s purse so that he might pay the ferry boatman”: The Greeks buried their dead with a coin, an obol, to pay Charon, who ferried souls across the river Styx to the underworld; those left unburied or unpaid wandered the near shore for a hundred years. See Greek Mythology.
- “both with only sevens and elevens”: In craps, a seven or eleven on the first roll is an automatic win, a “natural.” Peron is buried with dice that cannot lose. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “a racing form of the agate tables”: The Daily Racing Form, founded in Chicago in 1894, prints each horse’s past performances in tables of agate, the tiny five-and-a-half-point type also used for box scores.
- “He had paid an old billiard hall artist to come and take one last shot”: See the billiards legend of Louis Fox in the Chapter 53 resources. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “the official track bugler who had played at Suffolk Downs and Pimlico and Isfahan and Ismir and Indore”: Suffolk Downs is a former Thoroughbred racetrack in East Boston, Massachusetts. It opened in 1935. Flag: after 1964, its closing in 2019.
    - Pimlico is a racetrack in Baltimore, Maryland that holds the Preakness Stakes of the Triple Crown in Thoroughbred racing.
    - Isfahan is a city in central Iran known for its Persian architecture. Its great square, the Naqsh-e Jahan, was laid out about 1602 by Shah Abbas I as a polo ground, and its stone goalposts still stand.
    - Ismir may refer to Izmir in Turkey.

    - Indore is a large metropolitan city in Central India.
- “former first trumpet of the Boston Symphony”: The Boston Symphony Orchestra (BSO) is an American orchestra based in Boston. It is the second-oldest of the five major American symphony orchestras commonly referred to as the “Big Five.” Founded by Henry Lee Higginson in 1881, the BSO performs most of its concerts at Boston’s Symphony Hall and in the summer performs at Tanglewood. (Wikipedia)
    - The Philadelphia Orchestra is an American symphony orchestra, based in Philadelphia. One of the “Big Five” American orchestras, the orchestra is based at the Kimmel Center for the Performing Arts, where it performs its subscription concerts, numbering over 130 annually, at Marian Anderson Hall (formerly Verizon Hall). (Wikipedia) Flag: after 1964, the Kimmel Center (2001) and Marian Anderson Hall.
    - Minneapolis Symphony (Minnesota Orchestra) is an American orchestra based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Founded originally as the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra in 1903, the Minnesota Orchestra plays most of its concerts at Minneapolis’s Orchestra Hall. (Wikipedia) Flag: after 1964, the change of name to the Minnesota Orchestra in 1968.
- “distinguish propositions as to reality from tables and chairs”: The table is philosophy’s favorite piece of furniture. Bertrand Russell opens The Problems of Philosophy (1912) by asking whether the table he sees is real, and Arthur Eddington begins The Nature of the Physical World (1928) with his two tables, the solid one he writes on and the scientific one that is mostly empty space. See Illusion and Reality.
- “There is not a golden mountain”: Young takes the most famous example in the philosophy of language. Alexius Meinong held that even objects that do not exist, such as the golden mountain, have their properties; Bertrand Russell answered in “On Denoting” (1905) that a phrase like the golden mountain is a disguised description, not the name of anything. See Illusion and Reality.
- “though music should describe, his brother had so often reminded him, no image”: The quarrel is real. Eduard Hanslick argued in On the Beautiful in Music (1854) that music represents no images, only “tonally moving forms,” while program music painted scenes: in Saint-Saëns’s Danse macabre (1874), Death plays his fiddle in the graveyard at midnight and the oboe crows the cock’s crow at dawn. See Music and Composers.
- “the golden mountains singing hallelujah”: “the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands” (Isaiah 55:12, KJV). See The Bible.
- “the man of many coats and hats”: “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours” (Genesis 37:3, KJV). See The Bible.
- “He had been like the squid which tries to evade pursuers”: Young’s squid is accurate. Squid and octopuses release ink in blobs called pseudomorphs, held together by

mucus in roughly their own shape, so a predator attacks the decoy while the animal, often changing color, slips away.

- “he bore the exact relation to his brother as the shadow to the substance”: In Aesop’s fable of the dog and its reflection, a dog carrying meat across a stream snaps at the meat in its reflection and drops its own; the moral is not to lose the substance by grasping at the shadow.
- “in his Prince Albert cutaway”: “Prince Albert cutaway” frock coat is a formal men’s coat characterised by a knee-length skirt cut all around the base just above the knee, popular during the Victorian and Edwardian periods (1830s-1910s). It is a fitted, long-sleeved coat with a centre vent at the back and some features unusual in post-Victorian dress. These include the reverse collar and lapels, where the outer edge of the lapel is often cut from a separate piece of cloth from the main body and also a high degree of waist suppression around the waistcoat, where the coat’s diameter around the waist is less than around the chest. This is achieved by a high horizontal waist seam with side bodies, which are extra panels of fabric above the waist used to pull in the naturally cylindrical drape. As was usual with all coats in the 19th century, shoulder padding was rare or minimal. (Wikipedia)
- “many tailored suits from Savile Row”: Savile Row is a street in Central London that was originally famous for men’s tailoring. See On Savile Row and the history of tailoring and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “innumerable fine Steinkirk thrice-winding scarves”: Steinkirk is a kind of neckcloth worn in a loose and disorderly fashion. It is named for the Battle of Steenkerque (1692), where French officers, surprised by the enemy, went into battle with their cravats wound loosely and tucked through a buttonhole. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “the period of Beau Brummell”: Beau Brummell was an important figure in Regency England and known for promoting men’s fashion. He was born in 1778, the same year as Lord Brougham. See On Beau Brummell and the philosophy of dress.
- “the brougham which was named after Lord Brougham”: Henry Brougham (1778-1868), Lord Chancellor from 1830 to 1834, helped pass the Reform Act of 1832 and the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, which ended slavery in most of the British Empire. The brougham, a light closed carriage, was built to his design in 1838. Young’s dates for him are right. See Horses and Carriages.
- “huntsmen’s jackets, both green and red”: Fox hunters wear scarlet coats, called hunting pink, while those who hunt hares with beagles and harriers traditionally wear green. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “hound’s-tooth”: The houndstooth coat pattern originated as a utilitarian “shepherd’s check” wool fabric in the Scottish Lowlands in the 1800s, named for its resemblance to dog teeth. The pattern gained widespread popularity in the 1930s and was later adopted by high fashion, with designers like Coco Chanel and Christian Dior making it a symbol of luxury and timeless elegance in the 20th century. Today, it remains a

versatile classic, found in various colors, scales, and materials beyond its origins in woven wool.

- “herring-bone”: Herringbone fabric has ancient roots, first seen in Roman road construction (Opus spicatum) and later in Egyptian textiles, with the name coming from the V-shaped herring fish bones. While its textile use began in the 19th century, the fabric gained prominence in the early 20th century for its use in tough, practical hunting and workwear, like the US Army’s herringbone twill (HBT) uniforms in the 1940s, and became associated with formal wear in the 1950s.
- “Canton flannels”: Is a warm, cotton-based fabric, named for its origin in Canton (now Guangzhou), China, around the mid-to-late 19th century. It is characterized by a twill or plain weave on one side and a fleecy, napped surface on the other. The fabric was widely used in the American Civil War for military undergarments and later for sportswear and linings, becoming a staple of the textile industry by the early 20th century.
- “fine merinos”: Merino wool’s history began in 12th-century Spain, where the breed was developed for its fine, luxurious fleece. Exporting Merino sheep was strictly forbidden and punishable by death, but occasional gifts and attempts to smuggle the sheep allowed the breed to spread. The sheep were later introduced to South Africa and then Australia by the late 18th century, becoming the foundation for Australia’s significant wool industry. Merinos eventually reached the United States in the early 19th century, sparking “merino mania” and a boom in sheep farming there.
- “colored broadcloths”: Colored broadcloth has a long history from its origins in ancient civilizations to its widespread use in medieval Europe and colonial America, especially for trade and fashion. Originally, only the wealthy could afford it, but advancements in technology made it more accessible. Different quality broadcloths were available, and colors were produced using natural dyes. The fabric was used for clothing, and also in home decor, and trade goods.
- “great astrakhans”: Astrakhan is the tightly curled fleece of young karakul lambs, named for the Russian city of Astrakhan on the Volga, through which it was traded; an astrakhan is a coat or collar made of it.
- “camel’s hair”: Camel hair has a long history, dating back to biblical times when it was used by nomadic peoples for practical items like tents and cloaks, leveraging the hair’s natural insulation. Its use in Western fashion surged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, popularized by polo players in England and later becoming a “glamour garment” in the U.S. through its association with the F. Scott Fitzgerald era. Today, it’s a luxury fiber from Mongolia and China, valued for its softness, warmth, and sustainable harvesting process, used in high-end apparel and other textiles.
- “Bond Street fleece from India”: Bond Street is London’s street of luxury shops. The fleece from India is probably cashmere or pashmina, combed from the fine undercoat of Himalayan goats.
- “Irish cambrics”: Primarily relates to the development of the Irish linen industry, which became a global leader for fine, high-quality fabric. French Huguenot Louis Crommelin

modernized the production process in the late 17th century, establishing Lisburn as a major center for fine linen, including cambric-like textiles, and fostering linen's importance in the Irish economy. While "cambric" also refers to a specific fine linen fabric, it became strongly associated with Irish lace, particularly Carrickmacross lace, from the mid-19th century, where it was used as an embroidered appliqué base. Cambric takes its name from Cambrai, in northern France.

- "bright plaid shawls": Emerged from the ancient Celtic tradition, evolving into clan-specific Scottish tartan, which symbolized kinship and was also functional as a blanket. After a ban in the 18th century, tartan gained royal endorsement in the 19th century, leading to its worldwide popularity. The word "plaid" itself comes from the Gaelic term for a blanket or piece of cloth. European weavers eventually mimicked the costly Kashmir shawls, creating westernized versions with similar patterns but using less expensive fibers like wool and silk, often produced in Paisley, Scotland.
- "paisleys": The Paisley pattern originated from the ancient buto or buta motif in Persia and India, possibly dating back to 2,000 years ago and associated with the Zoroastrian symbol of life and fertility. The design was popularized on Kashmir shawls in India during the 18th century and later became a significant textile industry in Paisley, Scotland, which gave the pattern its English name. Its journey continued through import to Europe, replication by local textile manufacturers like those in Paisley, and adoption by various cultural movements, becoming a global icon in fashion and design. Weavers in Paisley and other Scottish towns endured harsh conditions and were subjected to other forms of brutal treatment typical of the Industrial Revolution. The Calton weavers of Glasgow, for example, went on strike in 1787 to protest a 25% wage cut. During the protest, troops opened fire on the demonstrators, killing six weavers. Work conditions for textile workers in Britain were notoriously poor, with long hours, low wages, and unsafe machinery that led to frequent accidents.
- "suits of twill and basket and plain and satin weaves": Twill's history as a suiting fabric stems from its ancient origins as a strong, durable weave that became popular for its strength and diagonal pattern. It evolved from early functional garments to status symbols and was crucial for military uniforms by the 18th and 19th centuries. During the Industrial Revolution, mass production made twill accessible for everyday wear, while its sophisticated aesthetic solidified its place in classic men's tailoring and modern suiting for both formal and smart-casual occasions.
    - Basket weave is a fabric weave in which two or more threads pass over and under together, giving a checked, basket-like texture, as in oxford cloth and hopsack.
    - The plain weave, a fundamental and ancient technique also known as tabby weave, has a history stretching back to Neolithic times, with evidence of early forms found in the form of clay impressions from the Czech Republic around 27,000 years ago and textile fragments from the Turkish site of Çatalhöyük around 7000 BC. This simple criss-cross weaving pattern is created by interlacing warp and weft yarns and remains the most basic and common type of woven fabric, forming a stable and durable material used in countless textiles and industrial applications today.

    - Weave originated in medieval China around the 9th or 10th century in the port city of Quanzhou. The fabric was initially made from silk and named after the Arabic name for this city, “Zaitun.” Through the Silk Road, satin spread to the Middle East and then to Europe by the 12th century, where it became a luxury item for the aristocracy. Advances in the 19th-century Industrial Revolution, including the invention of the mercerization process for cotton, allowed for mass production and the creation of more affordable sateen, broadening its accessibility beyond the wealthy.
- “several pairs of excellent knee breeches”: Were men’s trousers worn from the late 16th to early 19th centuries, ending around the knee, and were standard attire in Europe and America until they were replaced by long trousers, or pantaloons, which came to dominate by the 1820s. Originating from older leg coverings, knee breeches evolved from shorter versions worn in the Middle Ages to the dominant form of men’s lower-body wear. They were made of various materials like linen, cotton, and leather, were often embellished with ribbons or lace, and were seen in both everyday and formal wear, eventually surviving as court dress and in the livery of servants into the 20th century.
- “excellent plus fours”: Are a specific type of knickerbockers, named for the four extra inches of fabric below the knee, popularized in the 1920s by the Duke of Windsor for golf and outdoor pursuits. They offered increased comfort and range of motion compared to shorter knickers and became a staple of the stylish, casual sportswear trend of the era. Though they declined in popularity in the 1930s with the introduction of walking shorts, they remained a recognized part of golf fashion.
- “striped stockings”: Have a long and varied history, first appearing in the medieval period as garments for outcasts and criminals, but gaining respectability and popularity in the Victorian era as a fashionable statement. By the 18th century, vertical stripes were common, and the 19th century saw the advent of more colorful horizontal stripes for both everyday wear and sports like baseball. The 20th century brought new styles, with striped tube socks becoming a cultural icon in the 1960s and continuing to appear in various forms today for fashion and sports.
    - Have evolved over centuries, with their history tracing back to patterned plaids in ancient Celtic and Scottish cultures, famously refined into the Argyle pattern. However, smaller “checkered” or plaid patterns also featured on stockings in various forms, becoming prominent in specific eras.
- “bright red fishermen’s hats”: The red knitted cap goes back to the oyster divers of Whitstable, England, in the 1820s, whose hard-hat helmets had an air valve worked by bumping the head; the wool cap kept them from bruising and showed up in dim water. In Norway the red cap of the folk hero Askeladden became a sign of resistance during the Nazi occupation. Jacques Cousteau later wore it in honor of the early divers. Flag: after 1964, Cousteau’s television series (1966-1976). See On the history of Peron’s hats.

- “green-vizored yachtsmen’s hats”: The green-visored hat is most historically associated with accountants, gamblers, and other indoor professions that required reducing eye strain from harsh, early artificial lighting.
- “Homburgs”: The homburg hat originated in the German spa town of Bad Homburg in the late 19th century and was popularized globally by Prince Edward VII of Britain around 1882, who encountered the style during a visit to the town. Known for its stiff brim, single center dent, and formal elegance, the homburg became a symbol of status and was adopted by politicians and business leaders, famously worn by Winston Churchill and, in a later cinematic resurgence, Al Pacino as the “Godfather hat.” Flag: after 1964, The Godfather (1972).
- “Stetsons”: The Stetson hat company was founded by John B. Stetson in Philadelphia in 1865, after he created a durable hat for himself on a Western expedition that became known as the “Boss of the Plains.” This practical, wide-brimmed hat was a success and set the standard for cowboy hats, leading Stetson to become the world’s largest hat manufacturer by 1886. The company was known for its quality, innovation, and the creation of the first “cowboy hat.”
- “plugs”: Plug hat was nineteenth-century American slang for a top hat or other stiff hat. Baltimore’s Plug Uglies, a gang of the 1850s, are said to have stuffed their plug hats with wool and leather to wear as helmets in street fights.
- “trilbys”: Were named after a 1895 stage adaptation of George du Maurier’s novel “Trilby,” as the lead actress wore the hat, which then became known as the “Trilby.” The hat, with its short, downward-angled brim and slightly upward-turned back, rose to prominence in the 1920s and 30s, becoming associated with jazz culture and Hollywood.
- “pork-pies”: The pork pie hat originated in the mid-19th century in America and Britain, deriving its name from its resemblance to a pork pie. It was first a women’s fashion item but later popularized for men by entertainers like Buster Keaton in the 1920s, evolving into a symbol of cool for jazz and blues musicians like Lester Young in the 1930s and 40s.
- “brown bowler derbies”: The history of the brown bowler derby hat began in 1849 when London hatmakers Thomas and William Bowler created it for Edward Coke, a British nobleman, to provide a more practical and durable alternative to the tall top hat for his gamekeepers. Made from hard, dark felt (often black or brown), this hat’s stiff, rounded crown protected wearers from low-hanging branches. While the original was commissioned for British gamekeepers, its protective and distinctive style led to widespread adoption by British working and upper classes, eventually becoming the well-known American “derby” hat and a favorite of both lawmen and outlaws in the Wild West.
- “all kinds of head coverings including the ass’s head”: In Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Puck gives the weaver Bottom an ass’s head, and Titania, under a love spell, falls in love with him (3.1). See Shakespeare.

- “several beautiful Balaklava helmets”: The knitted balaclava is named for the Battle of Balaclava (1854) in the Crimean War, the battle of the Charge of the Light Brigade, where British soldiers are said to have worn knitted hoods against the Russian winter; the name is first recorded in the 1880s.
- “les grandes neiges”: Means the great snow..
- “many winter aconites”: Winter aconites is a flower in the buttercup family that grows in France, Italy, and the Balkans. It flowers yellow in late winter, often through the snow. See Roses and Flowers.
- “twelve small jockeys’ bird-billed hats and colored suits”: Outfit. Historians suggest the practice of using colors to distinguish riders originated in Ancient Rome, where chariot racers wore colored capes to help spectators identify the different factions (Blues, Greens, Reds, and Whites). As horse racing became a more formalized sport in England, the need for rider identification grew. In 1762, the English Jockey Club made it mandatory for owners to register their unique color and pattern combinations. The earliest registered “silks” were actually made of expensive materials like silk from Asia or fine European wool. The fabrics were chosen for their vibrant colors and light weight, reflecting the aristocratic nature of the sport.
- “much like beetles carrying the body of a dead bird”: Burying beetles really do this. A pair of Nicrophorus beetles will drag and bury the body of a small bird or mouse, strip it, and raise their young on it.
- “harlequin designs, domino checks”: Harlequin of the Italian commedia dell’arte wore a suit of colored diamond patches; a domino is a loose hooded cloak worn with a half mask at masquerades.
- “tremulous as clouds with silver linings”: “Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud / Turn forth her silver lining on the night?” (John Milton, Comus, 1634). See Milton and Clouds and Storms.
- “the dew drop trembling on the lip of the helmet flower”: Helmet flower is monkshood, Aconitum, named for its hooded upper petal; every part of it is poisonous. See Roses and Flowers.
- “the star-nosed mole burrowing under ground”: The star-nosed mole of eastern North America has a ring of twenty-two fleshy rays around its nose, with which it feels its way through dark tunnels and wet ground.
- “the flower-faced bat flying out over the moving waters”: Is a species of bat in the family Hipposideridae. It is in the monotypic genus Anthops. It is found in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville of Papua New Guinea and in the Solomon Islands. This rare and little-known bat has been recorded from tropical moist forest and flying around village houses. (Wikipedia)
- “the spouter whale spouting upon a far horizon”: A spouter is a whale seen blowing; Ishmael spends his first night in New Bedford at the Spouter-Inn (Herman Melville, Moby-Dick, ch. 2-3, 1851). See American Writers.

- “the whelks and the wentletraps like staircases to heaven”: Wentletrap is from the Dutch wenteltrap, a spiral staircase. The precious wentletrap was so prized by eighteenth-century collectors that counterfeits were made of rice paste.
- “the great phaetons”: Phaethon, son of the sun god Helios, drove his father’s chariot, lost control, and was struck down by Zeus; the light, open phaeton carriage is named for him. See Greek Mythology and Horses and Carriages.
- “the Dog star which was the brightest star of the heavens”: Sirius, the Dog Star in the constellation Canis Major, is the brightest star in the night sky. See Astronomy.
- “his whirling Inverness”: Is a form of weatherproof outer-coat. It is notable for being sleeveless, the arms emerging from arm holes beneath a cape. The sleeved version is an Inverness coat. The commonly held image of the cape as worn by Sherlock Holmes is one made of tweed, specifically in a grey hound’s tooth pattern. (Wikipedia)
- “walking on water as if it were land”: “And when Peter was come down out of the ship, he walked on the water, to go to Jesus” (Matthew 14:29, KJV). See The Bible.
- “the glass of fashion and the powdered fop”: Ophelia remembers Hamlet as “The glass of fashion and the mould of form” (William Shakespeare, Hamlet, 3.1). See Shakespeare.
- “like the colors of a dying dolphin”: Byron: “Parting day / Dies like the dolphin, whom each pang imbues / With a new colour as it gasps away, / The last still loveliest” (Lord Byron, Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage, canto 4, stanza 29, 1818). The dolphin is the dolphinfish, whose colors change as it dies. See Romantic Poets.
- “the rapidly changing colors as of some great color wheel”: Isaac Newton bent the spectrum into a circle in his Opticks (1704), the first color wheel.
- “the spray of Venus hair”: Venus hair is maidenhair fern, Adiantum capillus-veneris, the hair of Venus.
- “How often had he died”: “Cowards die many times before their deaths; / The valiant never taste of death but once” (William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar, 2.2). See Shakespeare.
- “the golden cockerel weathervane”: In Pushkin’s “The Tale of the Golden Cockerel” (1834), a golden cockerel on a spire crows to warn the tsar of danger; Rimsky-Korsakov made it an opera (1909). See Music and Composers.
- “The earth was moved by the moon like the tide”: The solid earth has tides too. Twice a day the ground under a person’s feet rises and falls, by up to about a foot and a half, as the moon and sun pull on it. See Astronomy.
- “but who was the spinner?”: Clotho, one of the three Fates, spins the thread of each life, Lachesis measures it, and Atropos cuts it. See Greek Mythology and Fate and Chance.
- “what mad tailor had tailored Mr. Spitzer”: See the tailor retailored, Sartor Resartus, in the Chapter 55 resources. See The Great Tailor.

- “the watery firmament”: “And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters” (Genesis 1:6, KJV). See The Bible.
- “He was a poor puppet dancing on its strings”: Heinrich von Kleist’s essay “On the Marionette Theatre” (1810) argues that a puppet, with no consciousness to make it self-aware, moves with more grace than any human dancer.
- “if the dreamer was dead, how should he know”: In Lewis Carroll’s Through the Looking-Glass (1871), Tweedledum and Tweedledee tell Alice that she is only a sort of thing in the sleeping Red King’s dream, and that if he woke she would go out like a candle. See Alice in Wonderland.
- “a golden wind harp”: See the Aeolian harp in the Chapter 55 resources. See Romantic Poets.
- “the sky streaked with silvery mares’-tails”: Mares’ tails are wispy cirrus clouds, high ice clouds that often come before a change of weather; sailors said, “Mackerel sky and mares’ tails make lofty ships carry low sails.” See Clouds and Storms.
- “the night-crowned heron wader”: The black-crowned night heron fishes at dusk and by night. See the night-crowned kingfisher in the Chapter 55 resources. See Birds.
- “the mantling hawk”: In falconry, a hawk mantles when it spreads its wings and tail over its prey to hide it. See Birds.
- “Had he not given birth to death”: In Milton’s Paradise Lost, Sin springs full-grown from the head of Satan, and she later bears his son, Death (Book 2, 1667). See Milton.
- “The mandrakes screamed”: The mandrake root, forked like a human body, was said to shriek when pulled from the ground and to kill or madden whoever heard it: “shrieks like mandrakes torn out of the earth, / That living mortals, hearing them, run mad” (William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, 4.3). See Shakespeare.
- “He was the octopus with the seven gold crowns”: “And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads” (Revelation 12:3, KJV). See The Bible.
- “the thirteenth month of the year”: Lunar calendars need a thirteenth month every few years to keep up with the sun; the Hebrew calendar adds a second month of Adar seven times in every nineteen years.
- “the horseshoe crabs clattering”: Horseshoe crabs are not crabs but relatives of spiders and scorpions, and their kind has lived in the sea for more than 400 million years.
- “the great hermits, the great kings in their shells”: Hermit crabs have soft bodies and live in borrowed snail shells, moving into larger ones as they grow, as Peron put on and put off his coats. King crabs are not true crabs but descend from hermit crabs.
- “the quivering bodies of dead luna moths”: The adult luna moth has no mouth and does not eat; it lives about a week, long enough to mate. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “Those were pearls that were his eyes”: Ariel sings of the drowned king: “Full fathom five thy father lies; / Of his bones are coral made; / Those are pearls that were his

eyes” (William Shakespeare, The Tempest, 1.2). See Shakespeare.

- “The great barnacle birds in the clouds”: Medieval naturalists believed that barnacle geese grew from goose barnacles on driftwood, since no one had seen them nest; Gerald of Wales described it in 1188. See Birds.
- “A garment of fog covered the earth”: “Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains” (Psalm 104:6, KJV). See The Bible.
- “kept time from advancing even though it had advanced, and all the hours struck at once”: Compare Miss Havisham in Charles Dickens’s Great Expectations (1861), who stopped every clock in her house at twenty minutes to nine, the moment she was jilted.
- “with the loosest basting stitches imaginable”: Are temporary, long stitches used in sewing to hold fabric layers together or mark positions, and are easily removed later. They are commonly used to test fit, hold fabric for sewing, or transfer pattern markings. Basting stitches are typically done with a longer stitch length on a sewing machine or with longer stitches by hand. See On basting stitches and the provisional self.
- “he heard a chimney cricket singing where there was no cricket”: In Charles Dickens’s The Cricket on the Hearth (1845), the cricket chirping on the hearth is the guardian spirit of the home.
- “lost in the horse latitudes”: The horse latitudes, about thirty degrees north and south of the equator, are belts of calm where sailing ships could lie becalmed for weeks; the legend says sailors threw horses overboard there to save water. See Horses and Carriages.
- “the great architect was dead”: Freemasons call God the Great Architect of the Universe.
- “the master of the scrolls”: Young’s master of the scrolls recalls the Master of the Rolls, the English judge who first kept the rolls of the Court of Chancery and now heads its civil appeals. See Cases in Chancery in the Chapter 55 resources.
- “the shriekings of the silken skies when they are torn in two”: “And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together” (Revelation 6:14, KJV). See The Bible.
- The clothes, given over the years to the poor, to tramps, and to ragged men, wear thin as Mr. Spitzer’s sense of himself does.

Vocabulary

Accoutered

Dressed and equipped, especially for a special occasion.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Ascot

A broad neck scarf looped under the chin, named for the Ascot races.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Basting

Long, loose temporary stitches.

Bowler

A hard felt hat with a rounded crown, called a derby in America; also one who bowls.

Breeches

Short trousers fastened at or below the knee.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Chameleon

A lizard that can change the color of its skin.

Conformation

The shape and proportions of an animal’s body, especially a horse’s.

Croupier

The attendant who runs a gambling table.

Crucible

A heat-resistant pot for melting metals. Figuratively, a severe test that changes a person.

Demented

Out of one’s mind.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Domino

A loose hooded cloak worn with a half mask at a masquerade.

Dominoes

A game played with small oblong tiles marked with spots.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Fedora

A soft felt hat with a brim and a crease along the crown.

Filament

A fine thread or fiber.

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Fluted

Marked with long rounded grooves, like a column.

Fop

A man vain of his clothes.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Harlequin

The patched, masked trickster of Italian comedy.

Hummock

A small hill or mound.

Ideograph

A written sign that stands for an idea or thing rather than a sound.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Integument

An outer covering, such as skin, rind, or shell.

Inverness

A man’s overcoat with a detachable cape.

King post

The upright beam in the middle of a roof truss.

Legerdemain

Sleight of hand; trickery.

Lintel

The horizontal beam across the top of a door or window.

Luna moth

A large pale green moth of North America with long tails on its hind wings.

Manifold

Many and various.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Pallbearer

One who helps carry a coffin at a funeral.

Peaked

Thin and pale, as from illness.

Phantasmagoric

Like a phantasmagoria, a shifting series of dreamlike or nightmarish images. A phantasmagoria was an eighteenth-century magic-lantern ghost show.

Polka

A lively couple dance from Bohemia.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Profligacy

Reckless extravagance; wastefulness.

Proposition

A statement put forward as true, to be argued.

Pulverized

Ground to powder.

Revers

The turned-back edge of a coat, as a lapel (French).

Sarcophagus

A stone coffin, often carved, placed above ground. The plural is sarcophagi.

Sartorial

Having to do with clothing, tailoring, or style of dress.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Sententiously

In a moralizing, pompous way.

Sentimentalist

One who indulges in tender feeling, often more than the occasion warrants.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Spruce

An evergreen tree of northern forests.

Swallow-tail

A man’s formal tailcoat, with tails like a swallow’s.

Tallow

Animal fat used for candles and soap. Tallow-colored is a dull, yellowish white.

Threadbare

Worn so thin the threads show.

Torpid

Sluggish; inactive.

Travesty

A grotesque imitation.

Tremulous

Trembling; quivering.

Tweed

A rough woolen cloth, often of mixed colors, first woven in Scotland.

Vaporous

Full of mist or vapor.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Wentletrap

A sea snail whose shell winds like a spiral staircase.

Whelk

A large sea snail with a spiral shell.

Whinny

A horse’s gentle neigh.

Winterbourne

A stream that flows only in winter.

Chapter 57

Content note: *This chapter mentions the suicide of Mr. Spitzer's twin brother, Peron.*

Summary

A polite, threatening bill keeps arriving from Peron's tailor for the black funeral suit Mr. Spitzer is sure he paid for in cash, without receipts. In a recurring dream he journeys to pay it twice and finds no tailor, only empty lofts, and wakes from seeing himself in Peron's brown derby. Awake, he searches Boston for the tailor's shop, turning left for right because dreams go by opposites. At the Public Library he combs city directories and old newspapers and finds Peron's death notice and his own name in the society columns, but no tailor and no street. Beside him a man argues with a dead man about the soul, and a young man who cannot be older than twenty swears he took a bullet at Appomattox, where the South won. Outside, at twilight, Mr. Spitzer watches the clouds become a skull, a hand, a bird, and a rose, and wishes for a rose named for both brothers, red and white on a single bush.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · The Great Tailor

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Society, Class, and Race · Time

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Cards, Games, and Chance · Clocks and Watches · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Clouds and Storms · Horses and Carriages · Roses and Flowers · Twins and Doubles · Weddings and Funerals

Allusions: American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Judaism · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Civil War

Key passages

From the research

- The recurring motif of the great tailor, possibly mad or non-existent, who supposedly tailored the black funeral suit and sends an incessant bill to Mr. Spitzer, symbolizes Mr. Spitzer's unresolved debts, guilt, and identity crisis. Despite having paid the funeral expenses, Mr. Spitzer is haunted by the tailor's persistent demand, which can be interpreted as a metaphor for the burdens of the past that Mr. Spitzer cannot escape. The fact that the suit is associated with his dead brother (Peron) who wore it at the

funeral adds layers of grief and identity confusion, as Mr. Spitzer wonders if he himself might be the dead man or the other way around. This passage reveals the theme of blurred boundaries between life and death, self and other, reality and dream.

- Mr. Spitzer repeatedly dreams of searching for the tailor’s shop, traveling through confusing, shifting streets and cities that resemble a storm-tossed sea or a surreal landscape. This endless, futile search reflects his psychological torment and the elusive nature of truth and memory. The tailor’s shop is described as empty or nonexistent, reinforcing the idea that what Mr. Spitzer pursues may be an illusion or a part of himself lost in time and space. The dream imagery (revolving doors, escalators, pigeons, and contradictory directions) emphasizes disorientation and the fractured nature of his existence.
- Mr. Spitzer consciously allows for distortions, reversals, and opposites in his search, knowing that dreams operate by opposites: dark is fair, life is death, man is woman. This recognition of duality and the unreliability of sensory impressions underscores the philosophical meditation on reality’s instability and the fluidity between contradictory states. This theme is crucial for understanding Mr. Spitzer’s predicament; he is caught between worlds, identities, and states of being.
- The scenes in the library reading room, where Mr. Spitzer consults city directories and old newspapers, highlighting his attempt to anchor himself in reality through facts and records, but his efforts are futile, no tailor or street exists. The presence of eccentric characters debating immortality and reconstructing alternate histories (such as the Confederate soldier who claims the South won the Civil War) adds to the surreal atmosphere and reflects Mr. Spitzer’s own existential doubts and confusion about time, history, and death.
- Mr. Spitzer’s inner desire for absolute certainty and immortality contrasts with his awareness of doubt and confusion. His longing to interrupt the argument about the soul’s existence but refraining out of fear of rejection reveals his loneliness and the human desire for definitive answers about life after death, which remain elusive. This passage deepens the existential questioning central to the chapter.
- Toward the end of the chapter, Mr. Spitzer’s observation of the twilight sky filled with colorful clouds and shapes (skulls, hands, birds) culminates in the image of a rose that changes from red to white. This rose symbolizes constancy, memory, and perhaps reconciliation of the living and the dead (the two brothers). Mr. Spitzer’s wish for a rose named after him and his brother encapsulates his yearning for remembrance, identity, and peace amid the instability of his existence.
- Throughout the chapter, Mr. Spitzer struggles to distinguish his dreams from his waking life. He encounters impossible events (dropping a handkerchief in Pisa despite never having been there) and perceives his reflection as a shadow or a pigeon’s murmur. This ambiguity highlights the chapter’s central concern with the fluid boundary between life and death, memory and forgetting, reality and illusion.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “The great tailor was dead, or he was obviously mad.” Who is the great tailor?
- Mr. Spitzer goes by the rule “that dreams go by opposites.” How does the rule lead him astray?
- “There had been greater mysteries then than now, Mr. Spitzer believed.” Why does he miss the world before the telegraph?

Characters

- Mr. Spitzer fears “that he had clothed the wrong man.” Which brother did he bury?
- A young man insists that “The South had won over the North.” Why does Mr. Spitzer, “a Boston Abolitionist,” only nod?
- Mr. Spitzer learned that “most people do not want the argument to be settled.” Why does he want certainty when others prefer doubt?

Connections

- The old librarian “always looked through the wrong pair” of spectacles. Where else in the novel do people see through the wrong lens?
- Mr. Spitzer dreams of “a red rose and a white rose growing on a single bush.” How does this rose answer the red and white roses of Chapter 56?
- “So many things had happened to Mr. Spitzer which could not possibly have happened to him.” How does the novel treat memories that cannot be true?

Reflection

- Mr. Spitzer hopes that “if he waited long enough, there might be no problem.” Do debts to the dead ever expire?
- He “had yearned for absolute certainty and had wished to be immortal.” Are the two wishes the same?
- “For how should he be remembered?” What makes a fitting memorial?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- Mr. Spitzer is grappling with grief, guilt, and confusion after his brother’s death. He is introspective, haunted by recurrent dreams, and obsessed with settling an ambiguous

tailor’s bill related to his brother’s funeral suit. He represents the struggle between reality and illusion, life and death.

Peron

- Peron, Mr. Spitzer’s deceased brother, is described as a gambler and a man of dignity in death. Peron’s identity is intertwined with mystery and symbolic imagery (black suit, red rose, bright red necktie), representing a life ended but still profoundly present in Mr. Spitzer’s mind.

The Great Tailor

- The Great Tailor may have made the black funeral suit for Peron. He symbolizes unresolved debts, both financial and psychological, and the elusive nature of truth and memory.

Strangers in the Library

- Various strangers and characters Mr. Spitzer encounters, including a Confederate soldier who claims contradictory historical facts, a librarian, and others who contribute to the dreamlike, surreal atmosphere.

Research: Themes

Identity and the Double

See: Identity and the Self · Twins and Doubles

- Mr. Spitzer’s identity is fluid and fragmented. He sometimes confuses himself with his brother, dreams of being the tailor, or living a double existence. His struggle to reconcile these selves reflects the complexity of human identity, especially after trauma or death.

Debt and the Past

See: Memory and the Past

- The persistent tailor’s bill symbolizes the unpayable debts of the past and the burden of memory. Mr. Spitzer’s attempts to pay or deny the debt represent his inability to move beyond grief and the past.

Dream and Waking

See: Dreams and Imagination · Illusion and Reality

- The narrative blurs the line between waking life and dream, with Mr. Spitzer experiencing continuous, overlapping realities. The chapter questions what is real and

what is illusion, emphasizing the instability of perception.

The Soul and Immortality

See: Death and Mortality

- Discussions on the soul, the afterlife, and the persistence of the dead in memory permeate the text. Mr. Spitzer's desire for certainty about immortality contrasts with others' doubts, highlighting existential uncertainty.

Time and History

See: Time

- The chapter reflects on the passage of time, both personal and historical, with references to changing cities, lost histories, and the impossibility of retracing steps exactly. Time is portrayed as fluid and unstable.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Black Funeral Suit and Tailor's Bill

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Weddings and Funerals

- Symbolizes unresolved debts, both literal and metaphorical. The suit represents Peron's dignity and the past that Mr. Spitzer attempts to honor and settle.

The Penny with Heads on Both Sides

See: Cards, Games, and Chance

- A talisman of luck and uncertainty, symbolizing Mr. Spitzer's gamble with fate and his desire for control in an uncontrollable world.

The Rose (Red and White)

See: Roses and Flowers

- Represents memory, fidelity, and duality. Mr. Spitzer imagines a rose named after himself and his brother, red and white together, symbolizing their intertwined fates and memories. The symbolism of red and white flowers together generally represents unity, harmony, and the balance of opposing concepts like passion and purity. This meaning is most common in Western traditions and varies significantly depending on the cultural context and the specific flowers chosen. The Tudor rose joined the red rose of Lancaster and the white rose of York after the Wars of the Roses, two houses in one flower, as Mr. Spitzer joins himself and his brother.

Dream Imagery

- Recurring images of clouds, city streets, pigeons, skull-shaped clouds, giant hands, and birds evoke the ephemeral and mutable nature of existence.

Timepieces (Two Wrist Watches)

See: Clocks and Watches · Twins and Doubles

- Represent duality and the conflicting measures of time, cosmic and earthly, highlighting Mr. Spitzer's fractured perception of time.

Research: Resources

- "a psychic armor no one now investigates": The psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich called the rigid habits of posture and manner that people build against feeling their "character armor" (Character Analysis, 1933).
- "an insistently polite, threatening note from his brother's tailor": See The Great Tailor, Chapter 55 resources, and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- "for the table was always set for the wanderer": Compare the old custom of setting an extra place at the table for the unexpected guest or wanderer, kept in Poland on Christmas Eve, and the cup poured for the prophet Elijah at the Passover seder. See Judaism.
- "alert interest and baited breath": Young's spelling puns on the usual phrase, from Shylock: "With bated breath and whispering humbleness" (William Shakespeare, The Merchant of Venice, 1.3). Bated means held back, abated. See Shakespeare.
- "those old Floradora girls": Floradora girls may refer to the musical Florodora which ran in London and Broadway in the early 1900s. It was famous for its chorus line of Florodora girls. Bella donna means beautiful woman in Italian. The belladonna plant is poisonous but drops were used by women to dilate their pupils which made them look attractive. The plant's name, beautiful lady, comes from that use.
- "horse-hair wigs": Horsehair has a long history of use in wigs, particularly in 17th-century Europe, with King Louis XIII and Charles II popularizing them as a status symbol and to conceal hair loss or skin conditions. The wigs were initially made of black horse and goat hair but were problematic due to their coarse texture and tendency to attract lice, leading to the development of white horsehair wigs in the late 18th century as a more manageable alternative. Horse-hair wigs will play a role in Miss MacIntosh's story in the following chapters as we learn more about her background.
- "The debt, even if there had been a debt which he had forgotten to pay, would be outlawed by time": A debt no one sues on within a set number of years is barred by the statute of limitations; in Massachusetts the limit for a contract is six years.
- "to bet with a penny which had heads upon both sides": The two-headed coin is the oldest of gamblers' tricks: whoever calls heads cannot lose. See Gambling and Playing

Cards.

- “the same Grand Central Station”: New York’s Grand Central Depot opened in 1871, became Grand Central Station in 1900, and was rebuilt as Grand Central Terminal in 1913.
- “and he only dreamed that he was dreaming”: “All that we see or seem / Is but a dream within a dream” (Edgar Allan Poe, “A Dream Within a Dream,” 1849). See American Writers.
- “like his being caught in a revolving door”: Theophilus Van Kannel of Philadelphia patented the revolving door in 1888.
- “passing himself on an escalator going up as he was going down”: Jesse Reno built a moving inclined stairway at Coney Island in 1896, and the Otis Elevator Company showed its first “escalator” at the Paris Exposition of 1900.
- “the music of the hurdy-gurdy”: The true hurdy-gurdy is a stringed instrument sounded by a cranked wheel; in America the name went to the barrel organs of street musicians. See Music and Composers.
- “or perhaps he was the measuring worm”: The measuring worm, or inchworm, is the caterpillar of the geometer moths, whose name means earth-measurers; it moves by looping, as if measuring the ground. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “Ah, how many gargoyles under the eaves!”: A gargoyle is a carved waterspout, from the French gargouille, throat; the water runs out through its mouth.
- “well knowing that dreams go by opposites”: The folk saying that dreams go by contraries is old; Freud gave it a theory in The Interpretation of Dreams (1900), where a dream may turn a thing into its opposite. See On dream logic and the logic of the opposite and Dreams and Imagination.
- “the three golden apples hanging in the air”: The three golden balls of the pawnbroker, which Young calls golden apples, come from the arms of the Medici and the Lombard bankers and are also said to stand for the three bags of gold Saint Nicholas gave as dowries to three poor sisters.
    - In Greek myth the golden apples grew in the garden of the Hesperides, and Eris’s golden apple, inscribed “to the fairest,” began the Trojan War. See Greek Mythology.
- “Jews’ harps”: Jews’ harps is a small musical instrument, also known as a jaw harp or mouth harp, that produces sound by the vibration of a flexible metal or bamboo tongue attached to a frame. The player places the frame against their teeth or lips and plucks the tongue, while changing the shape of their mouth to create different pitches and melodies. Despite the name, the instrument has no connection to Jewish people or Judaism and most likely originated in Asia thousands of years ago.
- “corsets”: Are structured garments designed to alter the body’s silhouette, evolved from Minoan-era forms to the rigid 16th-century stays of French courts and later the Victorian era’s extreme hourglass shape. Used by both men and women for centuries, corsets became associated primarily with women, shaping the waist and supporting the bust. Materials progressed from boning to whalebone, steel, and later synthetic

options, while the garment's role shifted from an undergarment to a symbol of social constraints and, in modern times, a symbol of empowerment or rebellion.

- "bird-cages": Date to antiquity, first appearing in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and China for symbolic, religious, and wealth display purposes, with the term "bird cage" emerging in late 15th century Europe. During the 16th and 17th centuries, exotic birds became status symbols, leading to ornate, expensive cages in Europe, a trend that peaked in the Victorian era with elaborate designs. The use of birds in cages has also served practical functions, such as navigation by sailors and safety checks in mines, though their primary role shifted from food source to domestic pets and decorative objects.
- "knowing, also, that dark is fair, that fair is dark": "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (William Shakespeare, Macbeth, 1.1). See Shakespeare.
- "the great blimp like a silver whale": Goodyear flew its first passenger blimp, the Pilgrim, in 1925, and its blimps became a fixture over American cities.
- "Chinese kites with their long ribbons streaming in the seventh heaven": In Jewish and Islamic tradition there are seven heavens, and the seventh is the highest, nearest God.
- "bridges of blackbirds": In the Chinese legend of the Cowherd and the Weaver Girl, magpies form a bridge across the Milky Way once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month, so the lovers can meet.
- "the ferris wheels reflected on a horizontal sea of clouds": George Ferris built the first Ferris wheel, 264 feet high, for the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, as America's answer to the Eiffel Tower.
- "how many funeral gondolas there were": Venetian gondolas are black by a law of 1562 against display, and funeral gondolas carried the dead across the lagoon to the cemetery island of San Michele.
- "how many black swans following the white midnight": Europeans long used the black swan as a byword for the impossible, after the Roman poet Juvenal's "rara avis in terris nigroque simillima cygno," a bird as rare on earth as a black swan (Satires 6.165), until the Dutch explorer Willem de Vlamingh found black swans in western Australia in 1697. See Birds.
- "mare clausum": The sea that is under the jurisdiction of a particular country The phrase comes from John Selden's Mare Clausum (1635), written against Hugo Grotius's Mare Liberum (1609), the free sea.
- "He had dropped his handkerchief in Pisa": Galileo's pupil Vincenzo Viviani told the story that Galileo dropped balls of different weights from the Leaning Tower of Pisa to show that they fall together.
- "He had gone, after several days, to the Public Library reading room": The history of American public libraries began with early private collections and subscription libraries like Benjamin Franklin's in 1731. The first entirely tax-supported public library was established in Peterborough, New Hampshire, in 1833, followed by the large Boston Public Library in 1854. The late 19th century marked a boom with Andrew Carnegie's philanthropy, which funded the construction of over 1,600 libraries, and the

establishment of the American Library Association (ALA) in 1876 to advocate for their services. Public libraries have since evolved to offer a wide array of services beyond book lending, including educational programs and internet access, becoming a cornerstone of American civic life. Public libraries in the US are open to all and are known as one of the last open places where the people can come in and stay as long as they do not cause a distraction. This has led to vulnerable populations taking shelter there. See On the Boston Public Library as sanctuary.

- “consulted the city directory”: Boston’s city directories, published from 1789, listed residents and businesses by name and street year by year.
- “bustles, corsets, shrouds and stays and canvas sails and masts”: Young puns on rigging: shrouds are the ropes that brace a mast from the sides and stays the ropes that brace it fore and aft, so the shrouds and stays of the dead and of the corset sit beside the sails and masts of the ships.
- “landaus, barouches, phaetons like great sea shells”: A landau is a four-wheel luxury carriage with a roof that can be let down. See Horses and Carriages.
    - Barouches are large, luxurious, four-wheeled carriages.
    - Phaetons were a sporty open carriage. See Phaethon in the Chapter 56 resources.
- “the one-horse shay”: One-horse shay or one-hoss shay is a light, covered, two-wheeled carriage. It was made famous by American writer Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. He memorialized the shay in his satirical poem “The Deacon’s Masterpiece or The Wonderful One-Hoss Shay.” In the poem, a fictional deacon crafts the titular wonderful one-hoss shay in such a logical way that it could not break down. The shay is constructed from the very best of materials so that each part is as strong as every other part. In Holmes’ humorous, yet “logical” twist, the shay endures for a hundred years and then “went to pieces all at once,— / All at once, and nothing first,— / Just as bubbles do when they burst” (Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Deacon’s Masterpiece,” in The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table, 1858). See American Writers.
- “rumors of ships which had gone down far from any human eye and might rise silently, ghost ships”: The brigantine Mary Celeste was found in 1872 sailing the Atlantic with no one aboard, her cargo intact and her crew never seen again; the Flying Dutchman is the legend’s ghost ship, doomed to sail forever.
- “a string of spectacles attached to her bosom, one above the other, one for every kind of distance”: Benjamin Franklin, tired of changing spectacles, had two pairs cut in half and joined, the first bifocals, which he described in a letter of 1785. See Benjamin Franklin and Poor Richard’s Almanack.
- “it might have been Bedlam”: Is a word referring to a scene of uproar, chaos, and confusion, or an asylum for the mentally ill, derived from the name of London’s Bethlem Royal Hospital, which was a famous psychiatric institution. The hospital’s historical association with treating the mentally ill led its name to become a common term for a madhouse and, by extension, any place of extreme disorder and madness.

- “the reading room was an Automat”: Is a restaurant where food is purchased from a wall of individual, coin-operated dispensers and retrieved through small, glass-windowed compartments. The concept originated in Europe with the Quisisana restaurant in Berlin and was brought to America by Joseph Horn and Frank Hardart. Automats were popular in cities like New York and Philadelphia in the early to mid-20th century, symbolizing efficiency and speed. They became less popular with the rise of fast food and changing dining preferences but are now remembered with nostalgia. See On the Automat.
- “whether it is an elixir, a substance, a speck, a dot, a little man”: Philosophers and doctors tried them all: Descartes placed the soul’s seat in the pineal gland, and in 1907 the Massachusetts doctor Duncan MacDougall weighed six dying patients and claimed the soul weighs twenty-one grams.
- “the musical stars sang”: “When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7, KJV). See The Bible.
- “reconstructing the Civil War—the Battle of Appomattox”: The Battle of Appomattox Court House, fought in Appomattox County, Virginia, on the morning of April 9, 1865, was one of the last battles of the American Civil War. It was the final engagement of Confederate General in Chief, Robert E. Lee, and his Army of Northern Virginia before they surrendered to the Union Army of the Potomac under the Commanding General of the United States Army, Ulysses S. Grant. (Wikipedia) Lee did not surrender in a tent but in the parlor of Wilmer McLean’s house at Appomattox Court House. See On the Confederate soldier and alternative history and The Civil War.
- “the flags of the Confederacy”: Refers to several flags used by the Confederate States of America during the Civil War (1861-65), with the most recognizable being the Battle Flag of the Army of Northern Virginia. It was created for battlefield use to distinguish it from the Union flag and later became a symbol for the Lost Cause narrative of Southern heritage, though its use also became tied to white supremacy and racist groups. The flag’s controversial meaning, representing both Southern heritage and a symbol of racism and slavery, has led to ongoing public debates and the removal of official displays. See The Civil War.
- “the flags of the Grand Union Army”: Young’s Grand Union Army is the Union army of the Civil War, whose veterans formed the Grand Army of the Republic in 1866. The Grand Union Flag, by contrast, was the first flag of the Continental Army, flown from 1775 until the Stars and Stripes was adopted in 1777. See The Civil War.
- “would always be a Boston Abolitionist”: Boston abolitionists, active from the 1830s to the Civil War, included prominent figures like William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and Lewis Hayden, who formed societies like the New England Anti-Slavery Society and published the anti-slavery newspaper The Liberator. These activists, both Black and white, organized and rallied against slavery, often facing violent opposition from anti-abolitionist mobs in the city. They also supported the Underground Railroad, assisted fugitive slaves, and pushed for social justice within their communities, eventually contributing to the eventual end of slavery. See Society, Class, and Race.

- “opposed even to the slavery of the moth to the star”: “The desire of the moth for the star, / Of the night for the morrow” (Percy Bysshe Shelley, “One word is too often profaned,” 1821). See Romantic Poets.
- “these were clouds without water”: “clouds they are without water, carried about of winds” (Jude 1:12, KJV). See The Bible and Clouds and Storms.
- “Delicate as mountain laurel”: Is a flowering plant native to the eastern United States. Its range stretches from southern Maine to northern Florida, and west to Indiana and Louisiana. Mountain laurel is the state flower of Connecticut and Pennsylvania.
- “a Sphinx had settled on his coat sleeve”: This sphinx is a sphinx moth, or hawk moth, named for the caterpillar’s habit of rearing up its head like the Great Sphinx. See The Life of the Sphinx Moth in the Chapter 55 resources. See Butterflies and Moths and Ancient Egypt.
- “He had seen a cloud like a great skull”: Compare Hamlet teasing Polonius: “Do you see yonder cloud that’s almost in shape of a camel?” (William Shakespeare, Hamlet, 3.2). See Shakespeare and Clouds and Storms.
- “there should be a red rose and a white rose growing on a single bush”: Young’s hybrid exists. The York and Lancaster rose, a damask rose grown since the sixteenth century, bears pink and white flowers on the same bush and is named for the red rose of Lancaster and the white rose of York, whose Wars of the Roses ended when Henry VII joined the two in the Tudor rose. See On the red rose and white rose and Roses and Flowers.

Vocabulary

Abacus

A frame with beads on wires, used for counting.

Artifact

An object made by human hands.

Aspersion

A damaging remark; a slur.

Barouche

A fashionable four-wheeled carriage with a folding half-hood and two seats facing each other.

Bowler

A hard felt hat with a rounded crown, called a derby in America; also one who bowls.

Bustle

A pad or frame worn under a skirt to puff out the back.

Cartographer

A maker of maps.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Counterpart

A person or thing that closely matches another.

Cupola

A small dome on a roof.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Dun

A demand for payment of a debt.

Eaves

The edges of a roof that overhang the walls.

Effaced

Erased; wiped out.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Elixir

A medicine sold as a cure-all.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Gnarled

Knobbly and twisted, as old trees or hands.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Horticulturist

One who grows garden plants.

Incandescence

The giving off of light by something heated until it glows.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Insolent

Rude and disrespectful.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Mauve

A pale purple.

Mutable

Changeable.

Nonentity

A thing that does not exist; also a person of no importance.

Pallbearer

One who helps carry a coffin at a funeral.

Pigeon-hole

A small open compartment in a desk for papers.

Plumage

A bird’s feathers.

Punctilio

A fine point of etiquette; exactness in form.

Scrupulous

Very careful to do what is right.

Scudding

Moving fast before the wind.

Shay

A light, one-horse carriage; a chaise.

Swallow-tail

A man’s formal tailcoat, with tails like a swallow’s.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Tumultuous

Loud, wild, and disorderly.

Viceroy

One who rules a province as the deputy of a king.

Zither

A stringed instrument with a flat soundboard, played lying flat.

Chapter 58

Summary

On the Library steps Mr. Spitzer meets an old violinist with a wounded chin and a wild white mane who plays an imaginary violin, and he recognizes the soundless tune at once: a forgotten waltz by a minor nineteenth-century composer, remembered from his childhood. Watching, he decides that the player might have been anyone with a different stick in his hand, batter, billiard player, shepherd, judge, fisherman, king, or conductor, for reality is made of just so many sticks. The music turns his thoughts to Peron, to the broken old sportsmen Peron befriended, and to Peron's fatal leap. He fears the old man is having a fit or is already dead, but is afraid to applaud or offer money. He has come to distinguish less and less between reality and his dreams, and suspects that this may be his only wisdom.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · The Old Violinist

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Identity and the Self · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence

Symbols: Butterflies and Moths · Cards, Games, and Chance · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Wittgenstein

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- Mr. Spitzer watches an old violinist who plays invisible notes on an imaginary violin. Despite the silence, Mr. Spitzer "knew immediately what music he was playing" and recognized it as an obscure minor composition from childhood, something almost lost to modern ears. This passage establishes the mystical and imaginative nature of the music. It exists purely in the mind and memory, evoking nostalgia for a past that is fading. The description of the old musician's expert emotional gestures and Mr. Spitzer's empathetic response shows a deep connection between memory, art, and the ineffable experience of music beyond sound.
- The narrative elaborates on the qualities of the music and the sounds of nature, city life, and ephemeral sensations woven seamlessly into the violinist's silent

performance. Mr. Spitzer experiences a profound detachment from his corporeal self and is deeply moved, his soul almost slipping from his body. The music is described as “pre-musical music,” existing before human consciousness or after it no longer perceives sound, suggesting a timeless, transcendent art form. This passage highlights the boundary between reality and imagination, sound and silence, life and death.

- Mr. Spitzer contemplates how the old violinist might have been many other figures (an athlete, a gentleman, a fisherman, a king) if only the instruments and tools in his hands had changed. This reflection suggests the fluidity of reality and identity, how reality is “made up of just so many sticks and not one stick more.” The passage explores the transformative power of imagination and the interchangeable roles people might play, blurring boundaries between art, sport, and life.
- Mr. Spitzer recalls his brother and old sportsmen, tying these memories to ideas of death, legacy, and continuing influence. This section reveals his obsession with memory and how past lives and experiences persist beyond physical death, transforming but never disappearing. It also contrasts Mr. Spitzer’s sensitivity to silent, subtle music with Peron’s preference for the rougher, more physical world of sports, highlighting differing responses to life’s challenges and art.
- Mr. Spitzer questions whether the old musician is alive or dead, a dream or reality, reflecting on the ambiguous boundary between life and death. The violinist’s wild, convulsive movements are seen both as music’s highest expression and possibly a sign of illness or death. This ambiguity deepens the chapter’s themes of mortality, the unknowability of existence, and the persistence of art and spirit beyond physical life.
- Mr. Spitzer reflects on himself as a “silent composer” and “walking score board,” someone who carries music and memory within but whose music is intangible and largely unheard. This passage underscores his isolation and the internal nature of artistic creation, the idea that much of life’s music is invisible or unperceived by others but deeply real to the creator.
- The chapter closes with Mr. Spitzer’s reflection that he no longer distinguishes clearly between reality and dreams, life and death. This indistinction, while sometimes embarrassing, is also his “only wisdom,” a protective cloud through which he moves. The metaphor of his black cape and drifting shadow emphasizes his liminal state between worlds, carrying the darkness as a cloak.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Mr. Spitzer “knew immediately what music he was playing, soundless though it was.” How can he recognize music he cannot hear?
- “Reality was made up of just so many sticks and not one stick more.” What does the list of sticks show about identity?

- Mr. Spitzer’s “admiration would always be his pity—and his pity, his admiration.” How do pity and admiration mix in his response to the violinist?

Characters

- Who might the old violinist be, a derelict, a ghost, or a part of Mr. Spitzer himself?
- Peron preferred “the unwritten music of the turf.” How do the two brothers’ kinds of music differ?
- Mr. Spitzer is afraid to applaud “to interrupt the silence with a sound.” What does his silence protect?

Connections

- The violinist plays “pre-musical music.” How does this chapter carry on the silent and theoretical music of Chapter 55?
- Mr. Spitzer wonders whether “the dead man lived and dreamed.” Where else in the novel does Young blur the living and the dead?
- For Mr. Spitzer, “a problem of existence was not illuminated—it was darkened by elucidation.” How does this sentence describe the way the novel itself works?

Reflection

- Can music that is never heard still be music?
- Mr. Spitzer finds that “if he waited long enough, most people would answer the questions he did not ask.” Is waiting a kind of wisdom?
- His confusion of dream and reality “was perhaps also his only wisdom.” When can not knowing protect a person?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- Mr. Spitzer is a large, reflective man, draped in a black cape, who is a silent composer and connoisseur of music. He is caught between life and death, reality and imagination. His deafness contrasts with his profound musical understanding, highlighting a spiritual or metaphysical connection to music beyond sound. He embodies melancholy, wisdom, and a deep sense of loss, especially connected to his dead brother and the passing of time.

The Old Violinist

- The Old Violinist is an enigmatic figure with white hair and shaking fingers, who plays silent music on an imaginary violin. His physical condition suggests age and wear, but

his music transcends physical limitations, becoming a symbol for the persistence of art and spirit beyond bodily decay. He may represent forgotten or marginalized artists, or even symbolize the border between life and death.

Research: Themes

Silent Music

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Music in this chapter exists beyond audible sound. The old violinist plays silent, imaginary music that Mr. Spitzer “hears” through intense observation and imagination. This silent music is described with rich auditory imagery (whispers, sobs, bird calls, and natural sounds) suggesting music as a universal language transcending physical constraints.

Memory and the Past

See: Memory and the Past

- Mr. Spitzer’s reflections evoke buried childhood memories and a past nearly lost to time. His thoughts on his dead brother and old sportsmen convey a deep sense of mourning and nostalgia. The music, described as an old, nearly forgotten waltz, symbolizes this connection to the past and the fading of cultural memory.

Life and Death

See: Death and Mortality

- The chapter blurs the lines between living and dead. Mr. Spitzer contemplates whether the old violinist is alive, dying, or already dead, and imagines music existing before consciousness and after hearing ceases. The text wrestles with existence, identity, and what remains after physical death.

Art, Sport, and Identity

See: Identity and the Self

- Mr. Spitzer draws analogies between music and sports, imagining the violinist as a baseball player, a billiards player, or other figures, emphasizing how art and life are intertwined and fluid. Reality itself is depicted as made from “sticks” or tools, with identity shaped by perspective and imagination.

Pity and Admiration

- Mr. Spitzer admires the violinist with a mingled feeling of pity, reflecting on the loneliness of the artist and the fragility of human endeavor. This ambivalence highlights the complex human response to suffering and greatness.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Imaginary Violin

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- The violinist's "imaginary bow" and "imaginary strings" represent art beyond the physical realm, emphasizing creativity as a spiritual act. The music is described with natural and cosmic imagery: "singings of blind moths," "bird calls," "sea shells buzzing like bees," and "sparks sparking on the strings."

The Black Cape

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Mr. Spitzer's attire symbolizes his somber, reflective nature and his boundary state between darkness and light, life and death.

The Hour-Glass of the Heart

- The hour-glass of the heart is a metaphor for the passage of time and the reversal or renewal of life, connected to the emotional impact of the music.

Sticks, Wands, and Games

See: Cards, Games, and Chance

- Baseball, billiards, croquet, polo, fishing, and even kingship are used metaphorically to describe potential alternate lives or identities for the violinist, highlighting the fluidity of reality and identity.

Sky and Clouds

- Frequent references to the sky, clouds, stars, and celestial bodies evoke a cosmic scale and the mystery of existence.

Research: Resources

- "his white Steinkirk drifting to his feet": See the Steinkirk scarf in the Chapter 56 resources.
- "his pearl-buttoned spats": Pearl-buttoned spats were a popular, elegant fashion accessory for both men and women from the late 19th century to the 1920s. Originally designed to protect footwear from dirt on unpaved roads, they became a symbol of social status and high fashion, especially during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Spats faded in the late 1920s, as paved streets and motorcars made them unnecessary and men's dress grew more casual. See On pearl-buttoned spats and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.

- “his head turned permanently to one side as if he still carried a box under his chin—which was abraded”: Young’s wound is real. Violinists and violists develop “fiddler’s neck,” a reddened, sometimes broken patch of skin under the left jaw where the instrument presses.
- “This was not the angel singing in the whirlwind”: Compare Joseph Addison’s angel who “Rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm” (“The Campaign,” 1705).
- “This was not the singing candle flame”: A flame can sing. In 1777 Bryan Higgins found that a hydrogen flame inside a glass tube gives out a steady note, and Pieter Rijke made a tube sing over heated gauze in 1859.
- “a minor composition by one of the lesser-known nineteenth-century composers”: Young names no piece; the waltz is lost, remembered only by Mr. Spitzer. See On the minor composition and Music and Composers.
- “embalmed in old music boxes”: The Geneva watchmaker Antoine Favre made the first comb-and-pin music movement in 1796, and Swiss cylinder music boxes carried the waltzes and opera airs of the nineteenth century into parlors everywhere. See Music and Composers.
- “the old bellwether jumping over the cliff”: The bellwether is the belled ram that leads the flock. In Rabelais’s Pantagruel, Panurge throws the leading ram overboard and the whole flock follows it into the sea (Book 4, ch. 8, 1552).
- “weavings of the threads of sound upon the loom of time”: In Goethe’s Faust, Part One (1808), the Earth Spirit weaves the living garment of God at the roaring loom of Time.
- “such as should have awakened the deaf and caused the dust to stir”: In Greek mythology, Orpheus was a Thracian bard, legendary musician and prophet. He was also a renowned poet and, according to legend, travelled with Jason and the Argonauts in search of the Golden Fleece, and descended into the underworld to recover his lost wife, Eurydice. His music charmed beasts, trees, and stones. See Greek Mythology.
    - “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped” (Isaiah 35:5, KJV). See The Bible.
- “sea shells buzzing like bees”: The sea heard in a shell is the noise of the room around it, echoing in the shell’s hollow, which sounds some pitches more than others. See The Sea and Water.
- “sound of the sand moving”: Some dunes really sing. Booming sands give out a low hum or roar when sand slides down their faces; Marco Polo heard of desert spirits making music in the sands of the Lop desert.
- “pre-musical music”: The earliest musical instruments demonstrate that early humans possessed abstract thought, symbolic expression, and sophisticated cognitive and social skills. These instruments, made from bone, shell, and ivory and dating back over 40,000 years, show that music played a crucial role in rituals, communication, and social bonding, helping to unite communities, convey spiritual beliefs, and even coordinate collective work or warfare. The existence of these complex tools indicates

that early humans were innovators, capable of abstract thought and creating objects with symbolic and functional meaning beyond mere survival needs. See On pre-musical music and Music, Sound, and Silence.

- “this infant crying in the dark”: See Tennyson’s “infant crying in the night” in the Chapter 53 resources. See Romantic Poets.
- “prided himself that music and baseball were fused in his psychology”: Young also writes of his “intuitive understanding of this relation of music to sports.” Music and baseball (sports) are similar in their shared need for practice, discipline, teamwork, and performance. Both fields involve individual roles within a collective, rely on rhythm and coordination, cultivate passionate fanbases, and have rich, evolving traditions and narratives that contribute to their cultural significance.
- “knew a one-handed pianist”: Compare Paul Wittgenstein, brother of the philosopher Ludwig, a concert pianist who lost his right arm in the First World War and went on playing with his left; Ravel wrote his Piano Concerto for the Left Hand (1930) for him. See Wittgenstein.
- “shepherd, if his cane had been a staff”: “Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4, KJV). See The Bible.
- “a croquet player knocking his ball through the last wicket”: At the Queen’s croquet ground in Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland (1865), the mallets are flamingos and the balls hedgehogs, and the soldiers bend double to make the arches. See Alice in Wonderland.
- “a polo player furiously riding with his mallet”: See Isfahan’s polo square in the Chapter 56 resources.
- “fishing for lost souls”: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matthew 4:19, KJV). See The Bible.
- “the master of the mace”: The mace, once a war club, became a symbol of authority; the Serjeant-at-Arms carries it in the House of Commons, as the Sergeant at Arms does in the United States House of Representatives.
- “the old King of Cracow under the railway bridge”: See Krakus, king of Cracow, in the Chapter 54 resources.
- “the lacrosse player’s crosse or the flowering crosier, perhaps flowering with hawthorn”: Lacrosse grew from games played by the Haudenosaunee and other nations; French missionaries named it for the stick, which looked to them like a bishop’s crosier.
    - A flowering staff is an old sign of grace. Joseph of Arimathea’s staff, planted on Wearyall Hill at Glastonbury, was said to grow into the Glastonbury Thorn, a hawthorn that flowers at Christmas; in Wagner’s Tannhäuser (1845) the pope’s barren staff bursts into leaf.
- “his stupor as if he had been some old loggerhead turtle”: The loggerhead sea turtle is a species of oceanic turtle distributed throughout the world. It is a marine reptile, belonging to the family Cheloniidae. The average loggerhead measures around 90 cm

in carapace length when fully grown. The adult loggerhead sea turtle weighs approximately 135 kg (298 lb), with the largest specimens weighing in at more than 450 kg (1,000 lb). (Wikipedia) See On the loggerhead turtle and the hawk moth.
    - The Sphingidae are a family of moths commonly called sphinx moths, also colloquially known as hawk moths, with many of their caterpillars known as hornworms. It includes about 1,450 species. It is best represented in the tropics, but species are found in every region. (Wikipedia) See Butterflies and Moths.
- “the rattle of dice in an ivory box”: See playing the bones in the Chapter 55 resources. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “old fighters with glass knuckles, glass fists, glass chins”: A boxer with a glass jaw, or glass chin, is one who is easily knocked out.
- “killing the song sparrow in his fall”: “There is special providence in the fall of a sparrow” (William Shakespeare, Hamlet, 5.2), after “one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father” (Matthew 10:29, KJV). See Shakespeare and The Bible.
- “loud Te Deums”: “Te Deums” may refer to Te Deum laudamus which means Thee, O God, we praise. It is a Latin Christian hymn. Legend says Ambrose and Augustine sang it in alternate verses at Augustine’s baptism in 387. See On the Te Deum and Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “an oyster bed invaded by a starfish derby”: Starfish are the oysterman’s plague: a starfish pulls an oyster’s shell open with its tube feet and turns its own stomach inside out into the shell to digest it. See The Sea and Water.
- “no dividing net between the heavens and the heavens”: Compare Robert Frost on free verse: writing without meter is “like playing tennis with the net down” (address at Milton Academy, 1935).
- “both moon and earth moving like the neap tide”: Is a tide just after the first or third quarters of the moon when there is least difference between high and low water.
    - Is the period when the tide is going out, or the water level is falling from high to low, with water flowing away from the shore. It is the opposite of a flood tide, which occurs when the water level is rising. The term can also refer to the seaward flow of water in estuaries or tidal rivers during this lowering water phase.
- “shaking like an aspen tree of silver leaves”: Aspen leaves tremble in the slightest air because their stems are flattened sideways; legend says the aspen has trembled ever since the Cross was made of its wood.
- “a tree with its bare branches filled with singing birds”: Young reverses Shakespeare’s winter tree: “Bare ruin’d choirs, where late the sweet birds sang” (William Shakespeare, Sonnet 73, 1609). See Shakespeare.
- “playing on and on as if, as he had never begun, he could not stop”: The music has no beginning and so no end, and Mr. Spitzer has “ringings in his ears for several days,” almost forgetting his own troubles.
    - The idea of doing something without being able to stop has occurred in history with the Dancing plague of 1518 where 50 to 400 people danced until they dropped

exhausted then got up and danced again; the Strasbourg authorities first hired musicians to keep them dancing, then sent the dancers to a shrine of Saint Vitus at Saverne.

- “only the echo of the echo fading into silence”: In Ovid’s Metamorphoses, the nymph Echo pines for Narcissus until her body wastes away and her bones turn to stone, and only her voice is left (Book 3). See Greek Mythology and Music, Sound, and Silence.
- “the snail because it could shed its skin”: Mr. Spitzer’s envy mixes its creatures: snakes shed their skins, but snails keep their shells for life, adding to them as they grow.
- “the dying dolphin because it could change its moods and its colors”: See Byron’s dying dolphin in the Chapter 56 resources. See Romantic Poets.
- “a hollow sound like a last trumpet blowing”: “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible” (1 Corinthians 15:52, KJV). See The Bible.
- “might have knocked upon so many ivory doors”: See the gates of horn and ivory in the Chapter 42 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “this submerged river of silence flow through a cave”: “Where Alph, the sacred river, ran / Through caverns measureless to man / Down to a sunless sea” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Kubla Khan,” 1816). See Romantic Poets.
- “such as he might have composed for a black keyboard only”: In Chopin’s “Black Key” Étude (Opus 10, No. 5, 1830) the right hand plays only on the black keys. See Music and Composers.
- “notchings of tallies”: The English Exchequer kept its accounts on notched wooden tally sticks until 1826; burning the old tallies in a stove under the House of Lords started the fire that destroyed the Palace of Westminster in 1834.
- “as if he were the recording angel”: See Sterne’s recording angel in the Chapter 55 resources.
- “the first rosy light of star-lit dawn”: Homer’s dawn is “rosy-fingered,” the epithet that opens many mornings in the Iliad and the Odyssey. See Greek Mythology.
- “the pearl-mantled loon singers on the back of the old glider whale”: Compare the voyage of Saint Brendan, whose monks landed on an island to celebrate Easter, lit a fire, and found the island was a whale named Jasconius (Navigatio Sancti Brendani, ninth century).
- “as if it were he who was drawn by strings like a mad puppet”: See Kleist’s marionettes in the Chapter 56 resources.
- “showers of imaginary sound like golden rain”: Zeus came to Danaë, locked in a bronze tower, as a shower of gold, and she bore Perseus. See Greek Mythology.
- “they were those who wore their hearts upon their sleeves”: “I will wear my heart upon my sleeve / For daws to peck at” (William Shakespeare, Othello, 1.1). See Shakespeare.

- “that glassy flute music which brought the rocks hurtling from the sky”: In Greek myth Amphion played his lyre and the stones moved by themselves into the walls of Thebes. See Greek Mythology.
- “the star lilies swimming through dark waters”: Young’s star lilies are crinoids, sea lilies and feather stars, animals that look like flowers. A feather star begins life on a stalk like a lily and then breaks free and swims. Their “sea-change” is Ariel’s: “Nothing of him that doth fade / But doth suffer a sea-change / Into something rich and strange” (William Shakespeare, The Tempest, 1.2). See The Sea and Water and Shakespeare.
- “dying that he might live”: “As dying, and, behold, we live” (2 Corinthians 6:9, KJV). See The Bible.
- “a dead sea shell was not dead but only sleeping”: Some sea shells do strike. Cone snails harpoon their prey with a venomous tooth, and the sting of the geography cone has killed people. See The Sea and Water.

Vocabulary

Abacus

A frame with beads on wires, used for counting.

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Ague

A fever with fits of shivering.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Apoplexy

A sudden fit or stroke; a fit of rage.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Bellwether

The lead sheep of a flock, which wears a bell.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Corporeal

Having a body; physical.

Crosier

The hooked staff carried by a bishop.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Distraught

Deeply upset.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Elucidation

A making clear; an explanation.

Enigmatic

Mysterious; puzzling.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Gavel

A small mallet a judge or chairman uses to call for order.

Gossamer

A fine film of cobweb; anything light and delicate.

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Itinerant

Traveling from place to place.

Jaunty

Lively and self-confident; set at a rakish angle.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mace

A heavy club carried as a weapon or a symbol of authority; also the early stick used in billiards.

Mercurial

Quick and changeable in mood. From the swift Roman messenger god Mercury and the liquid metal named for him.

Neap tide

The tide with the smallest difference between high and low water, twice a month at the quarter moons.

Overture

An orchestral piece that opens an opera or other work.

Palsy

Paralysis or uncontrollable trembling.

Paroxysm

A sudden violent attack or outburst.

Pinion

A bird’s wing, or the outer part of it.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Presentiment

An intuitive feeling that something is about to happen.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Remuneration

Payment for work or service.

Rhapsodic

Full of rapturous feeling.

Sceptre

A staff carried by a ruler as a sign of power. Also spelled scepter.

Somnolence

Sleepiness; drowsiness.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Sonata

An instrumental composition, usually in three or four movements.

Sonorous

Deep and full in sound.

Spats

Short cloth gaiters worn over the instep and ankle.

Spruce

An evergreen tree of northern forests.

Surmise

A guess, without proof.

Taw

A large marble used for shooting; the line from which marbles are shot.

Transient

Passing quickly; not lasting. As a noun, a hotel guest who stays only a short time.

Tremolo

A rapid trembling repetition of a note.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Velocity

Speed in a given direction.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Wraith

A ghost; a faint, pale shape.

Chapter 59

Content note: *This chapter is a long meditation on suicide, which Mr. Spitzer wonders might be “the most creative act.”*

Summary

Mr. Spitzer wanders the foggy city tossing coins to street musicians, never sure who is poor or rich, living or dead. One old horn-blower he pitied for years turns out to play in a great symphony orchestra and to be richer than he is. Another, a pale cavalier in white silks outside the old Opera House, turns out to be an usher waiting for his cue; Mr. Spitzer’s gold coin lands in his horn, and soon the whole street is tossing coins. He hears bells, horns, and the cries of migratory birds, and writes his silent music on his shirt cuff where Peron once kept his horse scores. He wonders whether Peron’s suicide was a creative act, a reach for life beyond the grave. He grows convinced that the skeleton inside him is not his own, that body, soul, and spirit may have been exchanged, and that he might even be Peron. What he fears most is a third body that is neither brother. At last he suspects that one fact would explain everything: he is already dead.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer · The Old Horn-Blower

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Fate and Chance · Fear and Courage · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Light and Darkness · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence · Time

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Clouds and Storms · Dogs · Eyes and Blindness · Fog and Mist · Keys, Doors, and Locks · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · Music and Instruments · Roses and Flowers · Shadows · Silence and Deafness · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Descartes and Dualism · Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) · Existentialism · Heraclitus and Flux · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres · Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory

Allusions: Astronomy · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer’s Epics · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with vivid imagery of “forlorn adventures” of sad or mad musicians, old torch singers, derelict piano players, horn-blowers, and beggars mistaken for kings or vice versa. Mr. Spitzer’s indiscriminate generosity, tossing coins to street musicians, reveals his sympathy and confusion about appearance versus reality, life and death, wealth and poverty. This motif of mistaken identity and blurred boundaries continues throughout the chapter.
- A particularly striking passage describes an old horn-blower who, despite begging on the streets and playing glassy jazz, also belongs to a prestigious symphony orchestra. This paradox highlights the theme of duality and deception or appearances that often mask a deeper reality. It also underscores Mr. Spitzer’s ongoing dilemma in discerning the true nature of those he helps.
- Mr. Spitzer is “deafened... by bells ringing,” including those “muffled sounds of bells under water,” evoking images of drowned cathedrals and lost worlds. The ringing bells symbolize haunting memories and the border between life and death. Here music becomes a metaphor for existence itself: fleeting, ephemeral, and intertwined with silence and emptiness.
- Contrary to his brother, who feared darkness, Mr. Spitzer embraces it as his “only light” and “illumination.” The darkness reveals invisible gleamings of fish fins, stars, and iridescences which symbolize insight into the hidden or unconscious realms beyond ordinary perception. This passage conveys a mystical acceptance of death and the unknown.
- Mr. Spitzer contemplates his brother’s suicide, seeing it paradoxically as a creative act or a desire to live beyond life’s limits and to seek an immortal love. This complex meditation challenges conventional views on death, suggesting death might be a transformative passage rather than mere cessation.
- One of the most important and haunting passages deals with Mr. Spitzer’s conviction that his body is not truly his and that his skeleton and physical form have been replaced in “this substitution,” inhabited by an alien presence or a different self. This reflects themes of alienation, fragmentation of identity, and the instability of the self. He feels like a “shadow trembling in the air” and a man who “wore a borrowed mask,” underscoring his existential dislocation.
- Mr. Spitzer muses on the nature of the individual as composed of body (illusion), soul (all-informing), and spirit (temporary as the wind). He speculates that transformations between these components may occur without awareness, further complicating the notion of a stable self. This passage deepens the philosophical inquiry into mortality and identity.
- Throughout the chapter, Mr. Spitzer reflects that there is “no dividing line, no distinction between life and death,” that birth and death are like a “wild sea without a shore.” This

motif emphasizes the fluidity and interpenetration of existence and non-existence, challenging binary oppositions and inviting a more nuanced understanding of human experience.

- Mr. Spitzer is “afraid of everything” and paradoxically “would be most afraid if he had no fear.” He fears loss of identity, silence, thresholds, and even his own shadow. This pervasive anxiety captures his profound existential uncertainty and the human struggle to face the unknown.
- Mr. Spitzer returns repeatedly to the images of cloud, tree, and moon as symbols of impermanence, transformation, and liminality. He recognizes that he is a “temporary conformation of cloud and tree and moon,” enduring only briefly before dissolving into change. This metaphor encapsulates the chapter’s meditation on transience and the elusive nature of self.
- The chapter closes with Mr. Spitzer’s tentative acceptance that he is already dead, though he experiences this through “circumlocutions and way-stations,” not straightforwardly. The acknowledgment of death as a present reality, rather than a future event, frames the entire chapter as an exploration of the liminal existence between life and death, presence and absence.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Mr. Spitzer finds “the darkness his only light.” What can he see by night that he cannot see by day?
- “He knew only that in order to be what one was one must be what one was not.” How does this sentence work as a rule for the whole chapter?
- Mr. Spitzer insists that “this skeleton was not his skeleton.” What does the long list of bones that are not his do to a reader?

Characters

- Mr. Spitzer insults “the usher who played the horn to announce the dying king.” Why does Young keep showing him mistaking beggars for kings and kings for beggars?
- “His brother had feared life because it was brief. Mr. Spitzer had feared life because it was long.” How do the twins mirror each other?
- Mr. Spitzer calls himself “a psychological beggar wearing a coat of patchwork.” Is this self-pity, self-knowledge, or both?

Connections

- Mr. Spitzer has “salt water in his veins instead of blood.” Where else does the sea run through the novel’s characters?

- Mr. Spitzer brought the King of Cracow “the rocking chair, though too late.” How does this carry on the King of Cracow’s story from Chapter 54?
- Mr. Spitzer thinks that he “might be his brother, and Peron might be Joachim.” How does this chapter prepare for later questions about which brother is alive?

Reflection

- “That which was known should cause less fear than that which was unknown.” Does knowing a fear make it smaller?
- “And if chance, it was not music.” Can art come from chance?
- Mr. Spitzer asks, “were we not all members of one another.” What is owed to the strangers who brush past in the street?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- A melancholic, introspective figure who is both a lawyer and a musician.
- Haunted by memories of his brother Peron and his own existential plight.
- Portrayed as a man caught between life and death, reality and illusion.
- Exhibits deep sympathy for poor musicians, often giving coins indiscriminately.
- Suffers from sensory impairments and a profound sense of alienation from his own body and identity.
- Experiences a metaphysical substitution of his skeleton and body, questioning his own existence.
- His thoughts reflect a complex understanding of mortality and immortality, and he embraces darkness as a form of illumination.

Peron Spitzer (Joachim’s twin brother)

- A contrasting figure who feared life because it was brief.
- His death deeply affects Mr. Spitzer and acts as a catalyst for many of Spitzer’s reflections.
- Represents the opposite approach to life compared to Mr. Spitzer’s fear of life’s length.

The Old Horn-Blower / Street Musicians

- Symbolize the blurred lines between poverty and wealth, life and death.
- One horn-blower leads a double life: a street musician and a member of a classical orchestra.
- Represents the multiplicity of identity and the deceptive appearances of social roles.

- Another horn-player, a skull-faced cavalier in white silks outside the old Opera House, is only an usher waiting to announce the dying king. Mr. Spitzer's gold coin falls into his horn, the horn blasts, every traffic horn answers, and the whole street starts tossing coins.

Research: Themes

Life and Death as Interwoven States

See: Death and Mortality

- Mr. Spitzer is caught between life and death, uncertain of his true state.
- The narrative suggests that birth and death are part of a continuous, shoreless sea.
- Death is not a finality but a transformation. Suicide may even be a creative act, like sexual love begetting another person, a desire to live beyond the grave.

Identity and Alienation

See: Identity and the Self · Isolation and Connection

- Mr. Spitzer questions his own identity, feeling alienated from his body and self.
- The metaphor of a stolen or substituted skeleton underscores his existential dislocation.
- This raises philosophical questions about what constitutes the self (body, soul, or spirit) and the instability of these concepts.

Music as Metaphor

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Music recurs as a symbol of life's ephemeral beauty and the fleeting nature of existence.
- Mr. Spitzer's compositions, based on the patterns of migratory birds, and the cue-ball musician's symphony for billiard balls represent the unpredictability and chance in life.
- The music of the dead and the living intertwine, suggesting a continuum beyond mortality.

Illusion and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Eyes and Blindness · Fog and Mist

- The blurred perceptions of Mr. Spitzer, including his dim eyesight and confusion about colors and sounds, symbolize the difficulty of discerning reality.
- The chapter explores illusions (revolving doors, glass walls, and shifting clouds) as metaphors for life's uncertainties and transformations.

Time and Memory

See: Memory and the Past · Time

- Time is depicted as fluid and unreliable; Mr. Spitzer experiences memories of vanished streets, people, and moments.
- His experience of time is cyclical and elusive, with the past, present, and future intermingling.
- The idea that memories and sensations can persist beyond death is central to his reflections.

Fear and Courage

See: Fear and Courage · Shadows

- Fear dominates Mr. Spitzer’s existence: fear of death, loss of identity, silence, and change.
- Yet, he also embraces darkness as illumination and finds a strange peace in failure and uncertainty.

On Suicide and Immortality

See: Suicide in History and Literature

- Suicide is contemplated as a potentially creative act, a desire to transcend mortality rather than a mere escape.
- The relationship between fear of death and the will to live is explored deeply.

On the Self and Its Components

See: Identity and the Self · Descartes and Dualism

- Mr. Spitzer distinguishes between body (illusion), soul (all-informing), and spirit (temporary), reflecting a tripartite view of human existence.
- The instability of these components leads to questions about the permanence and reality of the self.

On Memory and Loss

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Memory and the Past

- Memory holds both joy and pain; past pleasures become present pains.
- Mr. Spitzer’s awareness of his own fading perceptions underscores the themes of loss and impermanence.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Bells and Horns

See: Music and Instruments · Silence and Deafness

- Bells represent the passage of time and change ringing without repetition, symbolizing life’s unpredictability.
- Horns, especially the old horn-blower, signify calls or signals between life and death, reality and illusion.

Cloud, Tree, Moon

See: Moon and Stars · Clouds and Storms

- Recurring images representing the transient, mutable, and interconnected nature of existence.
- Clouds suggest the ephemeral and formless; trees denote rootedness yet vulnerability; the moon symbolizes mystery and change.

Skeleton and Bones

See: Identity and the Self · Twins and Doubles

- The alien skeleton inhabiting Mr. Spitzer’s body symbolizes the uncertainty of identity and the fracturing of the self.
- His bones creaking and speaking imply the body’s betrayal or the intrusion of something foreign within him.
- This is also foreshadowing of his true identity.

Birds and Migratory Patterns

See: Birds

- Migratory birds symbolize movement between worlds, the passage of souls, and the patterns of life and death.
- The cries of birds are likened to music and the fleeting nature of human emotion.

Music and Notes

See: Music and Instruments

- Musical notes written on Mr. Spitzer’s shirt cuff are his elegy and memory, fragments of his lost self.
- The metaphor of music as elusive and ephemeral highlights the fragility of life and consciousness.

Research: Resources

- “old torch singers singing under the city arc lamps”: A torch song is a lament for a love that is not returned; to “carry a torch” is to go on loving someone who does not love back. Helen Morgan, Libby Holman, and Ruth Etting were famous torch singers of the 1920s and 1930s. See Music and Composers.
- “the red rose of the sun or the white rose of the moon”: Compare the Temple Garden scene of Henry VI, Part 1, where the lords of York pluck white roses and the lords of Lancaster red, the start of the Wars of the Roses (William Shakespeare, 2.4). See Shakespeare and Roses and Flowers.
- “played the starter music at the shining glow-worm tracks”: At American racetracks a bugler sounds the “Call to the Post” to bring the horses onto the track. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “the coin for Charon”: See coins for the dead and Charon’s fare in the Chapter 52 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “his long white Steinkirk”: See the Steinkirk scarf in the Chapter 56 resources. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “the glittering diamond horseshoe”: See the Diamond Horseshoe of the old Metropolitan Opera House in the Chapter 48 resources.
- “Mr. Spitzer’s silent music de profundis”: De profundis is Latin for from the depths. “Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O LORD” (Psalm 130:1, KJV). Oscar Wilde took the phrase for the long letter he wrote in Reading Gaol in 1897, published as De Profundis in 1905. See On De profundis and The Bible.
- “the theft of the great rajah’s crown”: See the carbuncle from the rajah’s crown in the Chapter 55 resources.
- “the old bell-ringer’s change ringing”: Young defines change ringing in her own aside. Fabian Stedman’s Tintinnalogia (1668, with Richard Duckworth) and Campanalogia (1677) set out the art, and Stedman’s method is still rung. See change ringing in the Chapter 44 resources. See Music and Instruments.
- “the bells of the drowned cathedrals”: In Breton legend the city of Ys was drowned for its sins, and on calm mornings its cathedral rises from the sea with its bells tolling. Claude Debussy set the legend in “La cathédrale engloutie” (“The Sunken Cathedral,” Préludes, Book 1, 1910). See Music and Composers.
- “the bells of the bucentaurs”: The Bucentaur (Bucintoro) was the golden state barge of the Doges of Venice. Every Ascension Day the Doge was rowed out in it for the Marriage of the Sea and dropped a gold ring into the Adriatic. The last Bucentaur was burned by Napoleon’s troops in 1798.
  - Bucentaure was an 86-gun ship in the French Navy. It was Admiral Villeneuve’s flagship at Trafalgar (1805).
- “that land where no explorer had ever set his flag”: Robert Peary claimed the North Pole in 1909, a claim still disputed, and Roald Amundsen’s party planted the

Norwegian flag at the South Pole on December 14, 1911. See Exploration and the Poles.

- “the sign marking the beginning or the end of a repeat”: Young defines the segno, the sign in a score that marks where a repeat begins or ends; “dal segno” (D.S.) means “from the sign.” See Music and Composers.
- “a celestial equator making the day and night everywhere of equal length”: The celestial equator is Earth’s equator projected onto the sky. When the sun crosses it at the spring and autumn equinoxes, day and night are nearly equal everywhere on Earth. See Astronomy.
- “The darkness was his illumination”: Compare Henry Vaughan: “There is in God (some say) / A deep, but dazzling darkness” (“The Night,” 1650). See Light and Darkness.
- “whether she was a beautiful lady white as snow or some old hag”: Compare the loathly lady of Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Wife of Bath’s Tale” (The Canterbury Tales, 1390s). An old hag offers her husband a wife foul and faithful or fair and perhaps unfaithful; when he leaves the choice to her, she becomes both fair and true.
- “like seeds falling from another star”: See panspermia in the Chapter 29 resources.
- “this undiscovered shore”: Compare Hamlet’s “undiscover’d country from whose bourn / No traveller returns” (William Shakespeare, Hamlet, 3.1). See Shakespeare.
    - Mr. Spitzer invites comparison with Hamlet. Both are haunted by the dead, Hamlet by his father and Mr. Spitzer by his brother: “Beautiful memories of memories thronged through his mind, as many as the dead.” Both doubt their own perceptions; Mr. Spitzer suspects a substitution, a “temporary tenant” in his own flesh. He fears becoming “an echo lost under a domeless sky,” as Hamlet dies into “the rest is silence” (5.2), and he is “porous as a cloud,” a “psychological beggar wearing a coat of patchwork,” as estranged as Hamlet at Elsinore. Both meditate on the “undiscovered country,” and both are held back by fear and doubt. Mr. Spitzer is a modern Hamlet.
- “his escape from this chrysalis”: The Greek word psyche means both soul and butterfly, and a butterfly leaving its chrysalis was an ancient image of the soul leaving the body. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “that which has a local habitation and a name”: The poet “gives to airy nothing / A local habitation and a name” (William Shakespeare, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, 5.1). See the Chapter 9 resources and Shakespeare.
- “as a ghost may cause the hairs to raise up on one’s hand”: “Then a spirit passed before my face; the hair of my flesh stood up” (Job 4:15, KJV). See The Book of Job.
- “He knew only that in order to be what one was one must be what one was not”: To be himself, Mr. Spitzer, the living brother who carries the dead one, must also be his brother, his shadow, his opposite: identity holds what it is not. See On being what one was not and Identity and the Self.
- “the records of euchre”: Euchre is a trick-taking card game commonly played in English speaking countries. The joker was added to the American deck around the 1860s as

the top trump in euchre, the “best bower.” See Gambling and Playing Cards.

- “the barkings of red-eyed dogs accompanying dead souls to Hades”: In northern English folklore the Gabriel Hounds, or Gabble Ratchets, were a spectral pack heard yelping overhead at night, and their cry foretold a death; the sound was probably wild geese in passage. See Birds, Dogs, and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “dwarves with their feet on backwards”: Pliny the Elder describes the Abarimon, a people of India whose feet are turned backward, yet who run with great speed (Natural History, Book 7).
- “so many dying swans to sing again”: Anna Pavlova made The Dying Swan, which Michel Fokine set for her in 1905 to Saint-Saëns’s “The Swan,” her signature dance; she is said to have asked for her swan costume as she died in 1931. See the swan song in the Chapter 53 resources.
- “the old King of Cracow to whom, as he had been unable to restore his throne, he had brought the rocking chair”: Symbolically he is estranged from his origins or realities. It explores displacement and fragmentation of self. See Krakus, king of Cracow, in the Chapter 54 resources.
- “the revolving castles of the dead, the glass castles, the spiral castles”: In the Welsh poem Preiddeu Annwfn (The Spoils of Annwn, Book of Taliesin, early fourteenth century), Arthur sails with three shiploads of men to the fortresses of the otherworld, among them a Glass Fortress, and only seven come back. Caer Sidi, the otherworld fortress of another Taliesin poem, has been translated “Revolving Castle.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “What was more pitiful than man?”: When the immortal horses of Achilles weep for Patroclus, Zeus pities them: “for of all creatures that live and move upon the earth there is none so pitiable as he is” (Homer, Iliad, Book 17, trans. Samuel Butler, 1898). See Homer’s Epics.
- “he had been caught in a revolving door”: See the revolving door and the escalator in the Chapter 57 resources. Dee Horton and Lew Hewitt of Corpus Christi, Texas, developed the automatic sliding door in the mid-1950s because swinging doors fought the coastal wind; their first commercial doors came in 1960. See Keys, Doors, and Locks.
- “this planet singing as it died”: In the Pythagorean music of the spheres, each planet sounds a note as it moves. See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres.
- “that great flute-player who had caused the roaring avalanche”: See Amphion in the Chapter 58 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “that old cue-ball musician who was writing a symphony for musical billiard balls”: Composers have long played with chance. The Musikalisches Würfelspiel, a dice game for composing waltzes, was published under Mozart’s name in 1792, and John Cage composed his Music of Changes (1951) by tossing coins according to the I Ching. Mr. Spitzer’s verdict: “And if chance, it was not music.” See Music and Composers and Fate and Chance.

- “The ivory balls would not roll twice the same”: Heraclitus taught that everything flows; Plato reports his saying that no one can step twice into the same river (Cratylus 402a). See Heraclitus and Flux.
- “Chance might be the overwhelming factor of the universe”: Mr. Spitzer sees the human wish for order meet a universe of chance. His brother the gambler embraced chance; he, cautious, tries to manage or deny it. Chance runs from the dice table to the birth and death of stars, and into memory, identity, and the music of a life, whose notes and silences fall unpredictably. Attempts at total order fail, and he accepts chance with melancholy, as a destroyer and as the condition of life itself. See Fate and Chance.
    - Billiard balls struck at random make a music never exactly repeated: “The music was like the wind shaking the crystal prisms, like the wind blowing the surf, the spectral foam patterns never twice the same as they drifted and broke, the song of the fluttering moth.” Yet cycles suggest an order under chance: “And why should he be caught in revolving doors? Why should he suffer twice, thrice, four times?” Chance reaches identity itself, for “every man and every woman might have suffered a substitution like his own,” and even suicide might be “the most creative act, even like sexual love begetting another person.” Music, the most fleeting of things, holds chance and order together: “Might not a musician fear music as he feared death, dying into his music.”
- “a sea of black umbrellas billowing like hearts”: See The Umbrella.
- “should one walk seven times around all existence”: The Battle of Jericho in biblical tradition involved the walls of Jericho falling after the sounding of trumpets and a ritual march around the city which is an event symbolizing the collapse of barriers and the onset of a new order. “And the seventh day ye shall compass the city seven times, and the priests shall blow with the trumpets” (Joshua 6:4, KJV). See On the Battle of Jericho and The Bible.
- “Death was equal on all sides”: Horace: “Pallida Mors aequo pulsat pede pauperum tabernas / regumque turris,” pale Death knocks with an equal foot at the huts of the poor and the towers of kings (Odes 1.4.13-14). See Death and Mortality.
- “One cell was the begetter of all cells”: Rudolf Virchow’s maxim “Omnis cellula e cellula,” every cell from a cell (1855), became a founding rule of biology.
- “He was afraid of becoming an echo”: See Echo in the Chapter 58 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “there was salt water in his veins instead of blood”: “whirling darkness when earth itself and all the waters of earth rang like this dark bell” evokes a profound cosmic and natural imagery. The “whirling darkness” suggests a tumultuous, almost apocalyptic atmosphere as an environment charged with overwhelming forces, possibly reflecting internal turmoil or existential dread. The earth and all its waters ringing “like this dark bell” personifies the planet and its oceans as resonating with a somber, mournful sound. See On salt water in the veins.

    - “for he was his father’s son,” grounds this cosmic imagery in lineage and inherited identity. It asserts the inevitability of descent and connection to one’s roots, implying that Mr. Spitzer carries within him not just genetic inheritance but also the weight of ancestral memory and fate.
    - “and there was salt water in his veins instead of blood, and there was the taste of salt upon his lips” deepens this connection to nature, especially the sea. Salt water, symbolizing the ocean, evokes themes of fluidity, vastness, and the primordial source of life. It suggests that Mr. Spitzer’s very being is intertwined with the sea as his life force is not typical blood but something elemental and ancient, linking him to the natural world’s endless cycles of life and death. The “taste of salt upon his lips” evokes sensory immediacy, emphasizing a visceral, intimate connection to the oceanic element, and perhaps a lingering presence of sorrow or loss, as salt is also associated with tears.
- “an old blind sheep dog barking with thin, wild cries all night long”: See The Old Blind Sheep Dog.
- “Should he not be the leper or the beggar or the blind man”: The leper of Leviticus must “cry, Unclean, unclean” (Leviticus 13:45, KJV); medieval lepers carried a bell or clapper to warn others away. See The Bible.
- “Out of a cloud they came, and into a cloud they returned”: “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return” (Genesis 3:19, KJV). See Genesis.
- “the gorgons in the mirrors”: Perseus cut off the Gorgon Medusa’s head by looking only at her reflection in his polished shield, for to meet her eyes was to turn to stone (Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book 4). See Greek Mythology and Mirrors and Reflections.
- “the Sphinx faces in the streets”: The Sphinx of Thebes killed all who failed her riddle: what walks on four feet in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening? Oedipus answered, man. See Greek Mythology.
- “hearing the kingfisher’s cries”: In Ovid, Ceyx drowns at sea and his wife Alcyone finds his body washed ashore; the gods turn both into kingfishers, and the calm “halcyon days” are the days when the sea is still for their nesting (Metamorphoses, Book 11). See Greek Mythology and Birds.
- “there was a missing rib”: “And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman” (Genesis 2:22, KJV). Adam, too, was a sleeper: “the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept” (Genesis 2:21, KJV). See Genesis.
- “water to water and dust to dust”: The burial service of the Book of Common Prayer commits the body “earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust.”
- “ossifrage, the breaking of his bones”: Ossifrage means bone-breaker, from the Latin os, bone, and frangere, to break. It is the old name of the bearded vulture, which drops bones on rocks to split them for the marrow; the King James Bible lists “the ossifrage” among the unclean birds (Leviticus 11:13). See Birds and The Bible.

- “roaring like the cockles of his heart”: The “cockles of the heart,” its innermost depths, is often traced to the Latin cochleae cordis, the ventricles of the heart, or to the heart-shaped cockle shell. See The Sea and Water.
- “cuneiform, atlas”: The atlas is the first bone of the neck, named for the Titan Atlas because it holds up the globe of the skull as he holds up the heavens. The cuneiform bones of the foot are named, like cuneiform writing, for their wedge shape (Latin cuneus). See Greek Mythology.
- “his tragic sense had been the greatest joy”: Compare Miguel de Unamuno’s The Tragic Sense of Life (Del sentimiento trágico de la vida, 1913), which finds the root of human feeling in a hunger for immortality that reason cannot satisfy. See Existentialism.
- “these tri-stranded beings comprising the individual”: “And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23, KJV). Christian writers who divide the person into body, soul, and spirit cite this verse. See The Bible.
- “He was disturbed by galaxies colliding”: In the early 1950s Walter Baade and Rudolph Minkowski identified the strong radio source Cygnus A with what they took to be two galaxies in collision. Later work found another cause for its radio noise, but colliding galaxies are real. See Astronomy.
- “He was no trinitarian”: The Trinity in Christianity is the belief that there is one God who exists eternally as three distinct persons: the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. These three persons are not separate gods but are one divine essence, each fully God, who share a single being and nature. While the word “trinity” doesn’t appear in the Bible, the doctrine is based on scriptural revelations about God’s nature and actions. See On the Trinitarians and The Bible.
    - Trinitarians were a Holy Order founded in 1198 and dedicated to raising funds for the ransom of Christians held by Muslims during the crusades and piracy along the Mediterranean coast. They also performed charitable acts in the areas where the orders were established and were dedicated to studying the mystery of the Holy Trinity.
- “his soul had departed upon the wings of the morning”: “If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea” (Psalm 139:9, KJV). See The Bible.
- “That which Mr. Spitzer feared with his most overwhelming fear was probably a third body”: The three-body problem in classical physics and celestial mechanics involves predicting the motion of three gravitationally interacting bodies. Unlike the two-body problem, which has a precise, predictable solution, the three-body problem is famously complex and chaotic: small changes in initial conditions can lead to wildly different outcomes, and there is no general closed-form solution. The system is characterized by instability, unpredictability, and intricate, often non-repeating orbits. Mr. Spitzer wonders if he is “one man in two worlds or two men in one world,” and fears a third body, neither himself nor his brother, out of the “unholy trinity of body, soul, spirit.” Like

three bodies in orbit, his selves have no stable solution: he is “like a cloud continually changing,” and “When the definition was correct, the thing defined should be incorrect.” There is no “algebra of the human spirit,” and “were we not all members of one another,” as bodies pull on one another in the sky. See On the three-body problem.

    - Newton solved the motion of two bodies; for three, no general formula exists. In 1887 King Oscar II of Sweden offered a prize for the problem, and Henri Poincaré’s prize memoir (1890) showed how wildly the paths of three bodies can wander, the beginning of chaos theory. See Time, Physics, and Chaos Theory.

- “were we not all members of one another”: “For we are members one of another” (Ephesians 4:25, KJV); “So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Romans 12:5, KJV). See The Bible.
- “was not the moth married to the star which had extinguished it”: See Shelley’s “desire of the moth for the star” in the Chapter 57 resources. See Romantic Poets and Butterflies and Moths.
- “the idea of a central and coordinating self was probably”: Compare David Hume, for whom the self is “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement” (A Treatise of Human Nature, 1.4.6, 1739). See Empiricism (Locke, Berkeley, Hume) and Identity and the Self.
- “had already paid the black coachman for his long journey through the night”: Mr. Spitzer’s coin for Charon becomes the black coachman’s fare. See The Black Coachman.

Vocabulary

Adventitious

Happening by chance; not essential or built in.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Cadaverous

Pale and gaunt, like a corpse.

Capacious

Roomy; able to hold much.

Carousel

A merry-go-round. Earlier, a tournament in which horsemen performed exercises and displays.

Cartilaginous

Made of or like cartilage, the tough, flexible tissue of the body.

Castanets

Pairs of small wooden shells clicked together in the hand, as in Spanish dance.

Cavalier

A horseman or gallant gentleman; also offhand and disdainful.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chrysalis

The hard case in which a caterpillar becomes a butterfly or moth.

Circumlocution

A roundabout way of saying something.

Cockle

A small saltwater clam with a ribbed, heart-shaped shell. A cockleshell boat is a small, flimsy one.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Conformation

The shape and proportions of an animal’s body, especially a horse’s.

Conscientious

Careful to do what is right; thorough.

Coruscate

To flash or sparkle.

Cosmography

A description or map of the whole universe, both heavens and earth.

Crosier

The hooked staff carried by a bishop.

Demented

Out of one’s mind.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Disincarnate

Without a body.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Enigma

A mystery or puzzle; a person or thing that is hard to understand.

Ephemeral

Lasting a very short time.

Equivocal

Open to more than one interpretation; deliberately vague.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Euchre

A card game for four players, for which the joker was first added to the deck.

Extricate

To free from a trap or difficulty.

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Filament

A fine thread or fiber.

Fogdog

A bright patch of light seen in a bank of fog.

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Furtive

Secretive; sly.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Glazier

One who sets glass in windows.

Glow-worm

A beetle whose wingless female and larvae give off a greenish light.

Gorgon

In Greek myth, one of three snake-haired sisters whose gaze turned men to stone.

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Hummock

A small hill or mound.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Intaglio

A design cut into the surface of a gem or stone.

Intermittent

Stopping and starting.

Lagoon

A stretch of shallow water separated from the sea by a reef or sandbar.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Mortice

A hole cut to receive a tenon in joining wood; also spelled mortise.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Motley

Of many mixed kinds; the fool’s patched dress.

Mourning cloak

A dark butterfly with pale-edged wings that survives the winter as an adult; also a black cloak worn in mourning.

Myopic

Nearsighted.

Nag

An old or worn-out horse.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Obsequies

Funeral rites.

Ossifrage

The bearded vulture; literally, bone-breaker.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Plumed

Decorated with feathers.

Porous

Full of tiny holes that let water through.

Portfolio

A flat case for carrying loose papers and documents.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Proffered

Held out; offered.

Profligate

A reckless, immoral spendthrift.

Protuberance

A bulge or swelling.

Pulverized

Ground to powder.

Refraction

The bending of light as it passes from one medium to another.

Roulette

A gambling game in which a ball comes to rest in a numbered slot of a spinning wheel.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Segno

A sign in written music marking where a repeat begins or ends.

Sequin

A small shining disk sewn on clothing; first the zecchino, a Venetian gold coin.

Sonorous

Deep and full in sound.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Spruce

An evergreen tree of northern forests.

Surreptitiously

Secretly, by stealth.

Surrogate

A substitute who acts in another’s place.

Swallowtail

A man’s formal tailcoat with long, divided tails.

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Transmigration

The passing of a soul into another body after death.

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists’ dream of turning base metal into gold.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Ululation

Howling or wailing.

Vapid

Dull and empty of life or interest.

Vaporous

Full of mist or vapor.

Ward-heeler

A minor political worker who canvasses a city ward for a party boss.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Wrack

Wreck or ruin, as in “wrack and ruin.”

Chapter 60

Summary

Mr. Spitzer wonders whether he is really a musician or only a gambler like Peron, who read nothing but the sporting page, never went to a concert, and could never have imagined silence. A gambler would know how to call moose, and Mr. Spitzer remembers practicing moose calls on an empty city street at dusk until a great purple moose answered him through the fog; ever since, he has only whispered. A gambler would know duck calls too, and once, absent-minded in a windy avenue, Mr. Spitzer must have made one, for a flight of wild ducks came down and rushed past him, or through him, while he stood still like a lighthouse. He decides they were mandarin ducks blown far off course, exotic pilgrims to this shore. Their honking follows him for days or years, and he concludes that he need not write his elegy after all: the wild duck’s horn is his elegy.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · Peron Spitzer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Dreams and Imagination · Identity and the Self · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

Symbols: Birds · Cards, Games, and Chance · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Horses and Carriages · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Moon and Stars · Music and Instruments · The Bus and the Journey · The Umbrella

Allusions: American Writers · Angels and Archangels · Astronomy · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a profound reflection on whether the protagonist, Mr. Spitzer, is truly a musician or merely a gambler who has deluded himself into believing in a lost musical career. This internal conflict is central where he is haunted by the “germinal music in his head,” yet increasingly obsessed with gambling. The imagery of cards (ace of clubs, spots on dice) and horse races evokes a chaotic, chance-driven world contrasted with the ordered art of music. The passage poses the question of identity and authenticity and whether his essence is musical or rooted in worldly, mundane obsessions like gambling. This sets the tone for the chapter’s exploration of perception and self-delusion.

- The chapter imagines the gambler Mr. Spitzer might have been, who is really Peron: a man who read only the sporting page, ignored international, financial, and high society news, and never attended a concert in his life. Measuring himself against that man, Mr. Spitzer tests whether his own music is real. The gambler's ignorance of "the value of a sand dollar or a Boston dollar or an English pound sterling" sets the world of the track against the world of money and high culture.
- There is a symbolic and surreal moment where Mr. Spitzer practices moose calls in the city at dusk, only to hear the answering call of an actual moose which is an extraordinary, almost hallucinatory experience. The moose's antlers are described as "looming like tree boughs through the blowing purple fog," blending natural imagery with urban and cosmic elements (traffic lights, the Pleiades). This encounter blurs the boundary between reality and imagination, the natural and the supernatural, highlighting Mr. Spitzer's liminal state between sanity and hallucination, music and noise, life and death.
- The climax of the chapter is the vision of the wild ducks flying overhead: exotic "beautiful Asiatics" with crested heads and golden eyes, described in luminous, almost otherworldly colors. Mr. Spitzer perceives their honking calls as a "wild sonata," a natural music that becomes his elegy. The ducks' flight is metaphorically linked to transcendence, migration, and perhaps the soul's journey. He imagines himself metamorphosed into wings, a silent observer caught between earth and sky. The passage conveys a sense of awe, mystery, and the dissolution of boundaries between self and nature, music and silence, sound and chaos.
- Near the end, the chapter suggests that Mr. Spitzer's elegy (the music he cannot write or remember) may be embodied in the calls of the wild ducks. This is a powerful metaphor for artistic creation as something wild, natural, and perhaps uncontrollable, rather than composed or intellectual. The elegy is not just a lament but an acceptance of the wild, untamed forces that accompany him "through the long reaches of the silence."

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Mr. Spitzer wonders whether he "had merely deceived himself by his pretensions to a lost musical career." Why does he test himself against the gambler Peron?
- "Sound shared the silence, but his dead brother could not have imagined the silence." What does silence mean to Mr. Spitzer that it could not mean to Peron?
- Young calls music "a path dividing sound from chaos." How does the chapter's own long first sentence find its way through chaos?

Characters

- Peron never read “the obituary columns listing himself.” What does it mean to imagine a dead man who does not know he is dead?
- After the moose answers, Mr. Spitzer “had only whispered for fear the great purple moose might be anywhere and answer.” What does this comic episode show about him?
- Mr. Spitzer stands “like the burning of the lighthouse on the distant rock.” Who in his life has been the lighthouse, and who the birds?

Connections

- The “great flutist who had caused the avalanche” returns from Chapters 58 and 59. Why does Young keep calling him back?
- Mr. Spitzer hears “the starter’s music” again. How do horse racing and music twine together through the Spitzer chapters?
- In Chapter 59 Mr. Spitzer could not finish his elegy; here “his elegy was this wild duck’s horn.” What has changed?

Reflection

- The birds “have mistaken the lighthouse for the light, the reflection of a star.” What lights do people mistake for stars?
- The wings roar “not so much past him as through him.” What would it mean for music to pass through a person rather than past?
- Mr. Spitzer rebuilds the ducks from a few gleams, “even as a dead man might build the world.” How much of any memory is rebuilt this way?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- Torn between his identity as a musician and as a gambler, Mr. Spitzer experiences profound self-doubt and alienation.
- His focus on gambling and his distracted thoughts reveal a fragmented psyche, obsessed with trivial and profound matters simultaneously.
- Despite his urban surroundings, he has a deep affinity for natural sounds, which evoke powerful emotional and spiritual responses.
- Memories of his dead twin brother and lost musical compositions haunt him, reflecting a sense of unfinished business and loss.
- Mr. Spitzer embodies the human struggle to find meaning through art, memory, and connection, even when confronted with mortality and oblivion.

Peron Spitzer

- Peron appears as the gambler Mr. Spitzer measures himself against: a man who read only the sporting page, never attended a concert in his life, and could not have imagined silence.
- He would have known how to call moose and wild ducks, and would have recognized the ducks' horns "even if he had been in his grave."

Research: Themes

Identity and Self-Perception

See: Identity and the Self

- Mr. Spitzer is uncertain about whether he is truly a musician or merely a gambler who has deceived himself.
- His self-questioning reveals a deep internal conflict and a search for meaning in his life.
- The duality of musician versus gambler serves as a metaphor for the struggle between art and chance, order and chaos.

Music and Sound as Metaphor

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Music is portrayed as a transcendent, intellectual force that shapes reality and the imagination.
- The "music of the world" and the "music of the track" symbolize different aspects of life, artistic creativity versus raw, primal existence.
- Mr. Spitzer reflects on musical composition, the clef, bar, and rhythm as pathways dividing sound from chaos, highlighting sound as a spiritual and intellectual phenomenon.

Memory, Imagination, and the Unconscious

See: Dreams and Imagination · Memory and the Past

- The text weaves memories, hallucinations, and dreams, blurring boundaries between past and present, real and imagined.
- Mr. Spitzer's recollections of his dead brother and the imagined music he never wrote suggest themes of loss, regret, and the elusive nature of artistic creation.

Nature and the Wild

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- Calls of moose and wild ducks serve as recurring motifs, connecting Mr. Spitzer to the natural and primal world.
- These animal calls symbolize communication beyond human language, evoking mystery and transcendence.
- The vivid description of the wild ducks conveys a mystical beauty and the theme of otherworldly visitation.

Silence and Sound

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Silence is portrayed as unimaginable to the dead brother, emphasizing the importance of sound as life and presence.
- Sound and silence share a complex relationship, where sound moves “like the human spirit through heavens of imagined silence,” suggesting spiritual continuity beyond death.

Death and Transcendence

See: Death and Mortality

- References to death, such as “the sleep of the dead,” “bones in an old bone-box,” and the leveling effect of death, permeate the text.
- Mr. Spitzer’s experiences of hearing moose calls and wild duck honkings border on the supernatural, indicating a liminal state between life and death.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Ace of Clubs / Playing Cards

See: Cards, Games, and Chance

- Symbolize chance, fate, and the gamble of life.
- The falling ace and the spots on cards evoke the randomness and structure of existence.

The All Black Harpsichord and Instruments

See: Music and Instruments

- Represent lost artistic potential and the melancholic beauty of forgotten music.
- The “all black keys” and “viola da gamba” suggest a somber, elegiac tone.

Moose Calls and Antlers

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- Symbolize primal communication and a connection to a wild, untamed world.
- The moose's antlers "looming like tree boughs" create a haunting, majestic image of nature's power.

Wild Ducks

See: Birds

- Represent migration, passage, and the ephemeral beauty of life.
- Their "crested heads and veiled gold eyes" suggest exoticism and a mystical presence.
- Their flight and honking are likened to a "wild sonata," connecting nature with music.

Traffic and Cityscape

See: The Bus and the Journey

- The contrast between natural sounds and the urban environment highlights the tension between civilization and nature.
- The "old cars" and "traffic streams" serve as a backdrop to the surreal, almost supernatural events.

Stars and Heavens

See: Moon and Stars

- Stars are symbolic of eternity, guidance, and mystery.
- The merging of all stars into "one great star" suggests unity and transcendence beyond earthly existence.

Research: Resources

- "the pedal note prolonged and crying above a choir": A pedal note, or pedal point, is a long-held note, usually in the bass, sounding on while the harmonies above it change; on the organ it is played with the feet. See Music and Instruments.
- "the ace of clubs falling like a swallow from his sleeve": A card sharp hides an ace up his sleeve, the source of the phrase for a secret advantage. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- "seeing the cubistic dream player melt upon the trembling air": Cubism shows an object from several viewpoints at once, broken into planes. The "cubistic dream player" is Mr. Spitzer seen the same way, a self of many disjointed parts that will not form one picture. See On the cubistic dream player.
    - The Cubist art movement, pioneered by Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque in the early 20th century, revolutionized art by rejecting traditional single-point perspective and instead depicting subjects from multiple viewpoints simultaneously. This approach resulted in paintings and sculptures that appear fragmented into abstract,

geometric forms, emphasizing the flat, two-dimensional surface of the canvas. Notable women Cubist artists are:

  - Marie Laurencin: A French painter who met Georges Braque as a fellow student at the Académie Humbert and developed a distinct style with soft, pastel colors and graceful, flowing figures. Her work offered a lyrical and feminine counterpoint to the more traditional Cubist aesthetic.
  - María Blanchard: A Spanish painter who moved to Paris and became a significant figure in the Cubist movement. Despite being an important painter, she was often overlooked in historical accounts of the era, which were dominated by male artists.
  - Sonia Delaunay: While also known for her work in Orphism, Delaunay's style was heavily influenced by Cubism and she was a key figure in the avant-garde.
  - Natalia Goncharova: A Russian avant-garde artist who, along with her partner Mikhail Larionov, was a founder of the Rayonist movement. Her work engaged with many modernist styles, including Cubism.
  - Lyubov Popova: A leading figure of the Russian avant-garde, Popova's work moved through various phases of modernism, including Cubo-Futurism.
  - Aleksandra Exter: Studied art in Kiev and became a prominent avant-garde artist whose work became increasingly radical, mixing Cubist influences with other modernist ideas.
  - Mainie (Mary Harriet) Jellett (1897-1944): An Irish painter who studied with André Lhote and Albert Gleizes in Paris; her Decoration (1923) was among the first abstract paintings shown in Ireland.
  - The central idea of Cubism was to show objects as the mind comprehends them in their totality, rather than from a single, fixed viewpoint. This involved breaking down and reassembling objects into an abstract form to suggest their three-dimensional structure and their movement through time and space. Artists reduced figures and objects to fundamental geometric shapes such as cubes, spheres, and cones. This fragmentation of forms challenged traditional naturalistic representation. Cubists rejected the illusion of depth created by traditional perspective, instead highlighting the flatness of the canvas. Background and foreground often merge in their compositions. Cubism was significantly influenced by the late work of Post-Impressionist painter Paul Cézanne, who simplified nature into geometric forms, and by the abstract, stylized forms of African masks and Iberian sculpture.
  - Compare Paul Cézanne's Card Players (1890s) and Pablo Picasso's Card Player (winter 1913-14, Museum of Modern Art), in which the player and his cards break into flat, overlapping planes. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- "the wild fool, the solitary player playing on and on": The joker, the fool of the deck, is often played wild; a card game for one is solitaire, or patience. See the joker in euchre in the Chapter 59 resources. See Cards, Games, and Chance.
- "the starter's music awakening him after so many years of sleep": See the "Call to the Post" in the Chapter 59 resources.

- “the value of a sand dollar”: A sand dollar is a flat, round sea urchin whose bleached skeleton washes up on beaches like a coin.
- “golden shekels, talents, florins, drachmas”: The talent was the largest weight of money in the ancient world; in the parable, the servant who buried his one talent in the earth lost it (Matthew 25:14-30, KJV). The florin was first struck in gold in Florence in 1252. See The Bible.
- “the writings of Boston music critics”: Boston’s critics were famous for severity: John Sullivan Dwight ran Dwight’s Journal of Music (1852-1881), and Philip Hale wrote the Boston Symphony’s program notes from 1901 to 1933.
- “had never sat in a diamond horseshoe”: See the Diamond Horseshoe in the Chapter 48 resources.
- “dresses of bone lace or bird-cages”: Bone lace is bobbin lace, worked on a pillow with bobbins once carved from bone. A bird-cage was the hooped steel crinoline of the 1850s and 1860s. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “whether they carry black umbrellas or white umbrellas”: See The Umbrella.
- “that death which levels all”: “Sceptre and crown / Must tumble down, / And in the dust be equal made / With the poor crooked scythe and spade” (James Shirley, “Death the Leveller,” from The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses, 1659). See Horace’s pale Death in the Chapter 59 resources. See Death and Mortality.
- “some poor old tramp who slept under the El”: The El is an elevated railway. New York’s Sixth Avenue El came down in 1939 and its Third Avenue El in 1955-56; Boston’s Washington Street Elevated ran from 1901 to 1987, a date after 1964.
- “whistle like Mozart in the silent hours”: See Mozart in the Chapter 55 resources. At fourteen Mozart heard Allegri’s Miserere in the Sistine Chapel and wrote it out from memory (1770). See Music and Composers.
- “Why should he think he was an authority on the harpsichord?”: The harpsichord plucks its strings with quills rather than striking them with hammers like the piano. See Music and Instruments.
- “He would have known more about calling moose”:
  - Hunters called moose with a horn of rolled birch bark. In Thoreau’s “Chesuncook” (The Maine Woods, 1864), the Penobscot guide Joe Aitteon “imitated the call of the moose,—ugh-ugh-ugh, or oo-oo-oo-oo.” See American Writers.
  - A bull moose’s antlers can spread five or six feet, wider than Young’s “four-foot spread.”
- “causing the northern light beams to rustle”: People of the far North have long said the aurora rustles or crackles. Finnish researchers led by Unto Laine recorded such sounds in 2012 (after 1964). See Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos.
- “the dim clusters of the Pleiades”: The Pleiades, the Seven Sisters, are a star cluster in Taurus; “Canst thou bind the sweet influences of Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?” (Job 38:31, KJV). See Astronomy and Greek Mythology.

- “sound being an intellectual thing”: Compare William Blake: “For a Tear is an Intellectual Thing” (“The Grey Monk,” c. 1803, and Jerusalem). See Romantic Poets.
- “the great gold-eyed snow owl”: The snowy owl of the Arctic has yellow eyes; in some winters snowy owls come south in numbers to fields, shores, and airports. See Birds.
- “old owl car bumping down the dusk”: An owl car was a streetcar that ran through the night; late-night transit is still called owl service.
- “passing the horse fountains”: Between 1902 and 1915 Hermon Lee Ensign’s National Humane Alliance gave about 125 granite watering troughs to American cities, for horses, dogs, cats, and people. See Horses and Carriages.
- “that great flutist who had caused the avalanche”: The “great flutist who had caused the avalanche” may refer to the god Kokopelli. Kokopelli is the humpbacked flute player of the rock art of the American Southwest, a bringer of fertility and rain. See On Kokopelli. See also Amphion in the Chapter 58 resources.
- “the all black harpsichord with the all black keys”: Many old harpsichords reverse the piano’s colors, with black natural keys and white sharps; Young’s is black throughout. See Chopin’s “Black Key” Étude in the Chapter 58 resources. See Music and Instruments.
- “the viola da gamba”: The viola da gamba, or viol, is the “viol for the leg,” held between the knees and bowed underhand. It has frets and usually six strings. The viols are a separate family from the violins; they flourished in the Renaissance and Baroque and were revived in the twentieth century. See On the viola da gamba and Music and Instruments.
- “lute with an angel’s head as screw”: Old viols and lutes often end in a carved head in place of a scroll, a lion, a woman, or an angel.
    - A “lute with an angel’s head” is not a specific type of musical instrument. Angels, cherubs, and putti playing the lute are also a common motif in Renaissance and Baroque art.
- “tortoise-shell violin”: In the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, the newborn god makes the first lyre from a tortoise shell, stretching strings of sheep gut across it. See Greek Mythology and Music and Instruments.
- “the polysyllabic horns of the wild ducks”: Young’s “polysyllabic horns” are the ducks’ calls of many syllables, which hunters imitate with wooden duck calls. See Birds.
- “like an unfinished fugue running through his mind”: A “fugue” has two main meanings: a complex musical composition where a theme is repeated and interwoven by multiple voices, and a temporary mental state of amnesia and wandering, often associated with dissociative disorders. Musically, it involves a single theme being introduced by one voice and then imitated by others in a structured, imitative style. Psychologically, a dissociative fugue is a condition where an individual forgets their past and may travel, only to have no memory of the period later. Bach’s Art of Fugue breaks off in its last fugue; he died in 1750 before finishing it. See On fugue and Music and Composers.

- “for he had forgotten many fugues”: Lethe is both a river in the Greek underworld and the personification of forgetfulness and oblivion. Souls who drank from the River Lethe would forget their past lives, and this concept of forgetfulness is used in a broader, metaphorical sense as well. See On the River Lethe and Greek Mythology.
- “many antiphonies”: “Antiphonies” are a type of responsive singing or music between two groups, creating a “call and response” effect. The term can also refer to a verse sung before and after a psalm or hymn, often used in religious services. See On antiphonies and Music and Composers.
- “many winding horns”: “Winding horns” are a type of wind instrument, historically made from animal horns or metal, used for signaling over long distances in activities like hunting, battle, and ceremonies. Also known as blowing horns or war horns, they produce a single note, and different meanings are conveyed through rhythms and speed. See Music and Instruments.
- “the old Locomobile, circa 1912”: Locomobile, circa 1912 may refer to the Locomobile Company of America which was one of the earliest manufacturers of cars before the assembly line.
    - The Locomobile Company of America made steam cars from 1899, then luxury gasoline cars; its racer “Old 16” won the Vanderbilt Cup in 1908.
- “skipped a beat like a trip hammer”: A trip hammer is a heavy power hammer lifted by a cam and dropped again and again, used in forges and mills.
- “almost angelic wings”: Compare the cherubim of Solomon’s temple: “the wing of the one touched the one wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall; and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house” (1 Kings 6:27, KJV). See Angels and Archangels and The Bible.
- “a flight of mandarins driven by non-adventitious winds far off their usual course”: The mandarin duck of East Asia is the most brilliantly colored of ducks, the drake crested and with orange “sails” on his back. In China a pair of mandarin ducks stands for faithful married love. See Birds.
- “the dappled light cast by a dying dolphin”: See Byron’s dying dolphin in the Chapter 56 resources. See Romantic Poets.
- “those poor birds of passage who, with their eyes blinded by the light”: Lighthouse keepers reported hundreds of migrating birds killed against the lantern in a single foggy night; the light draws night migrants, above all in fog. See Birds and Lamps, Candles, and Light.
- “exotic Pilgrims to this shore”: The “exotic Pilgrims” are the mandarin ducks, the “beautiful Asiatics” with gold-tipped wings, travelers from far lands arriving like pilgrims on a strange shore.
    - The capital P recalls the Pilgrims who landed at Plymouth in 1620, and the chapter’s Boston dollars and Boston critics point toward New England.
- “his elegy was this wild duck’s horn”: Compare Henrik Ibsen’s The Wild Duck (1884), whose wounded duck, kept in a garret, comes to stand for lives sustained by illusion.

- “had nearly been knocked down by an old Locomobile with black curtains flapping”: Mr. Spitzer nearly dies in “a most unusual traffic accident.” See the Locomobile entry above.
- “like the chambered nautilus building another shell, adding another room to the series of rooms which had been his life”: Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Chambered Nautilus” (1858): “Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul.”
- “like the migratory monarch butterfly buffeted by many winds”: Monarch butterflies of eastern North America fly south each autumn, some as far as the mountains of central Mexico. (Wikipedia)
- “those white flowers which grow at the edge of Lethe, the darkest stream”: Lethe is the river of forgetting in the Greek underworld. In Ovid, Lethe runs from the cave of Sleep, where poppies bloom at the door (Metamorphoses, Book 11). In the Odyssey, the dead walk the meadow of asphodel (Book 24). See On the River Lethe.

Vocabulary

Adventitious

Happening by chance; not essential or built in.

Antiphony

Singing or playing in alternation between two groups, as of a divided choir.

Basso profundo

The deepest bass voice.

Bone lace

Bobbin lace, made with bobbins once carved from bone.

Clef

A sign at the start of a staff fixing the pitch of the notes.

Drachma

A silver coin of ancient Greece.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Filament

A fine thread or fiber.

Florin

A gold coin first struck in Florence in 1252; later a British two-shilling piece.

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Fugue

A composition in which one theme is taken up in turn by several voices; also a flight from one’s own identity.

Germinal

In the earliest stage of growth; like a seed.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Harpsichord

A keyboard instrument, ancestor of the piano, whose strings are plucked rather than struck.

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Hieroglyphics

Picture writing, as of ancient Egypt; any writing hard to read.

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Mundane

Ordinary; of this world.

Pedal point

A long-held note, usually in the bass, sounding on while the harmonies change.

Polysyllabic

Having many syllables.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Resonance

Deep, full, echoing sound.

Sand dollar

A flat, round sea urchin whose white skeleton is found on beaches.

Shekel

An ancient Hebrew weight and coin of silver or gold.

Sonata

An instrumental composition, usually in three or four movements.

Tempestuous

Stormy; violent in feeling.

Timbre

The quality or tone of a voice or sound.

Tine

A prong or point, as of an antler or fork.

Tremulous

Trembling; quivering.

Trip hammer

A heavy power hammer raised by a cam and dropped again and again.

Tumult

A loud, confused uproar.

Tumultuous

Loud, wild, and disorderly.

Viola da gamba

The bass viol, an old fretted string instrument held between the knees.

Chapter 61

Content note: *This chapter touches on suicide and Mr. Spitzer's sense of living on as one who "had committed suicide and lived."*

Summary

In a thieves' café, Mr. Spitzer befriends an old mute who has trained a frog to speak in his mouth. One rainy night the frog recites the Lord's Prayer; later it asks for a light and a nickel for coffee and tells him to put his money on the Robins. When the frog dies on Maundy Thursday, Mr. Spitzer goes with the mute to bury it in a cigar box in an upland meadow a mile or two inland, addresses a funeral speech to the frog, and drops a red rose into the grave. On the walk home through the city at dawn he guides the grieving mute through the traffic, hears a bullfrog croak "Too deep, too deep," and thinks about the deaf: what the mute has lost and what he has been spared, and whether a man who cannot hear is the ideal audience for Mr. Spitzer's own unheard music, scattered on scraps all over Boston, Philadelphia, Trenton, Camden, and Asbury Park.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · The Old Mute

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Music, Sound, and Silence · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Time

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Mirrors and Reflections · Music and Instruments · Roses and Flowers · Silence and Deafness · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Aristotle · Heraclitus and Flux · Plato and Platonism · Wittgenstein

Allusions: American Writers · Ancient Egypt · Deafness and Sign Language · Exploration and the Poles · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · Judaism · Music and Composers · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with the remarkable story of an old mute who, through a frog trained to sing in his mouth, can "speak" and "croak" human words and even the Lord's Prayer. This passage is surreal and symbolic, underscoring themes of voice and silence, communication beyond normal means, and the miracle of expression despite

physical limitations. The frog is both instrument and voice for the mute, representing a fragile connection to the world of sound and speech.

- Mr. Spitzer accompanies the mute in burying the frog, which had been the mute's only voice. The description of the burial site as an upland flower-strewn meadow with wildflowers, grasses, and symbolic plants is deeply symbolic of mortality and the cycle of life and death. Mr. Spitzer reflects on mortality, mourning not just the frog but the brevity and fragility of life itself. The mute's grief is portrayed as profound and inexpressible, a voiceless sorrow that Mr. Spitzer tries to honor through silent companionship.
- The mute's expressive hands create a rich, complex sign language full of symbols (crosses, circles, directions, and gestures) that Mr. Spitzer tries to interpret. This passage highlights communication beyond words and the ambiguity and depth of silent expression. It stresses the idea that silence can be full of meaning, though often ambiguous and elusive.
- Mr. Spitzer reflects extensively on the mute's condition as a deaf mute living in a world full of sound and language. The mute is portrayed as a stranger in a foreign land, unable to access the rich auditory world around him. This section meditates on the isolating nature of silence and deafness, the loss of abstract concepts and sensory experiences, and the profound loneliness that comes with it. Mr. Spitzer envies the mute's escape from the distractions and dissonances of sound, yet mourns the tragic loss of connection and communication.
- Despite being a musician, Mr. Spitzer feels that his music is lost or unheard, especially by the mute who cannot hear. This intertwines the theme of isolation in the artist's life with the mute's silence. Mr. Spitzer's compositions are described as "inaudible music," music that exists more as internal experience than as shared sound. This passage emphasizes the paradox of creating art that may never be truly communicated or appreciated.
- Throughout the chapter, Mr. Spitzer contemplates mortality, the fleeting nature of life, and the illusions of time. The mute, unable to hear clocks or the city's awakening, exists outside conventional time, which deepens the symbolic resonance of death and silence. Mr. Spitzer's philosophical musings on existence, memory, and the passage of time add a profound existential dimension to the narrative.
- The chapter repeatedly contrasts the world of sound (the bustling city, music, natural noises) with the silence of the mute. Silence is portrayed not as mere absence but as a profound presence, "greater than sound." This duality explores the limits of human experience and the mystery of what may lie beyond sensory perception.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- When the frog croaks “Got a light, mister?” it is “this simple question seeming the real miracle.” Why does the ordinary question seem more miraculous than the prayer?
- Mr. Spitzer promises the frog, “thou shalt be a man, little frog, in the next world,” then asks himself “what ego was this.” What is he mourning, the frog or himself?
- Mr. Spitzer weighs whether the bullfrog’s cry means “too, to, two.” How does the pun lead him back to Peron?

Characters

- Young writes that “the mute had learned love.” What does his grief over a frog show about him?
- Mr. Spitzer “could not help almost envying him.” What does he envy in the mute’s deafness, and is the envy fair?
- Mr. Spitzer is irritated that “the way back had seemed shorter than the way they had come.” Why does this small complaint fit his whole life?

Connections

- The frog “had asked for a match, a coin.” How does this chapter carry on Mr. Spitzer’s coin-giving from Chapter 59?
- “Death was his coachman.” Where else in the novel does death drive a carriage?
- Mr. Spitzer has scattered his music “all over Boston and sometimes Philadelphia and sometimes Trenton, Camden, Asbury Park.” Why does he leave his music wherever he goes?

Reflection

- “Silence spoke with an almost human voice.” When does silence speak?
- “Reality is language, Mr. Spitzer said.” Is there a reality beyond what can be said or signed?
- Mr. Spitzer believes “a man was fortunate if he lived for one moment in twenty-four hours.” What makes such a moment?

Research: Characters

Mr. Spitzer

- An old, reflective, and solitary musician, a retired lawyer turned silent observer of life.

- He is contemplative, mourning not only the frog and the mute but also larger existential losses.
- Characterized by his flowing black mourning cloak, and his slow, deliberate movements.
- His music is described as unheard, symbolic of his isolation and the futility of his art in a silent world.

The Old Mute

- A silent figure who communicates through sign language and an extraordinary frog trained to “speak” by croaking words.
- Embodies the theme of silence, loss, and the difficulty of communication.
- His grief over the frog’s death is profound and inexpressible except through gestures.

The Singing Frog

- A small frog trained to sing and speak by the mute, symbolizing voice, life, and the fragile link between silence and sound.
- Its death symbolizes the loss of voice and communication, a tragedy for the mute.

Research: Themes

Silence and Communication

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- The mute’s silence contrasts with Mr. Spitzer’s music, which ironically is unheard.
- The frog’s voice bridges silence and speech but is ephemeral, highlighting the fragility of communication.
- Sign language and gestures represent a form of expression beyond spoken words, filled with deep ambiguities and mysteries.

Mortality and Grief

See: Death and Mortality · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- The chapter meditates on death, the brevity of life, and mourning.
- Mr. Spitzer’s reflection on the frog’s funeral is symbolic of universal mortality and the pain of loss.
- The mute’s grief is personal yet universal, emphasizing the silence that death brings.

Isolation and Alienation

See: Isolation and Connection

- The mute is portrayed as isolated in a silent world, unable to hear or be heard.
- Mr. Spitzer reflects on the mute's experience as a metaphor for alienation in a world filled with noise but lacking true communication.
- The idea of being a stranger in a foreign country is applied to the mute's condition.

The Nature of Reality and Perception

See: Illusion and Reality · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- Reality is portrayed as a language or an image, with Mr. Spitzer pondering on signs, symbols, and the interplay of presence and absence.
- The imagery of stars, clouds, and sea shells suggests a fluid, shifting reality where boundaries blur.

Music and Sound versus Silence

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Mr. Spitzer's music is described as a physiological act yet deeply meaningful to him, though unheard by others and especially the mute.
- Silence is given primacy over sound; silence is eternal and encompassing.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Frog

- Symbolizes voice, life, and the connection between silence and speech.
- Its death is a metaphor for lost communication and the fragility of life.

The Mute's Hands / Sign Language

See: Silence and Deafness

- Hands express complex signs and emotions beyond words, symbolizing the limits and possibilities of communication.

The Rose

See: Roses and Flowers

- The red rose dropped into the frog's grave symbolizes immortality, resurrection, and eternal life.

Sea Shells

See: The Sea and Water

- Symbolize journeys, the passage of time, and the blending of past, present, and future.

Silence as a Character

See: Silence and Deafness

- Silence is portrayed almost as a living force, greater than sound, surrounding and enveloping the mute and Mr. Spitzer alike.

Further notes from the text

- The chapter opens on a chain of reversals, night as day, dawn as twilight, beginning as end, which sets the terms for Mr. Spitzer's friendship with a man who speaks only in signs.
- The frog that speaks the Lord's Prayer is the comic center. See Comedy in Chapter 61.
- The burial ground is an upland meadow a mile or two inland, among plovers, woodpeckers, and old fences, beyond the reach of the sea but not beyond its sound.
- Mr. Spitzer is irritated that the way back is short and direct: if so, why did they go such a long way, circling through fog and mistaking reflections for the real thing? The complaint fits his whole life.
- Sign language becomes a theology: many things said by one sign, many never expressed, "like the sign language of God," who wrote the world in hieroglyphic birds, beasts, and flowers.
- Testing the mute's hearing, Mr. Spitzer holds up a watch to the man's dead ear, then realizes he has lifted his own dead arm, on his deaf side, with the broken watch on his dead side.
- Near the end comes a long catalogue of sea shells drifting from pole to pole, including the left-handed stromb, a rare shell that coils the wrong way.

Research: Resources

- "And his night was his day, and his day was his night": Young goes on: "his dawn was his twilight, and his moon was his sun, and his sun was his moon, and his beginning was his end, and his end was his beginning." These statements encapsulate the core of the reversal philosophy: the collapsing of distinctions that we usually take for granted. See the philosophy of reversals entry in the Chapter 37 resources.
- "the Lord's Prayer, Our Father Who Art in Heaven": "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name" (Matthew 6:9, KJV). Young gives the prayer in the Catholic and Book of Common Prayer form, "who art." See The Bible.
- "by labial and laryngeal and dental manipulations": Labial is related to the lips. Laryngeal is related to the larynx. Dental sounds are made with the tongue against the teeth.

- “Put your money on the Robins”: Mr. Spitzer wasn’t sure if he meant the song “When the Red, Red Robin (Comes Bob, Bob, Bobbin’ Along)” (Harry Woods, 1926) or if he meant the baseball team.
    - The Dodgers were founded in 1883 as the Brooklyn Atlantics. The team was known alternatively as the Bridegrooms, Grooms, Superbas, Robins, and Trolley Dodgers before officially becoming the Brooklyn Dodgers in the 1930s. The team moved to Los Angeles in 1958. They were the Robins from 1914 to 1931, named for their manager, Wilbert Robinson. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “his little frog like a mouth harp”: The Jew’s harp, also known as jaw harp, juice harp, or mouth harp, is a lamellophone instrument, consisting of a flexible metal or bamboo tongue or reed attached to a frame. Despite the colloquial name, the Jew’s harp most likely originated in China, with the earliest known Jew’s harps dating back 4,000 years ago from Shaanxi province. It has no relation to the Jewish people. Jew’s harps may be categorized as idioglot or heteroglot (whether or not the frame and the tine are one piece); by the shape of the frame (rod or plaque); by the number of tines, and whether the tines are plucked, joint-tapped, or string-pulled.
    - In America “mouth harp” usually means the harmonica. See Music and Instruments.
- “an Enrico Caruso among the frogs”: Enrico Caruso was a famous Italian operatic tenor. His records made him the first great star of the phonograph; he died in 1921. See Music and Composers.
- “meadows of Queen Anne’s lace”: Queen Anne’s lace is the wild carrot. Legend says Queen Anne pricked her finger while making lace, and the single dark red floret at the center of the white flower head is her drop of blood. See Roses and Flowers.
- “the great bitterns booming in the clouds”: The American bittern’s booming spring call carries far across the marsh; country people called the bird the thunder-pumper and the stake-driver. See Birds.
- “the lute turtle sleeping in the mud”: The leatherback sea turtle is also called the lute turtle, or luth, for the ridges along its shell, which reminded French naturalists of a lute. See The Sea and Water.
- “the recording angel in the cloud”: See Sterne’s recording angel in the Chapter 55 resources.
- “man is but a fleeting shadow and fades as grass”: “He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not” (Job 14:2, KJV); “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth” (Isaiah 40:8, KJV). See The Bible.
- “cloud cherubim riding sea-horses with their long, gilded necks”: The sea-horses of Greek myth, the hippocamps, are horses in front and fish behind; they draw Poseidon’s chariot over the waves. See Greek Mythology.
- “a gentleman’s nosegay”: A gentleman’s nosegay is a small, sweet-scented bouquet of flowers and herbs, similar to a modern boutonnière, that was worn pinned to a man’s clothing. It was used historically for both practical and symbolic purposes.

- “perhaps of mignonette”: Mignonette (Reseda odorata), “little darling” in French, is a small, sweet-scented garden flower long loved for nosegays. See Roses and Flowers.
    - Mignonette is a classic French sauce, primarily served with raw oysters and other seafood, that consists of red wine vinegar, finely minced shallots, and cracked black pepper.
- “five-flowered gentian named in memory of a dead Illyrian king”: Five-flowered gentian is a North American plant, also called stiff gentian or agueweed, known for its light blue or violet-blue, 5-lobed flowers that often appear in clusters.
    - “dead Illyrian king” may refer to Gentius, the last king of the Illyrian Kingdom. He ruled from 181 to 168 BC and is known for his final, unsuccessful resistance against the expansion of the Roman Republic. His defeat marked the end of Illyrian independence, as the region was absorbed into the Roman Empire. Pliny says the plant was named for Gentius, who discovered its powers (Natural History, Book 25).
- “an idee fixe”: In Berlioz’s Symphonie fantastique (1830), the idée fixe is the melody that stands for the beloved and returns, changed, in every movement. See Music and Composers.
- “hedgehogs stand with their backs always to the sea”: Mr. Spitzer thought Aristotle said that hedgehogs always stand with their backs to the sea. Aristotle: History of Animals IX says they look out of their holes in the direction of the wind. See Aristotle.
- “like many other old bindlestiffs”: Bindlestiffs is another word for a hobo who carries a bedroll.
- “the Etruscans had set stones at the doors of the houses of the dead”: Etruscans marked graves differently depending on the sex of the deceased, most famously in the necropolis at Cerveteri. This practice used carved stone markers called cippi. While the form and style of grave markers varied by region and over time, distinct gender-specific shapes were a notable tradition in certain Etruscan communities. There is less evidence for marking graves differently based on the age of the deceased, although separate burials for children did exist.
    - The Sarcophagus of the Spouses from Cerveteri (c. 520 BC, Villa Giulia, Rome) shows a husband and wife reclining together as if at a banquet; Etruscan tombs held engraved bronze mirrors. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “The Eskimos dug a hole in the ice”: The Inuit more often laid their dead on the land under cairns of stones, since the frozen ground could not be dug.
- “Some of the Indians had lashed their dead to the boughs of trees”: North American First Nations and other indigenous peoples tied their dead to tree branches called a Burial tree.
- “The Egyptians had put their dead into swan boats under the sand”: Boats were buried with Egyptian kings for the voyage of the dead; Khufu’s cedar boat, buried beside the Great Pyramid, was found in 1954. See Ancient Egypt.
    - Royal Egyptians were buried in funerary boats.

- “he is wrapped in his sail and should have had a sea burial”: At sea the dead were sewn into a hammock or a length of sail, weighted with shot, and slid over the side while the captain read the burial service; by sailors’ custom the last stitch went through the nose. See The Sea and Water.
- “milkwort which is believed to cause the milk to flow in the breasts of nurses”: Mr. Spitzer listed the different plants and their properties that were in the meadow: milkwort, cockscomb, moonwort, Dutchman’s pipes and breeches, jack-in-the-pulpit, coneflowers, cosmos, orchis, hedge hyssop, nightshade, heliotrope, cattails, oxlip, bladder campion, frog lilies, snakeroot, crowfoot, couch grass, crab grass, pectoral grass, mouse ear, snakemouth, yellow marsh mallows, periwinkle, penny-royals, marsh flags, star grass, starflowers, wild rambler roses, moon vines. The plants mentioned are not just decorative details but carry symbolic meaning linked to life, death, mourning, transformation, and the boundary between worlds. See On the meadow plants.
    - Milkwort: Traditionally associated with nurturing and fertility (believed to increase milk flow in nurses), milkwort symbolizes nurturing life and the continuation of existence beyond death. Its presence at the frog’s grave suggests a hope for renewal or sustenance beyond mortality.
    - Cockscomb: Its bright, flame-like shape often symbolizes boldness, uniqueness, or the vibrancy of life. Within the mournful scene, it contrasts the somber tone, perhaps hinting at the persistence of life’s vividness amid death.
    - Moonwort: A fern associated with the moon and mystical powers, moonwort evokes mystery, transformation, and the hidden realms of the night. It symbolizes the passage from life to death, the “moonlit” or shadowy journey of the soul.
    - Dutchman’s pipes and breeches, Jack-in-the-pulpit: These uniquely shaped plants are often symbolic of the strange, peculiar, and sometimes spiritual or supernatural. They may represent the oddity of existence, the spiritual “voices” or signs that speak silently, fitting the mute’s world.
    - Coneflowers, Cosmos, Orchis: These flowers are often linked to harmony, beauty, and spiritual order. Orchis, an orchid, is tied to fertility and rebirth. Cosmos stands for order and peace. Their presence suggests the coexistence of death and spiritual continuity and harmony.
    - Hedge hyssop: Traditionally connected with protection and purification, this plant could symbolize a guarding of the soul or the sacredness of the burial site.
    - Nightshade: A poisonous plant, nightshade often symbolizes danger, death, and the dark side of life. Its inclusion points to mortality and the ever-present shadow of death.
    - Heliotrope: Known for turning towards the sun, heliotrope symbolizes devotion and eternal love. This flower’s orientation towards the sun might represent a soul’s yearning for light beyond death.

    - Cattails, Oxlip, Bladder campion: Wetland plants like cattails and marsh flowers connect to themes of liminality or places between water and land, life and death. These plants symbolize transition, the fluid boundaries between states of being.
    - Frog lilies: Named evocatively, these lilies spotted with rainy light tie directly to the frog's character and his watery world, symbolizing the fragile beauty of life and the connection between the mute, the frog, and nature.
    - Snakeroot, Crowfoot: Plants with names associated with animals or mystical traits may symbolize danger, cunning, or the cyclical nature of life and death.
    - Couch grass, Crab grass, Pectoral grass, Mouse-ear, Snakemouth: Hardy, common grasses and plants embody persistence, survival, and the mundane continuity of life amid the extraordinary event of death.
    - Yellow marsh mallows, Periwinkle, Penny-royals, Marsh flags: These marsh plants reinforce the watery, liminal setting, symbolizing cleansing, healing, and the mysteries of the marshland as a space of passage.
    - Star grass, Starflowers: Clearly symbolic of the stars, the heavens, and the eternal. They evoke immortality, the soul's journey to the cosmos, and the vastness beyond earthly life.
    - Wild rambler roses: Roses are classic symbols of love and mourning. Wild, they suggest untamed nature and spontaneous beauty amid sorrow.
    - Moon vines: As climbers associated with the moon, they symbolize growth, reaching upward, and the connection between earth and sky, life and the unknown.
    - Young's moonwort "with tiny buds and crescent moon seeds" may be honesty (Lunaria), also called moonwort, whose round, silvery seed pods shine like moons.
    - The frog lily is the yellow pond lily (Nuphar) of ponds and slow streams.
- "flowers pale as tussock moths": Tussock moths are found on every continent except Antarctica. See Butterflies and Moths.
- "the black-crowned night heron splashed": The black-crowned night heron feeds at dusk and by night; its call is a flat "quok." See Birds.
- "staring into a scum-covered pond as if it were a mirror": See Narcissus and Echo in the Chapter 58 resources. See Mirrors and Reflections.
- "some great loom weaving heaven and earth together": See Goethe's loom of Time in the Chapter 58 resources.
- "it was Maundy Thursday when the frog had died": Maundy Thursday is Holy Thursday during Holy Week that commemorates the Washing of the Feet and Last Supper of Jesus Christ with the Apostles. "Maundy" comes from the Latin mandatum: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another" (John 13:34, KJV). See The Bible.
- "as if there were a frog in his throat": The idiom "a frog in his throat" means hoarseness; it is also used for a voice choked by emotion. Harvey Newcomb used it in How To Be A Man: A Book for Boys (1847), but it appears in America at least as early

as 1808, when the Salem Gazette toasted France, wishing that she “may find a frog in her throat” when she tried to raise her voice in American councils (Word Histories). See On a frog in his throat.

- “as if he were evolving into one great sea shell, spiral above spiral”: “Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul” (Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Chambered Nautilus,” 1858). See American Writers.
- “mimetic flowers like faces in clouds”: Mimetic flowers are flowers that deceive pollinators by mimicking other organisms or objects to attract them without offering a reward. This mimicry can involve copying the appearance, scent, or texture of a model, such as a rewarding flower, rotting flesh, or even a female insect, to trick insects into acting as pollinators.
- “music for the wind harp”: The wind harp, or Aeolian harp, is a box of strings set in a window or a tree for the wind to play; “And what if all of animated nature / Be but organic Harps diversely fram’d” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Eolian Harp,” 1795). See Romantic Poets and Music and Instruments.
- “A swan when it is dying has the right to sing”: The swan song myth is an ancient belief that swans, typically silent throughout their lives, sing a beautiful song just before they die. The term is now used metaphorically to describe a final, often brilliant, performance, work, or gesture before retirement or death. This myth has roots in Greek and Roman mythology, appearing in the writings of Aeschylus and Plato, and was later referenced in English literature by Chaucer. The English phrase “swan song,” a translation of the German Schwanengesang, dates from 1831; Thomas Carlyle is credited with popularizing it in his satire Sartor Resartus, written in 1831. See On the swan song. See also Plato’s singing swans in the Chapter 53 resources. See Plato and Platonism.
- “there were these two deaths which every man must die”: “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Revelation 20:14, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “Death was his coachman”: “Because I could not stop for Death— / He kindly stopped for me— / The Carriage held but just Ourselves— / And Immortality” (Emily Dickinson, c. 1863). See The Black Coachman and American Writers.
- “for this world, he had said to the little frog, is but the tadpole state”: The tadpole becomes a frog; for Mr. Spitzer this world is “the tadpole state,” and death the change into another form of life.
- “many signs which Mr. Spitzer had not understood”: American Sign Language grew from the school that Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and the deaf French teacher Laurent Clerc opened in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1817. See Deafness and Sign Language.
- “there was no being but becoming”: Existence is not fixed but a process of change, a turning wheel with “images flowing like water into these images”: no fixed self, only becoming. In 1913 Sir Thomas Oliver, a professor of medicine, said “becoming is better than being.” See On no being but becoming and Heraclitus and Flux.

    - Quote Investigator traces the saying to his paper read at Newcastle-upon-Tyne in December 1913; Carol Dweck repeated it in Mindset (2006, after 1964).
- “is that which never was and never will be”: Mr. Spitzer asks what “is that which never was and never will be and is not given in reality and if it were given would not be itself but a silent plain, empty and silent and vast?” Infinity, if it were given, would be only an empty plain; reality is language instead, “image of image, image of the rose,” made of symbols rather than bare existence.
- “Reality is language, Mr. Spitzer said”: Compare Ludwig Wittgenstein: “The limits of my language mean the limits of my world” (Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, 5.6, 1921). See Wittgenstein.
- “the shadow of the mantling hawk”: In falconry a hawk mantles when it spreads its wings over its prey, or stretches a wing and a leg down one side. See Birds.
- “He had pulled out his hair by the handfuls”: Ancient mourning tore the hair and beat the breast. When Achilles hears that Patroclus is dead, he pours dust on his head and tears his hair with his hands (Homer, Iliad, Book 18). See Homer’s Epics and Grief, Loss, and Mourning.
- “Pax vobiscum”: Pax vobiscum, “peace be with you,” is said by the priest during the Mass. Young turns it into “silence be thine.”
- “the way back had seemed shorter than the way they had come”: This is called the “Return Trip Effect,” which is a combination of familiarity, predictability, and reduced pressure to arrive on time. On the outbound journey a traveler focuses on the destination, which makes the trip feel longer, while the return is often more familiar and less time-pressured, making it seem to pass more quickly. (Niels van de Ven and others, “The Return Trip Effect,” 2011, after 1964.)
- “like star-nosed moles”: The star-nosed mole of eastern North American wetlands has a ring of twenty-two fleshy rays around its snout, the most sensitive touch organ known in any mammal.
- “it was an airplane light intermittently gleaming through the clouds”: Through most of the novel the events around the characters, especially Mr. Spitzer, seem to take place in the past or in a time around the 1900s. One of the clearest glimpses of modern times comes in this paragraph where Mr. Spitzer thinks he sees a moving star but it is an airplane light seen through clouds.
- “one of his Congress gaiters was broken”: Congress gaiters were a popular boot for men and women in the 19th and 20th century.
    - The Congress gaiter is an ankle boot with elastic gussets in its sides, patented by J. Sparkes Hall in 1837. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “a silver helmet with beaver down to hide his face”: The beaver is the face guard of a helmet; of the ghost of Hamlet’s father, “he wore his beaver up” (William Shakespeare, Hamlet, 1.2). See Shakespeare.
- “a florin or crusado”: A florin was a former coin of various countries, most notably a gold coin from Florence and later a British two-shilling coin equivalent to ten new

pence. Today, the Aruban florin is the official currency of Aruba, and some European countries like the Netherlands have used “florin” as another name for their guilder, though its use is declining.
    - The crusado, or cruzado, is primarily an old Portuguese gold or silver coin, named for the cross that was typically on its reverse.
- “the Bank of Sea Men and Others”: “Bank of Sea Men” metaphorically represents a kind of spiritual or otherworldly institution where coins (perhaps symbolic of value, memory, or passage) are exchanged or held.
    - Compare the Seamen’s Bank for Savings, founded in New York in 1829 for sailors’ wages.
- “Carthago est delenda”: Carthago est delenda may refer to Carthago delenda est, Carthage must be destroyed, which is said to have been the last line of Cato the Elder’s speech advocating for war between Rome and Carthage. The war between Rome and Carthage, known as the Punic Wars, was a series of three conflicts from 264 BCE to 146 BCE that resulted in Roman victory and the destruction of Carthage. The wars were fought over dominance in the western Mediterranean, with the first and third wars fought over Sicily and later over the total destruction of Carthage. The Second Punic War is famously known for Hannibal’s invasion of Italy by crossing the Alps, but it ultimately ended with Carthage’s defeat at the Battle of Zama. See On Carthago est delenda.
    - Marcus Porcius Cato, also known as Cato the Censor, the Elder and the Wise, was a Roman soldier, senator, and historian known for his conservatism and opposition to Hellenization. He was the first to write history in Latin with his Origines, a now fragmentary work on the history of Rome. His work De agri cultura, a treatise on agriculture, rituals, and recipes, is the oldest extant prose written in the Latin language. His epithet “Elder” distinguishes him from his great-grandson Senator Cato the Younger, who opposed Julius Caesar.
- “moving by summation”: A sea anemone’s nerve net acts by summation: one touch may do nothing, but repeated touches add up until the animal contracts. A medusa, or jellyfish, swims by pulsing its bell. See The Sea and Water.
- “hearing with their eyes, their skin, their hair”: Studies of deaf adults find heightened attention to the edges of the visual field and to touch (Daphne Bavelier and others, “Do deaf individuals see better?” 2006, after 1964). See Deafness and Sign Language.
- “in cloud cuckooland”: In Aristophanes’s The Birds (414 BC), the birds build Cloudcuckooland, a city in the air between gods and men. See Birds.
- “standing guilty when accused, standing mute”: A prisoner who stood mute and refused to plead could be pressed under weights; Giles Corey of Salem was pressed to death in 1692 for refusing to plead at the witch trials.
- “the tapestry figures of the emperor and the unicorn”: The unicorn traditionally symbolizes purity, innocence, and something rare or unattainable, often connected to mystical or idealized qualities. The emperor, on the other hand, represents worldly

power, authority, and earthly rule. Together, the “emperor and the unicorn” juxtaposes earthly power with mystical purity.
    - Compare the Unicorn Tapestries at The Cloisters in New York (c. 1495-1505) and The Lady and the Unicorn at the Musée de Cluny in Paris.
- “a silent attendant to a Turk”: The Ottoman sultans kept mutes, the dilsiz, at the Topkapı Palace; they spoke among themselves in signs and sometimes served as executioners. See the Kafes in the Chapter 42 resources. See Deafness and Sign Language.
- “a paid mourner at a funeral, walking behind the corpse”: In England the hired attendants who stood at the door and walked before the hearse were called mutes; Oliver Twist is put to work as one for the undertaker Mr. Sowerberry (Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, 1838). See Weddings and Funerals.
- “He did not hear the umbrella mender’s cry”: See The Umbrella.
- “for none should toll for him”: “Never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee” (John Donne, Meditation XVII, 1624).
- “even with tongues of angels and of men”: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Corinthians 13:1, KJV). See The Bible.
- “like a cabalistic language few could understand”: The Kabbalah is the Jewish mystical tradition that reads hidden meanings in the letters and numbers of Scripture; “cabalistic” came to mean secret and hard to understand. See Judaism.
- “the hermit thrush’s speckled breast”: The hermit thrush sings the elegy in Walt Whitman’s “When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom’d” (1865), his poem on the death of Lincoln. See American Writers and Birds.
- “the King’s English”: The King’s English most commonly refers to the standard or correct form of English, especially when a king reigns, or it can refer to a book on English usage by H.W. Fowler.
    - “Abusing of God’s patience and the king’s English” (William Shakespeare, The Merry Wives of Windsor, 1.4). See Shakespeare.
- “a Spanish deaf mute lip-reader in Boston”: Boston was a center of oralism, which taught deaf children to read lips and speak and drove out sign language. Alexander Graham Bell taught his Visible Speech at the Boston School for Deaf Mutes in 1871, and the Milan congress of 1880 voted to ban signing in deaf schools. See Deafness and Sign Language.
- “an English lip-reader in Seville”: Seville is the capital and largest city of the Spanish autonomous community of Andalusia and the province of Seville. It is situated on the lower reaches of the River Guadalquivir, in the southwest of the Iberian Peninsula.
- “as silent as Babylon or Nineveh or Tyre”: “Babylon” may refer to the ancient Mesopotamian city in modern-day Iraq. The ancient city was the capital of two empires, known for its scientific and architectural achievements.

    - Nineveh was a major ancient Mesopotamian city, serving as the final capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire around 700 BCE until its destruction in 612 BCE. It was a significant cultural and political center known for its grand palaces, gardens, and Ashurbanipal's library. The city is also prominent in the biblical story of Jonah. Tyre is a city in Lebanon, and one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. It was one of the earliest Phoenician metropolises and the legendary birthplace of Europa, her brothers Cadmus and Phoenix, and Carthage's founder Dido.
- "The idea occurred to Mr. Spitzer that the mute": Mr. Spitzer sees the mute cut off not only from sound but from society and human connection, and his own companionship is a fragile bridge to a man who lives at the margins of sense.
- "he was born deaf but had been made mute": Most deaf people have working voices. The old word "deaf-mute" came from the fact that a child born deaf did not learn speech by ear, and many Deaf people today reject the term. See Deafness and Sign Language.
- "his mother had been a fan dancer": Sally Rand made the fan dance famous at Chicago's Century of Progress fair in 1933, dancing behind two great ostrich-feather fans.
- "sound of the water ouzel": A water ouzel is the traditional name for the American Dipper, a medium-sized, gray songbird known for its aquatic lifestyle, as it dives into cold, fast-moving streams to hunt for food. It is the only North American songbird that forages underwater, where it walks along the stream bed to catch aquatic insects and other prey. John Muir wrote it a hymn of praise, "The Water-Ouzel" (The Mountains of California, 1894). See Birds and American Writers.
- "the bird of time forever winging": "The Bird of Time has but a little way / To flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing" (Edward FitzGerald, The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám, 1859). See Time.
- "when the graves gave up their dead": "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them" (Revelation 20:13, KJV). Young's trumpets "at the four corners of the clouded sky" recall the "four angels standing on the four corners of the earth" (Revelation 7:1, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- "with bright eyes flashing in the lights like Aurora": See the aurora in the Chapter 60 resources.
- "Look to the end, Mr. Spitzer said": Respice finem is Latin for consider the end or look to the end. The medieval Gesta Romanorum gives it as "Quidquid agis, prudenter agas, et respice finem," whatever you do, do it wisely, and look to the end. See On Respice finem.
- "Should that be added which had never been?": "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life" (Revelation 22:18-19, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.

- “as the dolphin’s rainbow colors faded”: See Byron’s dying dolphin in the Chapter 56 resources. See Romantic Poets.
- “the old milk-white horse”: Moon blindness is a recurring inflammation of a horse’s eyes, once blamed on the phases of the moon.
- “more than twelve knots a day”: A knot is already a speed, one nautical mile an hour, so “knots a day” is Young’s joke on Mr. Spitzer’s slowness.
- “to be the great conchologist”: A conchologist is a person who studies and collects shells, typically those of marine mollusks. See The Sea and Water.
- “brigantines of the opium trade”: Boston and Salem fortunes were made in the China trade. Russell & Company, run largely by Boston families such as the Forbeses and the Delanos, was the leading American firm in the opium trade with China. See The History of Opium.
- “ships from the Barbary coast”: The “Barbary Coast” most commonly refers to the historical coastal region of North Africa, inhabited by Berbers, from which pirates and privateers launched raids on European shipping and coastal towns from the 16th to the 19th century. The term is also used to describe the raucous waterfront district of San Francisco during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, known for its saloons, gambling, and brothels. The North African region was notorious for its Barbary corsairs, who captured ships and people for ransom and the slave trade.
- “the Labrador coast”: Labrador is a geographic and cultural region within the Canadian province of Newfoundland and Labrador. It is the primarily continental portion of the province and constitutes 71% of the province’s area but is home to only 6% of its population.
- “the great Arctic birds who round this globe each year, going from pole to pole”: The Arctic tern flies each year from its Arctic nesting grounds to the Antarctic and back, the longest migration of any bird. See Birds and Exploration and the Poles.
- “left-handed stromb”: A “left-handed stromb” is a very rare, naturally occurring left-handed snail shell. In most gastropods, including the Florida fighting conch, shells grow in a spiral that is right-handed, making a left-handed version a rare genetic anomaly.
- “sea shells are found on the mountain tops”: Leonardo da Vinci argued in his notebooks that fossil shells on mountains could not have been carried there by Noah’s Flood, and Charles Darwin found fossil shells high in the Andes in 1835.
- “roar like a demented sea shell remembering that sea which never was”: There is a common folk myth that if one holds a seashell to the ear the person can hear the ocean. This is because of seashell resonance. See On seashells and the ocean. See also the sea heard in a shell in the Chapter 58 resources.
- “Mr. Spitzer’s susurrus”: Susurrus means whispering, rustling, or murmuring.
- “here at the Hub”: Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote that the “Boston State-House is the hub of the solar system” (The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table, 1858), and Boston has been the Hub ever since. See American Writers.

- “a multiplicity of Tritons blowing their distant spiral horns”: “Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn” (William Wordsworth, “The World Is Too Much with Us,” 1807). Triton, son of Poseidon, calms or raises the sea with his conch. See Greek Mythology and Romantic Poets.
- “the cries of rickshaw boys in Peking”: Compare Lao She’s novel Rickshaw Boy (1937), whose English translation (1945) became an American bestseller.
- “great hermit mollusk door”: Young may have in mind hermit crabs (crustaceans) that use mollusk shells for protection. Hermit crabs lack their own protective shell and rely on empty shells from marine snails (gastropods) to protect their soft, vulnerable abdomens from predators and the elements.
  - A snail’s own door is its operculum, the horny or limy plate it closes over the opening of its shell.
- “sometimes Trenton, Camden, Asbury Park”: Trenton is the capital city of New Jersey and the county seat of Mercer County. It is historically significant as the site of George Washington’s first military victory during the American Revolutionary War in 1776.
  - Camden is a city in Camden County, in the U.S. state of New Jersey. It is part of the Delaware Valley metropolitan region. The city was incorporated on February 13, 1828. Walt Whitman spent his final years in Camden, where he died in 1892. He is buried in a tomb at Harleigh Cemetery in Camden. See On Camden, New Jersey and American Writers.
  - Asbury Park is a small seaside city on the New Jersey coast. It’s known for its sandy shore and beachfront boardwalk lined with shops, arcades and cafes. The city’s live music venues include the 1920s Paramount Theatre. The Silverball Museum’s video games, arcade games and pinball machines date from the 1930s to the present. (The Silverball Museum is after 1964.) Stephen Crane spent his boyhood in Asbury Park.

Vocabulary

Allegro

In music, lively and quick.

Ambivalently

With mixed or contradictory feelings or meanings.

Antiphony

Singing or playing in alternation between two groups, as of a divided choir.

Aperture

An opening.

Arabesque

An ornament of intertwined flowing lines, leaves, and tendrils.

Archipelago

A group of islands.

Artifice

Clever trickery, or the art of making things seem other than they are.

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Belfry

A bell tower, or the room in a tower where the bells hang.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Bill of lading

A receipt a shipper gives for goods taken on board, listing the cargo.

Bindlestiff

A hobo who carries his belongings in a bundle.

Bittern

A marsh heron with a booming call.

Boreal

Of the north; from Boreas, the north wind.

Breeches

Short trousers fastened at or below the knee.

Breve

A musical note twice the length of a whole note.

Brigantine

A two-masted sailing ship, square-rigged on the foremast.

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Cerements

Grave clothes; a shroud.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chrysalis

The hard case in which a caterpillar becomes a butterfly or moth.

Clapper

The hanging metal tongue inside a bell that strikes it to make it ring.

Cockscomb

The red crest of a rooster; also a jester’s cap, or a garden flower shaped like a crest.

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Conchologist

One who studies shells.

Cowl

A hood; also a hooded cap on a chimney that turns with the wind.

Demented

Out of one’s mind.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Dubious

Doubtful.

Eaves

The edges of a roof that overhang the walls.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Eunuch

A man who has been castrated. Eunuchs were employed for centuries to guard harems and to serve as officials in royal courts in the Middle East, China, and Byzantium. See The eunuch (Ch 35).

Filament

A fine thread or fiber.

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Florin

A gold coin first struck in Florence in 1252; later a British two-shilling piece.

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Gaiter

A covering for the ankle and lower leg; an ankle boot.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Gauze

A thin, transparent fabric.

Gentian

A plant with deep blue trumpet-shaped flowers.

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Harlequin

The patched, masked trickster of Italian comedy.

Harrowed

Distressed; tormented.

Hermit crab

A crab that lives in an empty shell borrowed from another creature.

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Hieroglyphics

Picture writing, as of ancient Egypt; any writing hard to read.

Hummock

A small hill or mound.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Idée fixe

A fixed idea; an obsession.

Inarticulate

Unable to express oneself clearly.

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Intermittent

Stopping and starting.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Itinerant

Traveling from place to place.

Jack-in-the-pulpit

A woodland plant whose flower spike stands under a hooded leaf, like a preacher in a pulpit.

Labial

Of the lips; a sound made with the lips.

Larboard

The old word for the left side of a ship.

Largo

In music, very slow and broad.

Laryngeal

Of the larynx, the voice box.

Lexicographer

One who writes dictionaries.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Lumbering

Moving heavily and clumsily.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mantling

In falconry, a hawk’s spreading of its wings over its prey.

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Mignonette

A small, sweet-scented garden flower.

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Mourning cloak

A dark butterfly with pale-edged wings that survives the winter as an adult; also a black cloak worn in mourning.

Mundane

Ordinary; of this world.

Nosegay

A small bouquet.

Pacific

Peaceful.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Peaked

Thin and pale, as from illness.

Periwinkle

A small edible sea snail.

Persian

A person of Persia, now Iran.

Phaeton

A light, open, four-wheeled carriage; also a name for some seashells.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Plumed

Decorated with feathers.

Postulated

Assumed as true, as the basis for an argument.

Presto

In music, very fast.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Problematical

Doubtful; hard to settle.

Psyche

A tall mirror that swings in a frame; also the soul.

Pulverized

Ground to powder.

Quail

A small, plump ground bird hunted as game.

Queen Anne’s lace

Wild carrot, a weed with flat white flower clusters like lace.

Refraction

The bending of light as it passes from one medium to another.

Refulgent

Shining brightly; radiant.

Requiem

A Mass or song for the dead.

Saffron

Orange-yellow, the color of the spice.

Sarcophagus

A stone coffin, often carved, placed above ground. The plural is sarcophagi.

Scabrous

Rough and scaly; also indecent.

Scudding

Moving fast before the wind.

Sepulchral

Of the tomb; gloomy and deathly.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Sleight of hand

Skillful tricks done with the hands, such as a magician’s.

Somnolence

Sleepiness; drowsiness.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Sonorous

Deep and full in sound.

Soughing

Making a soft sighing or rushing sound, like wind in trees.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Squall

A sudden, violent gust of wind, often with rain or snow.

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Susurrus

A whispering or rustling.

Swallow-tail

A man’s formal tailcoat, with tails like a swallow’s.

Taciturn

Habitually silent; saying little.

Tallow

Animal fat used for candles and soap. Tallow-colored is a dull, yellowish white.

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Torpid

Sluggish; inactive.

Triton

A sea god of Greek myth, half man and half fish, who blows a conch shell.

Tumescent

Swelling.

Tumult

A loud, confused uproar.

Turgid

Swollen; also, pompous in style.

Turnstone

A shorebird that turns over stones to find food.

Undulating

Rising and falling in waves.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Whaler

A whaling ship or a man who hunts whales.

Winding sheet

The cloth a corpse is wrapped in for burial.

Chapter 62

Content note: *This chapter tells of a clarinetist who killed himself and of Mr. Spitzer's own thoughts of suicide.*

Summary

Mr. Spitzer wonders whether he has ever truly slept. He dreams of rowing down a river that turns to fire and then to ice, followed by a great water orchestra of seagulls turned musicians. By lamplight he rewrites his will, leaving all his scraps of music to the world, even to deaf and dead ears, on condition that it be played only on water; he notes that the old pack rat who steals his papers always leaves something in return. No great music, he decides, is ever played as written. He remembers an old horn-blower dying of tuberculosis who cannot stop blowing his horn, and a clarinetist who jumped from a Gloucester roof leaving a note that he had gone to join a greater orchestra. He remembers, too, learning that the silent violinist of the Library steps had played for twenty years in the Philadelphia Symphony without once touching the strings and was dismissed the day he played a real note. Crossing Louisburg Square, he asks where he is and is startled to hear: Boston. He thought he was in Philadelphia.

Characters present

Joachim Spitzer · The Old Horn-Blower · The Old Violinist · The Pack Rat

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Music, Sound, and Silence · Time

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Dogs · Eyes and Blindness · Fire · Fireflies · Horses and Carriages · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · Moon and Stars · Music and Instruments · Silence and Deafness · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella · Twins and Doubles · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Freud and Jung · Nietzsche · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres

Allusions: American Writers · Astronomy · Dante · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Music and Composers · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Civil War

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, Mr. Spitzer dreams of rowing down a river that transforms from molten fire to frozen ice, surrounded by fantastical imagery: old walruses, seals with diamond necklaces, seagulls turning into musicians, and a great water orchestra. This symbolizes the fluid, transformative nature of reality, music, and life itself, flowing, burning, freezing, and shimmering between states, much like the elusive nature of perfect sleep and death which he never attains. This dreamscape is laden with surreal and symbolic images that represent the merging of reality and illusion, life and death, music and silence.
- Mr. Spitzer rewrites his will meticulously, with instructions reflecting his eccentric personality and his deep connection to his music and to the world around him. The will includes bequests of his musical works to the world “even to indifferent ears and even to deaf ears and even to dead ears and to sea conches”; this shows his acceptance of obscurity and his desire for his music to endure beyond his earthly life. The will also contains poetic and mysterious instructions, such as leaving secretive eggs and milk, and canceling subscriptions, which reflect his detachment from worldly affairs but attachment to ritual and symbolism. The will is an act of final artistic and existential expression, blending legal formality with poetic imagination.
- Mr. Spitzer reflects on how music, like life, is fleeting and imperfect, filled with unplayable notes, paradoxes, and silent chords. He contemplates how his compositions incorporate sounds of nature, cosmic events, and the elusive music of the dead or music that can never be fully realized or heard. This passage explores the metaphysical nature of music as both creation and loss, as something that connects the living and the dead, the real and the imagined. He acknowledges that no music is ever played exactly as composed, and that silence may be the truest form of music, an idea that profoundly illustrates the fragility and mystery of artistic expression.
- The story of the old horn-blower who has tuberculosis caused by his relentless playing of his instrument is a poignant metaphor for the physical and spiritual toll of devotion to art. Despite his suffering, the horn-blower cannot stop because music is both his love and his torment. Mr. Spitzer’s sympathy and sorrow for the horn-blower highlight the paradox of artistic creation that it can be both life-giving and life-destroying. The horn-blower’s determination to “blow on” even unto death embodies the tragic dedication of the artist.
- Mr. Spitzer recounts the tragic suicide of a clarinetist who felt “out of tune” despite reassurances of his perfection. This introduces the theme of alienation and despair among musicians who cannot reconcile their inner experiences with external reality. The clarinetist’s note about joining a “greater orchestra” evokes the hope or belief in a transcendent musical realm beyond this life. It also inspires Mr. Spitzer’s thoughts about an orchestra that includes all lost and unheard music, suggesting an eternal, cosmic harmony that surpasses earthly limitations.

- This surreal image of an old violinist silently playing an invisible violin with imaginary bow gestures symbolizes pure artistic expression divorced from physical constraints. Mr. Spitzer recognizes this as perhaps the “best music,” the music of silence, the unplayed and unplayable music that expresses the ineffable. The violinist’s story of having been a second violinist who never actually touched his strings, and who was dismissed after accidentally producing a “false note,” highlights themes of illusion, invisibility, and injustice in the artistic world. It represents the paradox of the artist’s life: the tension between visibility and invisibility, reality and performance, acceptance and rejection.
- Mr. Spitzer muses on the nature of memory and time, suggesting that events must happen twice to be real, that memory is inherently inaccurate, and that past and present coexist in complex ways. This philosophical reflection ties into the themes of music and life as cyclical, ephemeral, and intertwined with illusion and reality. The idea that memories may come from an “alien source” adds a mystical dimension to his understanding of self and art.
- In the closing sections, Mr. Spitzer contemplates the ultimate silence that surrounds all music and life. He considers silence not as mere absence but as a profound presence, “more silent than the grave.” Near the end Mr. Spitzer remembers almost applauding the silent music of the old violinist and his recognition that music may never fully be heard or understood but still holds profound beauty and meaning. The passage also touches on his existential confusion and isolation, highlighted by the moment he forgets where he is, symbolizing disconnection from reality.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Mr. Spitzer leaves his music “even to indifferent ears and even to deaf ears and even to dead ears and to sea conches.” For whom is he really writing?
- The violinist was dismissed “because once, once only, he had come over into reality.” What is Young saying about performance and truth?
- “Death did not balance with life.” How does the language of bookkeeping work in this chapter?

Characters

- The clarinetist leaves a note: “I am out of tune. I have gone to join a greater orchestra.” Why does Mr. Spitzer take an idea from it?
- Mr. Spitzer cries “Blow on, horn-blower, blow on!” while “recognizing that he was negating himself.” Why does he contradict his own advice?
- Mr. Spitzer wants “to show perfect justice to all parties, both the abuser and the abused,” even the pack rat. What does the pack rat’s trade teach him?

Connections

- The horn-blower “had been usher to a dying king and now was both the usher and the king.” How does he carry on the usher of Chapter 59?
- Of the Library steps violinist, Young now writes: “The man had been a member of a great orchestra.” How does this change the silent music of Chapter 58?
- The chapter ends with “My God! I thought I was in Philadelphia.” How does this answer Chapter 61’s naming of Boston?

Reflection

- Mr. Spitzer believes that “anything which was worth happening at all was worth happening twice.” Is something real only when it is repeated?
- “Memory provided in retrospect that which had never occurred.” When does memory invent?
- “From all his musical rags, future musicians must stitch together a musical coat.” What do the living make from what the dead leave?

Research: Characters

Mr. Joachim Spitzer

- A retired lawyer and musician, described as a composer and conductor of a unique “water music.” He is deeply reflective, often dreaming and contemplating his life, music, and the cosmos. He appears to be a symbol of the artist’s struggle and existential quest.

The Old Horn-Blower

- A tragic figure who blows his horn despite having tuberculosis, symbolizing devotion to art even unto death.

The Old Violinist

- A member of the Philadelphia Symphony who never touched his strings, symbolizing the paradox of illusion and reality in art.

The Pack Rat

- A metaphorical figure that steals scraps but returns something in exchange, symbolizing the cycle of loss and gain in creativity or life.

Research: Themes

Themes of the chapter

See: Death and Mortality · Illusion and Reality · Music, Sound, and Silence · Identity and the Self · Memory and the Past · Isolation and Connection

- The elusive nature of sleep and death.
- The interplay between reality and illusion.
- Music as a metaphor for life, death, and cosmic order.
- The struggle of the artist to realize and communicate his vision.
- The persistence of memory and identity beyond physical existence.
- The concept of silence and the unplayable music of the spheres.
- The loneliness and alienation of the creative genius.
- The inevitability of loss and the quest for immortality through art.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Water and Rivers

See: The Sea and Water

- Metaphors for the flow of life, time, and reality. The river transforms from fire to ice, representing change and the cyclical nature of existence.

Music and Instruments

See: Music and Instruments

- Represent creation, communication, and the ineffable aspects of life. Music is described as complex, sometimes unplayable, and deeply tied to natural phenomena like waves, wind, and stars.

Stars and Celestial Bodies

See: Moon and Stars

- Symbols of eternity, the unknown, and the cosmic order. The constellation Orion and others are referenced as markers of time and existence.

The Pack Rat

See: The Pack Rat

- Symbolizes the artist’s daily struggle, the exchange between loss and gain, and the persistence of creativity.

The Old Oil Lamp with Bull’s-Eye

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light · Eyes and Blindness

- Represents the faint, fragile light of consciousness and creativity amid darkness.

Silence

See: Silence and Deafness

- A recurring motif representing the ultimate music, the space before and after sound, and the mystery of existence.

The Firefly

See: Fireflies

- Symbolizes fragile life and the fleeting nature of existence and memory.

Dream of the River of Fire and Ice

See: The Sea and Water · Snow, Ice, and Winter · Fire

- Reflects the shifting states of reality and consciousness, the tension between light and darkness, life and death.

Mr. Spitzer’s Will

See: Death and Mortality

- Symbolizes the artist’s legacy and the desire to give all his music freely to the world, with an emphasis on the music being played only on water, highlighting the connection between music and nature.

The Old Horn-Blower’s Lament

See: Music and Instruments

- Highlights the tragic devotion to art despite physical decline, embodying sacrifice and the inevitability of death.

The Suicidal Clarinetist

See: Music and Instruments

- Represents the torment of the artist who perceives himself as “out of tune” with the world, and the concept of a “greater orchestra” beyond life.

The Old Violinist Who Never Touched Strings

See: Music and Instruments

- A powerful metaphor for the paradox between appearance and reality in art, and the pain of exclusion for breaking the illusion.

Music of Silence and Memory

See: Music and Instruments · Silence and Deafness

- Explores the impossibility of perfect memory and the idea that music, like life, is ephemeral and incomplete, and that silence may be the truest form of music.

Mr. Spitzer’s Final Reflections

See: Mirrors and Reflections

- Contemplate the nature of truth, memory, and existence, emphasizing that all experiences may be repetitions or illusions, and the loneliness intrinsic to human life and creativity.

Research: Resources

- “Sometimes Mr. Spitzer wondered if he had ever really slept”: Mr. Spitzer doubts he has ever truly slept, or died. In his dream a river of fire and a river of ice run past arctic animals in opulent rooms, until all the rivers seem one great river of reality, with “a burning star in the frozen cloud” above the ice pinnacles.
- “brilliant as five-pointed Arcturus”: Arcturus is the brightest star in the northern constellation of Bootes. “Canst thou guide Arcturus with his sons?” (Job 38:32, KJV). See Astronomy and The Bible.
- “old walruses sitting upon gilded chairs of the fin de siecle period”: Fin de siècle, “end of the century,” names the 1890s, with their sense of an age ending in elegance and decay. Compare the Walrus of Lewis Carroll’s “The Walrus and the Carpenter” (Through the Looking-Glass, 1871).
- “glass harmonicas”: Benjamin Franklin invented the glass armonica in 1761, a row of nested glass bowls turning on a spindle and played with wet fingers; Mozart wrote for it in 1791. See Music and Instruments.
- “for this was his swan song, his silent song, the swan being mute”: The mute swan is not truly mute; it hisses, snorts, and grunts. See the swan song in the Chapter 61 resources. See Birds.
- “there were great fiddler crabs following the boats”: The male fiddler crab has one enormous claw, which he waves like a fiddler’s bow to court females and warn off rivals. See The Sea and Water.
- “there was far away a viola da gamba faintly singing, preceding the violoncello”: The viola da gamba is a bowed, fretted string instrument that was popular during the Renaissance and Baroque periods and is held between the legs. It belongs to the viol family, is distinct from the cello, and typically has six or seven strings tuned in fourths

with a major third in the middle. Key features include frets on the fingerboard to aid intonation, a softer and brighter sound than a cello, and a flat back with sloping shoulders.
    - Violoncello (or cello) is a large, bowed string instrument in the violin family, played sitting down with the instrument held between the knees.
    - See the viola da gamba in the Chapter 60 resources.
- “flying naiads”: In Greek mythology, the naiads, sometimes also hydriads, are a type of female spirit, or nymph, presiding over fountains, wells, springs, streams, brooks and other bodies of fresh water. See Greek Mythology.
- “piccolos and hautboys”: The piccolo is a type of small, shrill woodwind instrument. The instrument is a small version of a flute played an octave higher.
    - The hautboy is an oboe or similar treble double reed instrument.
- “running coach dogs running silently”: The Dalmatian was the coach dog, bred to trot beside or beneath carriages and guard the horses; fire engines kept the custom. See Dogs and Horses and Carriages.
- “Hyperborean bees”: Hyperborean means a member of a people in Greek mythology who lived in perpetual sunshine. The Hyperboreans lived “beyond the North Wind,” Boreas. See Greek Mythology.
- “many golden cockerels flapping their wings and crowing on singing weathervanes”: Compare Rimsky-Korsakov’s opera The Golden Cockerel (first performed 1909), whose golden bird crows warnings from its perch. See Music and Composers and Birds.
- “phaeton shells”: Phaëton was the son of the sun god Helios (or Phoebus) in Greek mythology. He asked to prove his parentage by driving his father’s sun chariot, but his lack of skill caused the horses to run wild, burning the earth and creating deserts. Zeus eventually struck him with a thunderbolt to stop him. Horse-drawn light, open, four-wheeled carriage popular in the 18th and 19th centuries. It was owner-driven (no outside driver’s seat) and often had a folding top. An open-style car without fixed weather protection, similar to its horse-drawn predecessor. See Greek Mythology.
- “the faded music of the harpsichord”: The harpsichord is a keyboard instrument that produces sound by plucking strings with a plectrum when a key is pressed, unlike the piano which strikes strings with hammers. It was a dominant keyboard instrument during the Renaissance and Baroque eras and is known for its distinctive sound. See the harpsichord in the Chapter 60 resources.
- “the large-eyed squids staring at the paraselene”: A paraselene, moon dog, or mock moon is an atmospheric optical phenomenon which consists of a bright spot on one or both sides of a full moon.
    - Giant and colossal squids have the largest eyes of any animal, as big as dinner plates. See The Sea and Water.
- “he was the great conductor conducting the water music”: Handel’s Water Music was first played on a barge on the Thames in July 1717, for King George I, who had it

repeated three times. See Music and Composers.

- “like an osculating star he crossed the face of the moon”: When the moon passes in front of a star, astronomers call it an occultation; Young’s “osculating” means kissing. See Astronomy.
- “his largo”: Largo is an Italian term that means “slow and broad” and indicates a very slow tempo.
- “his barcarolle which was his elegy”: A barcarolle is a folk song of Venetian gondoliers, which is imitated in classical music to create a gently rocking rhythm, often in 6/8 or 12/8 time. The most famous examples are Jacques Offenbach’s “Barcarolle” from the opera The Tales of Hoffmann and Frédéric Chopin’s Barcarolle, Op. 60 for solo piano. See On the barcarolle and Music and Composers.
- “his body should be draped in the American flag though he had never fought in any war”: In the United States the custom of covering a soldier’s coffin with the flag spread during the Civil War; the government still gives a burial flag to veterans. See The Civil War.
- “instructions not to deliver the Boston Transcript”: The Boston Evening Transcript was a daily afternoon newspaper in Boston, Massachusetts, published from 1830 to 1941. It is no longer in publication, with its final issue printed on April 30, 1941.
    - T. S. Eliot satirized its readers in “The Boston Evening Transcript” (1915): “The readers of the Boston Evening Transcript / Sway in the wind like a field of ripe corn.” See American Writers.
- “The International Stamp Collector”: “The International Stamp Collector” and “The Society of Interplanetary Butterfly Lovers” appear to be Young’s inventions, gently comic versions of the hobby journals and collectors’ societies that flourished in the early twentieth century. Stamp collecting and butterfly collecting were both popular pastimes of the era, and both suit Mr. Spitzer’s habit of preserving fragile, fading things.
- “the secretive egg of some great bird like the sea gannet”: The sea gannet is a large seabird, most commonly referring to the Northern Gannet, known for its spectacular plunge-diving to catch fish. These birds are white with black and gold markings and spend their lives at sea, only coming to land to nest. See Birds.
- “two quarts of Pasteurized milk”: Pasteurized milk is milk that has been heated to kill harmful bacteria and other pathogens, making it safe to drink without risk of serious illness from harmful microbes. This process, named after Louis Pasteur, involves heating milk to a specific temperature for a set time, such as 145 degrees for 30 minutes or 161 degrees for 15 seconds, before cooling it down and packaging it. Pasteurization significantly extends shelf life and is the gold standard for milk safety, with most commercially available milk being pasteurized.
- “the Pledge of Allegiance”: The Pledge of Allegiance is a patriotic recited verse that promises allegiance to the flag of the United States and the republic of the United States. The first version was written in 1885 by Captain George Thatcher Balch, a

Union army officer in the Civil War who later authored a book on how to teach patriotism to children in public schools. In 1892, Francis Bellamy revised Balch's verse as part of a magazine promotion surrounding the World's Columbian Exposition, which celebrated the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas. Bellamy, the circulation manager for The Youth's Companion magazine, helped persuade then-president Benjamin Harrison to institute Columbus Day as a national holiday and lobbied Congress for a national school celebration of the day. The magazine sent leaflets containing part of Bellamy's Pledge of Allegiance to schools across the country and on October 21, 1892, over 10,000 children recited the verse together. Bellamy's version of the pledge is largely the same as the one formally adopted by Congress 50 years later, in 1942. The official name of The Pledge of Allegiance was adopted in 1945. The most recent alteration of its wording came on Flag Day (June 14) in 1954, when the words "under God" were added. However, Bellamy's authorship has been contested, as evidence has come out contradicting his claim. Several countries have a form of national pledge or oath, though the practice of daily, mandatory recitation in schools (as commonly associated with the US) is unusual by international standards. In many nations, oaths are typically reserved for specific occasions like citizenship ceremonies or for public officials.

- "author of the music of the spheres": See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres.
- "dance of the golden cock-of-the-rock": The cock-of-the-rock is a real bird of South American cloud forests; the brilliant orange males gather at leks, where they dance and display to win the females. See Birds.
    - The Andean cock-of-the-rock, the national bird of Peru, is a brilliant orange bird whose males gather to dance and display for the females.
- "graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music": The New England Conservatory of Music (NEC) was founded in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1867 by Eben Tourjée, making it the oldest independent music school in the United States. From its beginnings in a few rented rooms above the Boston Music Hall, the conservatory grew into a major music institution with a celebrated venue, Jordan Hall, which was granted National Historic Landmark status jointly with the NEC in 1994. Over its history, NEC has become a global leader in music education, known for its innovative approach and for attracting influential musicians as faculty and students.
- "North, Northwest of the Great Bear": Northwest of Ursa Major, the Great Bear, is the constellation Camelopardalis. Camelopardalis is a large, faint constellation that borders the northwestern part of the Great Bear. See Astronomy.
- "his brother's milky blue stone ring and ticking jeweled wrist watch": The right hand that signs the lawyer's will wears Peron's ring and Peron's ticking watch, while the left hand signs as the musician; the twins divide Mr. Spitzer's body between them. See Twins and Doubles.
- "Harvard graduate magna cum laude": Harvard University's history began in 1636 when the Massachusetts Bay Colony founded it as New College to train clergy. It was renamed Harvard College in 1639 after its first major benefactor, clergyman John

Harvard, and has since grown into the oldest institution of higher learning in the United States, renowned for its academic prestige, wealth, and influence.
    - At Harvard, graduating magna cum laude is a distinction awarded to students with “great distinction,” typically those in the top 15% of their class. It is a Latin honor determined by a combination of departmental recommendations for High or Highest Honors and college-wide GPA cutoffs, which are set annually.
- “never seen at a Pop concert in the Great Shell”: The Great Shell may be the Edward A. Hatch Memorial Shell, commonly called the Hatch Shell, an outdoor concert venue on the Charles River Esplanade in the Back Bay section of Boston, Massachusetts. Built in 1939-1940, it is one of the city’s prominent examples of Art Deco architecture. The Hatch Shell is best known for hosting the Boston Pops annually for the Boston Fourth of July celebration, but is also used for free concerts most weekends and many weeknights during the summer months. The grass pavilion in front of the stage has no permanent seating. There is a memorial nearby to Arthur Fiedler, first permanent conductor of the Pops.
    - Arthur Fiedler began the free Esplanade concerts in 1929 in an earlier wooden shell.
- “the pack rat who lined his papery nest”: The pack rat, or wood rat, is also called the trade rat, because it often drops what it is carrying to pick up something shinier, seeming to leave a fair exchange. See The Pack Rat.
- “greater than Haydn’s Creation”: Haydn’s Creation or The Creation is an oratorio written by Haydn and considered to be one of his masterpieces. It is a celebration of the creation of the world as in the Book of Genesis. See Genesis.
- “Johann Strauss’s Boston Dreams”: Johann Strauss’s Boston Dreams may refer to 1872 when Strauss visited America and Boston built a stadium that sat 100,000 people.
    - The 1872 event was Patrick Gilmore’s World’s Peace Jubilee, whose Coliseum was said to hold 100,000; Strauss conducted “The Blue Danube” there with an orchestra of more than a thousand.
- “Gustave Pick’s Fiacre Song”: Gustave Pick’s Fiacre Song may refer to Gustav Pick’s Fiakerlied which is a Viennese song. Pick wrote it in 1885, the song of a Viennese cab driver proud of his horses.
- “old trot, trot sheet music”: The “trot, trot” is the cab horse’s gait in Pick’s Fiakerlied, the song of a Viennese fiacre driver. See Horses and Carriages.
    - “old trot, trot sheet music” may refer to Trot, an old-style Korean pop music genre that emerged in the early 1900s, characterized by a repetitive, simple beat and ornamented, emotive vocals. It was influenced by Western dance styles like the foxtrot, Japanese enka, and Korean folk melodies, blending them into a unique style that expresses emotions like sadness, endurance, and hope.
- “songs for the gondolieri”: Gondolieri is the Italian word for the gondola boatmen of Venice.

    - Compare Gilbert and Sullivan's The Gondoliers (1889).
- "he was that poor skeleton sleeping in the oyster bed": See the skeleton with a missing rib in the Chapter 59 resources.
- "without expectations of emoluments": Emoluments are a salary, fee, or profit from employment or office.
- "given unto the generations": The public domain consists of all the creative work to which no exclusive intellectual property rights apply. Those rights may have expired, been forfeited, expressly waived, or may be inapplicable. There has been recent criticism of the current copyright laws in the US in that they do not help the public as they were meant to do but stifle creativity and scientific progress. One of the most famous examples is the copyrighted song Happy Birthday to You which a US Judge ruled invalid in 2015 (after 1964).
- "given by his mortmain, his dead hand": Mortmain, French for "dead hand," is a legal concept referring to the perpetual, inalienable ownership of land by a corporation, such as a church or charity. Historically, this practice was disfavored because it removed land from the feudal system and deprived lords of valuable feudal incidents. To curb this, Statutes of Mortmain were enacted to regulate or prohibit the transfer of land to corporations without a license. See On mortmain.
- "the constellation Orion": Orion is a constellation visible globally and features the famous Orion's Belt. The Orion Nebula, a stellar nursery within it, is one of the brightest in the sky. In Greek myth, Orion was a giant and mighty hunter. His death story varies, but most legends involve his death by the bow of Artemis or a scorpion's sting, after which he was placed in the heavens. See On Orion, Taurus, the Pleiades, the Hyades, Astronomy, and Greek Mythology.
    - Taurus: In astrology, Taurus (April 20-May 20) is the second sign of the zodiac, representing the bull and associated with being grounded, practical, and sensual. As a constellation, it's one of the oldest and most recognizable in the night sky, visible in the Northern Hemisphere and home to the Pleiades and Hyades star clusters.
    - The Pleiades, also known as the Seven Sisters, refers to both a prominent star cluster in the constellation Taurus and the seven daughters of Atlas and Pleione in Greek mythology. The star cluster is about 100 million years old and consists of thousands of stars, with six or seven visible to the naked eye. Its bright blue stars and visibility in the winter night sky have made it a significant feature in cultures around the world for centuries.
    - The Hyades, mythological sisters, were associated with rain, and after their brother Hyas died, they were transformed into the star cluster, which also became known as "the Rainy Ones." The star cluster is the closest one to Earth, appears as a V-shape that forms the face of Taurus, and includes the bright star Aldebaran (though Aldebaran is not a true member).
    - See the Pleiades in the Chapter 60 resources.

- “east of almighty Taurus like a great wentletrap”: Wentletraps are small, often white, very high-spired, predatory or ectoparasitic sea snails, marine gastropod mollusks in the family Epitoniidae. The word wentletrap originated in Dutch, and it means spiral staircase. These snails are sometimes also called “staircase shells,” and “ladder shells.” Precious wentletraps once sold for great sums, and Chinese counterfeits are said to have been molded from rice paste. See The Sea and Water.
- “pearl-bordered fritillaries”: Fritillaries are a type of butterfly and a genus of flowering plants known for their checkered patterns. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “his coronachs”: A coronach is a song or hymn of mourning composed or performed as a memorial to a dead person.
    - “He is gone on the mountain, / He is lost to the forest” (Sir Walter Scott, “Coronach,” The Lady of the Lake, 1810). See Romantic Poets.
- “screaming coradicorns”: Young’s “coradicorns” are likely the Coraciiformes, the order of rollers, kingfishers, bee-eaters, and motmots, in which hornbills and hoopoes were also long classed. See Birds.
    - Coradicorn may refer to a cormorant, which is an aquatic bird.
- “hornbills, hoopoes, motmots”: The hoopoe leads the birds on their pilgrimage in Attar’s Conference of the Birds (1177), and in Aristophanes’s The Birds it is the transformed king Tereus. See Cloudcuckooland in the Chapter 61 resources. See Birds.
- “maps of wandering Cocytus”: Cocytus is the river of wailing in the underworld in Greek mythology. In Dante’s Inferno it is a lake of ice holding the traitors (Cantos 32-34). See Dante and Greek Mythology.
- “old Polish kings who had been deposed”: The line of Polish kings spans from the first crowned king, Bolesław I the Brave, in 1025, to the last elected king of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Key dynasties include the Piast dynasty, which ruled from the kingdom’s founding until 1370, followed by the Jagiellonian dynasty after 1386. A significant aspect of Polish monarchy was the elective monarchy, where kings were chosen by the nobility, a unique system in Europe from the 16th to the 18th centuries.
- “old Laplander emperors”: There is no historical record of “Laplander emperors” because Lapland (Sápmi) was never an independent empire with its own emperors. The term “Laplander” is outdated, and the indigenous Sámi people are historically part of the regions now known as Finland, Sweden, Norway, and Russia. Historically, the region was loosely governed by various authorities, and as part of larger empires like Sweden and Russia, its administration was managed by those states.
- “old Siberian kings”: There was no unified “Siberian monarchy” or single line of “Siberian kings” in the modern sense. Instead, Siberian rulers were organized into various khanates, with the most prominent being the Khanate of Sibir, ruled by competing dynasties like the Taibugids and Shaybanids. The most famous “Siberian king” in this context was Khan Kuchum, the last ruler of the Khanate of Sibir, who was defeated by the Cossack Yermak Timofeyevich, leading to the Russian conquest of the region. The House of Sibirsky was the foremost of many Genghisid families formerly

living in Russia. It traced its descent from Kuchum, the last of the Siberian khans. Kuchum's sons were captured by Yermak's Cossacks and brought to Muscovy, where they were settled in Yaroslavl and other towns and were authorized to style themselves Tsarevichs of Siberia. Kuchum's grandson Alp-Arslan was even installed as a puppet khan of Kasimov between 1614 and 1627. In 1591, the son of Kuchum, Abul Khayir was the first of his dynasty to convert to Christianity. His conversion was followed by the conversion of his entire family who eventually assimilated into the Russian nobility. In 1686, the tsar decreed that the dynasties of the king of Imeretia in the Caucasus along with the princes of Siberia and Kasimov were to be entered into the Genealogical Book of the Russian nobility. The tsarevichs married into the best Russian families. One of their princesses was the wife of Peter the Great's maternal uncle, another married a son of the Georgian king.

- "Queen Victoria in her youth": Queen Victoria's youth was marked by a highly isolated upbringing under the "Kensington System," a set of strict rules designed to keep her under the control of her mother and her advisor, Sir John Conroy. Born in 1819, she lived at Kensington Palace, had few companions her own age, and was not allowed to be alone. Despite her controlled childhood, she pursued hobbies like painting, drawing, writing in her diary, and singing.
  - The Penny Black, the first postage stamp (1840), bore Victoria's profile as a girl, and British stamps kept that young head until her death in 1901.
  - "The great Consort in his age" is Prince Albert, who died in 1861 at forty-two.
- "the Leaning Tower of Pisa": Construction started in 1173 on the bell tower for the Pisa Cathedral. It began to lean by 1178 after the third floor was completed, due to a weak, shallow foundation on soft, sandy soil. Construction halted for nearly a century, a delay that allowed the soil to settle and prevented its early collapse. The tower was completed in 1372 after architects attempted to compensate for the lean by making the upper floors taller on one side. Modern efforts in the 1990s stabilized the tower and reduced its tilt to about 4 degrees, a lean that is now intentionally preserved.
- "several Russian Imperials and Kolokol": "Russian Imperials" refers to the Russian Empire, a vast Eurasian state that existed from 1721 to 1917, ruled by autocratic emperors known as "czars" or "tsars." It was the third-largest empire in history and encompassed a wide array of ethnicities, religions, and cultures, governed by a system that often maintained a degree of local autonomy under a centralized bureaucracy. The empire's history is defined by significant expansion, internal reforms, and eventual collapse during the Russian Revolution of 1917, which was exacerbated by its participation in World War I.
  - "Kolokol" is a Russian word for "bell" and can refer to several things, including the historical newspaper Kolokol edited by Alexander Herzen, the Kolokol Group of volcanoes in Russia's Kuril Islands, the Tsar Bell (also called Tsar Kolokol) in the Moscow Kremlin, or an incapacitating agent known as Kolokol-1. (The incapacitating agent is after 1964.)

- “crowned griffins”: “Crowned griffins” may refer to a symbol of power in heraldry and art, an emblem used for regions like Kashubia, or a creature with a crown in a specific context like a game or a piece of jewelry. The griffin itself is a mythical beast with the body of a lion and the head and wings of an eagle, symbolizing majesty and strength, which is then further emphasized by the addition of a crown. See Greek Mythology.
- “the first flight of the Wright brothers”: The Wright brothers made the first controlled, sustained flight of a powered, heavier-than-air aircraft on December 17, 1903, at Kill Devil Hills near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The first flight, piloted by Orville, lasted 12 seconds and covered 120 feet, while the longest flight of the day (piloted by Wilbur) lasted 59 seconds and traveled 852 feet. This event, achieved after four years of research and trials, is considered the birth of the aviation age.
- “a Greek drachma of the period of Theseus”: The drachma was the official currency of modern Greece from 1832 until the launch of the euro in 2001. The ancient silver drachma was struck from the sixth century BC; Theseus, a hero of legend, is older than any coin, which is Young’s joke. See Greek Mythology.
- “a coin of the Guelf”: The coin of the Guelf may refer to the first coin of its type introduced in Florence AD 1252 during the turbulent period of clashes between Guelphs and Ghibellines in the Italian city-states of central and northern Italy.
- “several cordobas”: The córdoba is the currency of Nicaragua, created in 1912 in the honour of Francisco Hernández de Córdoba, one of the Spanish captains who conquered those lands.
- “American dimes with the head of the Liberty girl”: The Liberty girl dime may refer to the Mercury dime or Winged Liberty Head dime used between 1916 and 1945.
- “all the way from here to Concord”: Concord may refer to Concord, Massachusetts, a historic town famous for being the site of the first battle of the American Revolutionary War.
- “He had sprinkled the paper with dust almost as brilliant as mica”: Mica is a group of silicate minerals. It is known for its ability to be split into thin, flexible, and elastic sheets and is used in various industries, including electronics and makeup. Mica powder is a shimmer-producing powder used in cosmetics, crafts, and other products.
    - Before blotting paper, writers dried wet ink by shaking fine sand, called pounce, from a sander over the page.
- “entries and double entries”: Double-entry bookkeeping, in which every sum is entered twice so the books balance, was first set out in print by Luca Pacioli in 1494.
- “He could not count on his abacus”: An abacus is a manual calculator with beads that slide on rods, used for performing arithmetic calculations. It has been used for centuries and comes in various forms, including the classic Chinese Suan-Pan and a version designed for blind users. While largely replaced by electronic calculators, it is still used today for educational purposes, teaching children math, and is favored by some experts for its speed.

- “had not many great composers written their works with visual patterns none could play”: Compare eye music, written to be seen rather than heard: Baude Cordier’s chanson “Belle, bonne, sage” (c. 1400) is written in the shape of a heart, and Renaissance composers blackened their notes for words of night and death. See Music and Composers.
- “drifting mackerel clouds”: A mackerel sky is dappled with small clouds like the markings of a mackerel; “Mackerel sky and mares’ tails / Make lofty ships carry low sails.”
- “the street music of the dead cities”: Nineveh was a major ancient city and the capital of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, located on the eastern bank of the Tigris River, across from modern-day Mosul, Iraq. It was a significant cultural and political center, known for its development of public squares, parks, and botanical gardens, and is also famous from biblical accounts in the Book of Jonah. The city flourished under kings like Sennacherib, who made it the capital around 705 B.C., but was ultimately destroyed in 612 B.C. by a coalition of Babylonians and Medes.
    - Tyre is a city in Lebanon, and one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. It was one of the earliest Phoenician metropolises and the legendary birthplace of Europa, her brothers Cadmus and Phoenix, and Carthage’s founder Dido.
    - Ur of the Chaldees refers to the ancient Sumerian city of Ur, located near the Euphrates River in modern-day southern Iraq, which is identified as the birthplace of Abraham in the Bible. The name “Chaldees” is a reference to the Chaldeans, a people who later became influential in the region and are linked to this city in the biblical text. The site was extensively excavated by Sir Leonard Woolley in the early 20th century, revealing a prosperous city with advanced culture, architecture, and a famous ziggurat. Woolley dug up the city between 1922 and 1934. “And they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees” (Genesis 11:31, KJV).
    - Carthage was the ancient Punic city and empire in North Africa that was Rome’s rival and is now a UNESCO World Heritage site. The ancient city was a major power in the ancient Mediterranean that ultimately clashed with Rome during the Punic Wars.
    - “Lo, all our pomp of yesterday / Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!” (Rudyard Kipling, “Recessional,” 1897).
    - See Babylon, Nineveh, and Tyre in the Chapter 61 resources.
- “cities under the frozen sand of the Great Gobi Desert”: The Great Gobi Desert of Outer Mongolia refers to the Gobi Desert, a large desert and semi-desert region in southern Mongolia and northern China that is home to extreme temperatures, diverse landscapes, and unique wildlife. It is not entirely a sandy desert but features mountains, steppes, and former lakes, and is surprisingly rich in biodiversity, including the critically endangered wild Bactrian camel and Gobi bear. Historically, it was part of the Mongol Empire and a key route on the Silk Road, and today it is known for its significant dinosaur fossil discoveries.

    - Pyotr Kozlov found the ruined city of Khara-Khoto in the Gobi in 1908, and Roy Chapman Andrews's expeditions of the 1920s found dinosaur eggs there.
- "the echoic ivory maiden Galatea": In Greek mythology, Galatea was the name of the following figures: 1) a Nereid who loved the shepherd Acis, and was loved by the cyclops Polyphemus. 2) the post-antiquity name given to the statue of a woman created by Pygmalion and brought to life by Aphrodite. 3) daughter of Eurytius, son of Sparton. She married a man of good family but poor, Lamprus. When she became pregnant, Lamprus wished to have a son and told her to expose the child if it turned out to be a girl. Galatea gave birth to a girl while Lamprus was away, so she, with the advice of seers and her own dreams, told Lamprus that the baby was male, and named her Leucippus. As Leucippus grew older, her true sex became harder and harder to conceal, so Galatea went to the sanctuary of Leto and prayed to the goddess to change her daughter into a man. Leto took pity on mother and daughter and made Leucippus an actual man. See Greek Mythology.
- "From all his musical rags, future musicians must stitch together a musical coat": Compare the philosophy of clothes in Thomas Carlyle's Sartor Resartus (1831), "the tailor retailored." See The Great Tailor and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- "Surely, however, he should not be discouraged by his failures": This long paragraph conveys a powerful meditation on the persistence of creative spirit and identity beyond loss and failure. Mr. Spitzer's music, though complex, fragmented, and often unheard, represents an eternal, multifaceted expression of life, death, and memory. His struggle is both deeply personal and cosmic, entwined with the universal rhythms of nature and time.
- "the sentinel dolphin dying": See Byron's dying dolphin in the Chapter 56 resources. See Romantic Poets.
- "wild screamings of stormy petrels": Sailors named the storm petrel for Saint Peter, because it seems to walk on the water as it feeds (Matthew 14:29). See Birds.
- "common measures and alia breves": Alla breve is a time signature indicating 2 or 4 half-note beats in a bar.
    - An appoggiatura is a musical embellishment that is approached by a leap and resolved by a step to a consonant pitch. It creates temporary tension by being dissonant against the underlying harmony and is typically played on a strong beat, before resolving to the main, or "principal," note. Unlike the very quick acciaccatura, the appoggiatura steals a significant portion of the main note's duration, often taking about half the value.
- "dreams of fishes sleeping in anemones like birds in nests": Clownfish live among the stinging tentacles of sea anemones, protected by a coat of mucus. See The Sea and Water.
- "forfended by other music": To forfend is to avert, keep away, prevent, or protect.
- "there was quinquevalent music": Quinquevalent music is a rare or specialized term, with several interpretations: 1) in a theoretical or philosophical context, it has been

mentioned in discussions about musical multiplicity, specifically as “music of five roads” or “five ways.” This suggests a conceptual framework for music that explores five different paths or dimensions, likely within a specific, non-mainstream musical theory or artistic project. 2) a more general interpretation relates to the prefix “quinquevalent” (meaning having a valence of five) and the musical term “quintet” (a group of five musicians or a piece of music for five performers). 3) the term “quinquevalent” itself is primarily used in chemistry and medicine (referring to a valence of five or a vaccine with five components). It is not standard music terminology.

- “if all times were simultaneities of all times”: Compare T. S. Eliot: “Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future” (“Burnt Norton,” 1936). See Time and American Writers.
- “loon soul crying as the light faded”: The common loon’s wailing night call carries for miles across northern lakes. See Birds.
- “add to his music of aubade and serenade his nocturne”: Aubade is a song or poem that greets the dawn, traditionally a morning love song about lovers parting at daybreak. The term, from the Old Occitan word auba meaning “dawn,” can also refer to morning music or a song sung outdoors at dawn as a compliment. The concept has been used in literature for centuries, notably in medieval France, and also appears as a subject for visual art, like the Picasso painting The Aubade. “It was the nightingale, and not the lark” (William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, 3.5). See On the aubade and Shakespeare.
    - The piano nocturne was invented by John Field in 1812 and perfected by Chopin.
- “pagoda umbrellas”: See The Umbrella.
- “signs of alchemic gold”: The alchemists wrote their metals in signs: gold the sun, silver the moon, quicksilver Mercury, lead Saturn. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.
- “sign of Uranus and sign of Pluto”: Uranus is the seventh planet from the Sun, a tilted “ice giant” with at least 28 moons and faint rings. It is a cold, blue-green planet primarily composed of water, ammonia, and methane, and is known for its extreme axial tilt which causes long periods of continuous daylight and darkness at its poles. In mythology, Uranus was the Greek god of the sky. William Herschel, an oboist and composer before he was an astronomer, discovered it in 1781.
    - Pluto, a dwarf planet in the Kuiper Belt, was reclassified from a planet in 2006 because it did not meet all the criteria for a full-sized planet. It was the first Kuiper Belt object discovered, and NASA’s New Horizons mission provided the first close-up images in 2015. (2006 is after 1964.) Clyde Tombaugh discovered Pluto in 1930.
- “sign of Sagittarius the Golden Archer”: Sagittarius, the Golden Archer, is the ninth astrological sign, associated with those born between approximately November 22 and December 21. Ruled by the planet Jupiter, it is a Fire sign represented by the Archer, or a centaur, who is often depicted aiming a bow and arrow. People born under this sign are known for being adventurous, optimistic, honest, and freedom-loving, though they can sometimes be impatient and blunt. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.

- “sign of the Southern Cross”: The Southern Cross is an asterism of the Crux constellation, made up of four or five bright stars that form a distinctive cross shape. It is a key navigational tool for finding the direction south and is prominently featured on the flags of several southern hemisphere countries, including Australia and New Zealand. It is one of the smallest and most easily recognized constellations in the southern night sky. See Astronomy.
- “fugacious as flowers falling soon after blooming”: Fugacious means tending to disappear; fleeting.
- “clouds of dogtooth violets”: The dogtooth violet is a bulbous herbaceous perennial flowering plant in the family Liliaceae, growing to 25 cm. It is native to central and southern Europe from Portugal to Ukraine. It is the only naturally occurring species of Erythronium in Europe.
    - America’s dogtooth violet is the trout lily (Erythronium americanum), named for its mottled leaves.
- “music of his checkrein”: A checkrein, or bearing rein, is a piece of horse tack that controls the horse’s head position.
    - Anna Sewell’s Black Beauty (1877) was written partly to end the cruelty of the bearing rein, which held a horse’s head painfully high. See Horses and Carriages.
- “flying notes of caprioles”: The capriole is a movement performed in classical riding, in which the horse leaps from the ground and kicks out with its hind legs.
    - The Lipizzaner stallions of Vienna’s Spanish Riding School still perform the capriole.
- “song of the clew lines”: Clew lines are ropes used to haul the clews (the corners) of a square sail up to the yard, which is necessary for furling and reefing it. They run from the clews, often through blocks and fairleads, to the deck, allowing the crew to pull the sail up from below.
- “apivorous birds”: Apivorous is an adjective that means “feeding on bees.” It describes animals, particularly birds, that eat bees as a food source. Bee-eaters and the honey buzzard are among them. See Birds.
- “Pavanne for a Dead Lady”: Compare Maurice Ravel’s Pavane pour une infante défunte, “Pavane for a Dead Princess” (1899). See Music and Composers.
- “Elegy for a Frog Eating a Firefly”: The polar bear and butterfly symbolize dormancy and rebirth, the iceberg music the hidden depths of experience, and the celestial notes the universal and eternal dimensions of art and memory.
    - See the frog’s funeral in the Chapter 61 resources. See Fireflies.
- “Note to Aldebaran”: Aldebaran is the red eye of Taurus the bull, near the Hyades. See Astronomy.
- “Small Burden for a Pack Rat”: A burden is the refrain of a song. See The Pack Rat.
- “the great wind horn, water horn, submarine flower winding around his neck”: Compare the helicon and the sousaphone, brass basses that wrap around the player’s body. See Music and Instruments.

- “until death did them part”: “Till death us do part,” from the marriage service of the Book of Common Prayer. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “had given him tuberculosis of the lungs”: Tuberculosis, the “white plague,” killed about one in seven of all people in nineteenth-century Europe and America; streptomycin, the first drug to cure it, came in 1943.
- “Blow on, horn-blower, blow on!”: Compare Tennyson: “Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying, / Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying” (The Princess, 1850). See Romantic Poets.
- “He knew a clarinetist who had committed suicide”: This paragraph uses the story of the clarinetist to illustrate themes of alienation, the quest for perfection, the impact of internal fears, and the possibility of transcendence through art or death. The kaleidoscopic imagery and the layering of real and symbolic witnesses enrich the text’s meditation on existence, while the clarinetist’s tragic end embodies the human longing for harmony and the fear of being “out of tune” in the grand symphony of life. See On the clarinetist’s greater orchestra and Suicide in History and Literature.
- “the dormer roof of a Gloucester boarding house”: Gloucester, Massachusetts, is the old fishing port of Rudyard Kipling’s Captains Courageous (1897).
- “even as the manifest dream concealed that hidden dream”: Freud distinguished the manifest content of a dream, what the dreamer remembers, from its latent content, the hidden wish it disguises (The Interpretation of Dreams, 1899). See Freud and Jung.
- “star coral”: Star coral can refer to several types of reef-building stony corals, such as the mountainous, lobed, or boulder star corals, or to other less common corals like the ORA Asterospicularia or Northern Star Coral. These corals form large, complex colonies with star-shaped polyps and are found in various reef environments, with many species now facing threats from climate change.
    - The dogwinkle, dog whelk, dogwhelk, or Atlantic dogwinkle is a species of predatory sea snail, a carnivorous marine gastropod in the family Muricidae, the rock snails. Nucella lapillus was originally described by Carl Linnaeus in his landmark 1758 10th edition of Systema Naturae as Buccinum lapillus.
    - The scallop shell is the traditional emblem of St. James the Great, one of the apostles of Jesus and the patron saint of Spain and pilgrims. In medieval times, pilgrims who completed the journey to the shrine of St. James at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Galicia, Spain, would collect a scallop shell from the coast as a souvenir and proof of their accomplishment. They would wear the shell on their hat or cloak. The scallop shell is widely used today as a wayfinding symbol along the Camino de Santiago routes, often painted in yellow on a blue background on milestones and signs to guide pilgrims to their destination. The shell’s grooves, all converging at a central point, are seen as a metaphor for the many different paths pilgrims take from all over the world, all leading to the single destination of St. James’ tomb. The shell was also used by pilgrims as a practical utensil for gathering water to drink or as a makeshift bowl for food, which they might request from homes along the way. The red cross often painted on the shell is the Cross of Saint James

(Cruz de Santiago), which is linked to medieval crusaders and Spanish military orders. The shell itself is a universal symbol for “weary travelers” and the “crusaders of the Order of St. James.”

- “like the fringes of a fringe-topped surrey”: Compare “The Surrey with the Fringe on Top,” from Rodgers and Hammerstein’s Oklahoma! (1943).
- “sand dollars as big as dinner plates”: See the sand dollar in the Chapter 60 resources.
- “anything which was worth happening at all was worth happening twice”: Compare Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence, the thought that this very life must be lived again innumerable times (The Gay Science, 341, 1882). See Nietzsche.
- “the recording angel”: See Sterne’s recording angel in the Chapter 55 resources.
- “the long white Stein-kirk”: See the Steinkirk scarf in the Chapter 56 resources. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “he had stood on the Library steps and had watched that old violinist”: Library steps may refer to the Library Company of Philadelphia, founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1731 as America’s first successful lending library, and the Free Library of Philadelphia, chartered in 1891, with its central branch opening in 1927.
  - If Mr. Spitzer is in Boston, as he learns in Louisburg Square, the steps may be those of the Boston Public Library on Copley Square (1895).
  - See The Old Violinist and the Chapter 58 resources.
- “four horse hairs drawn from the tail of a white Siberian horse”: A violin bow is strung with 150 to 200 hairs from the tails of white stallions, the best long held to come from Siberia and Mongolia. See Music and Instruments.
- “planets singing together”: “When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7, KJV). See The Bible.
- “a member of the Philadelphia Symphony”: The Philadelphia Orchestra was founded in 1900 by Fritz Scheel, evolving into one of America’s most prominent symphony orchestras. Key figures in its history include conductors Leopold Stokowski and Eugene Ormandy, who shaped its sound and recorded extensively. The orchestra is known for its history of innovation, including being a leader in orchestral recordings and tours, and for forging a close relationship with composer Sergei Rachmaninoff. See On the Philadelphia Orchestra and Music and Composers.
- “even as an Ishmael among men”: Ishmael was the son of Abraham and his concubine, Hagar, born before Abraham’s son Isaac with his wife Sarah. He is a significant figure in the Hebrew Bible, where his descendants are said to be numerous, and he is traditionally seen as the patriarch of the Arab people. Key events in his life include being the son whose birth was prophesied to Hagar and Abraham, being sent away with his mother, and later helping to bury his father, Abraham.
  - “He will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him” (Genesis 16:12, KJV). Melville’s outcast narrator begins, “Call me Ishmael” (Moby-Dick, 1851). See Genesis and American Writers.

- “The death’s-head smiling, inviting pity for the moth”: The death’s-head hawkmoth carries a skull on its back and squeaks when handled. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “cubes and cubes and cubes”: See Cubism in the Chapter 60 resources.
- “the tailor who sat cross-legged in the door of the moon”: See The Great Tailor.
- “crossing Louisburg Square”: Louisburg Square is a street in the Beacon Hill neighborhood of Boston, Massachusetts, bisected by a small private park. The park is bounded by Pinckney Street to the north and Mount Vernon Street to the south.
  - Louisa May Alcott spent her last years at No. 10, and William Dean Howells lived at No. 4. See American Writers.
- “My God! I thought I was in Philadelphia”:
  - Compare W. C. Fields’s mock epitaph, “On the whole, I’d rather be in Philadelphia” (Vanity Fair, 1925).

Vocabulary

Abacus

A frame with beads on wires, used for counting.

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Anvil

The heavy iron block on which a blacksmith hammers hot metal into shape.

Apivorous

Bee-eating.

Apogee

The point in an orbit farthest from the earth.

Appoggiatura

A grace note that leans on the main note before resolving to it.

Ashes of roses

A grayish pink; also a scent of roses.

Aubade

A morning song or poem, often of lovers parting at dawn.

Barcarolle

A Venetian gondolier’s song, or music in its gentle rocking rhythm.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Bemused

Puzzled and lost in thought.

Bill of lading

A receipt a shipper gives for goods taken on board, listing the cargo.

Breve

A musical note twice the length of a whole note.

Burden

The refrain of a song; also a load.

Cadaverous

Pale and gaunt, like a corpse.

Calker

Also caulker. A worker who seals the seams of a wooden ship to make it watertight.

Candelabra

A branched candlestick.

Capriole

An upward leap of a trained horse, kicking out its hind legs.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Checkrein

A rein that keeps a horse from lowering its head.

Clef

A sign at the start of a staff fixing the pitch of the notes.

Clew line

A rope that hauls the corner of a square sail up to its yard.

Coexistent

Existing at the same time.

Cognizance

Awareness; notice.

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Cordage

Ropes, especially the rigging of a ship.

Coronach

A Scottish or Irish funeral lament.

Crescendo

A gradual increase in loudness.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Deference

Polite respect, or yielding to someone else’s wishes or judgment.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Despotic

Tyrannical.

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Drachma

A silver coin of ancient Greece.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Echoic

Echoing.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Emolument

A salary or fee.

Empearled

Adorned with pearls, or having a pearly sheen.

Enigma

A mystery or puzzle; a person or thing that is hard to understand.

Ephemeral

Lasting a very short time.

Escrow

Property held by a third party until a condition is met.

Estuary

The wide mouth of a river, where fresh water meets the tide.

Evanescent

Quickly fading or vanishing.

Fin de siècle

The end of the nineteenth century, with its sense of an age closing in elegance and decay.

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Forfend

To ward off; to forbid.

Freighter

A ship that carries cargo.

Fritillary

A butterfly with orange wings checked with black, often silver-spotted beneath.

Fugacious

Fleeting; falling soon.

Fugue

A composition in which one theme is taken up in turn by several voices; also a flight from one's own identity.

Gannet

A large white seabird that dives for fish.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Griffin

A mythical beast with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Harpsichord

A keyboard instrument, ancestor of the piano, whose strings are plucked rather than struck.

Hautboy

An old name for the oboe.

Helm

The wheel or tiller that steers a ship.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Infinitesimal

Extremely small.

Inkhorn

A small portable ink pot, once made of horn.

Lagoon

A stretch of shallow water separated from the sea by a reef or sandbar.

Largo

In music, very slow and broad.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mica

A mineral that splits into thin, shiny, nearly transparent sheets and makes rock glitter.

Moonstone

A milky, pearly-blue gemstone.

Mortmain

“Dead hand”; ownership that can never be passed on.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mundane

Ordinary; of this world.

Naiad

A nymph of springs, streams, and fountains.

Nocturne

A dreamy piece of music suggesting the night.

Oilskin

Cloth made waterproof with oil; a raincoat of it.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Overture

An orchestral piece that opens an opera or other work.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Pall

A cloth spread over a coffin; anything dark that covers.

Paradox

A statement or situation that seems to contradict itself and yet may be true.

Parallelogram

A four-sided figure whose opposite sides are parallel.

Paraselene

A mock moon; a bright spot beside the moon seen through thin cloud.

Pariah

An outcast.

Pavane

A slow, stately court dance.

Perigee

The point in an orbit nearest the earth.

Phaeton

A light, open, four-wheeled carriage; also a name for some seashells.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Plumed

Decorated with feathers.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Purlieus

Outskirts; haunts.

Quinquevalent

Having five valences; Young’s music of five roads.

Quitclaim

A legal release of a claim or right.

Requiem

A Mass or song for the dead.

Retort

A glass vessel with a long bent neck, used by alchemists for distilling.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Saffron

Orange-yellow, the color of the spice.

Sand dollar

A flat, round sea urchin whose white skeleton is found on beaches.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Segno

A sign in written music marking where a repeat begins or ends.

Sentinel

A guard or watchman.

Sequin

A small shining disk sewn on clothing; first the zecchino, a Venetian gold coin.

Sonorous

Deep and full in sound.

Spume

Foam or froth on the sea.

Steeplejack

One who climbs and repairs steeples and chimneys.

Surrey

A light four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with two seats, often with a fringed canopy on top.

Tallow

Animal fat used for candles and soap. Tallow-colored is a dull, yellowish white.

Tenuto

A mark telling the player to hold a note its full value.

Thimble

A small cap worn on the finger to push the needle in sewing.

Tine

A prong or point, as of an antler or fork.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Tumultuous

Loud, wild, and disorderly.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Vaporous

Full of mist or vapor.

Viola da gamba

The bass viol, an old fretted string instrument held between the knees.

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Wentletrap

A sea snail whose shell winds like a spiral staircase.

Whaler

A whaling ship or a man who hunts whales.

Zenith

The highest point.

Chapter 63

Summary

At breakfast the morning after her dream, Vera tries to see Miss MacIntosh as she always has: the Rock of Ages, the plain, red-haired nursemaid of common sense who scolds the tide, hates the Emperor Constantine for changing the calendar, and rails against Benjamin Franklin and the electric lights that have robbed the poor of the dark. But Vera has seen her bald in the night. She strikes the table and demands the truth: Miss MacIntosh wears a wig and has neither eyebrows nor eyelashes. Miss MacIntosh answers in grief and wild humor, by way of Canute and Constantine, Jonas Hanway and the umbrella that made every man his own coachman, and the brothers who called her George, and at last she lifts off her red wig. She is bald, her left breast is gone, and she was broke when she first came, which is why they saved the electric lights. Vera promises always to love her. Miss MacIntosh tells her to eat her breakfast, that people are never quite what they seem, that nobody knows anybody, and that she suffers especially when there are rainbows.

Characters present

Miss MacIntosh · Vera Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Fog and Mist · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Mirrors and Reflections · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Marguerite Young on Her Craft

Allusions: Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Ecclesiastes · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Milton · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, Miss MacIntosh is described as a figure of unwavering common sense and moral clarity amid chaos and illusion. She is portrayed as the “Rock of Ages in a land where all things crumbled,” the “surefooted Pilgrim,” and the “one person never dreaming where all might dream.” This passage highlights her steadfastness and practical nature, contrasting with the fog and illusions surrounding them.

- A substantial and vivid passage details Miss MacIntosh's intense dislike for electric lights, reflecting her preference for natural darkness and simplicity. She associates electric lights with loss of privacy, artificiality, and moral decay. This passage also reflects her nostalgia and resistance to the encroachment of modern technology and the disruption of natural rhythms.
- A critical dialogue occurs between Vera and Miss MacIntosh, where Vera confronts her about the "hollow pretense" of their living situation and demands honesty about the nature of their relationship. Vera accuses Miss MacIntosh of deception and questions whether they are truly bound to each other, expressing a desire to understand what she wants and lacks. This exchange is charged with emotional intensity and existential questioning.
- One of the most poignant moments is when Miss MacIntosh removes her wig, revealing her baldness, which she describes as a source of deep personal embarrassment and symbol of her vulnerability and the "burned wig" shielding her from life's harsh elements. This act strips away illusion and forces a confrontation with bare reality, emphasizing themes of identity, appearance versus essence, and mortality.
- Miss MacIntosh offers a bleak yet humorous meditation on life's disappointments, the inevitability of death, and the "system of mutual deception" that love often entails. She speaks with a mixture of bitterness and dark humor about her past, the failures of God and creation, and the futility of illusions.
- Miss MacIntosh discusses the umbrella as a symbol of equality and protection, tracing its history from the Orient to England and its social implications. She also mentions the raincoat as a practical item for the poor, underscoring her concern for everyday realities and the working classes. This passage blends historical anecdotes with social commentary.
- Toward the end of the chapter, despite all the darkness and despair, Miss MacIntosh exhorts Vera to "be of good cheer," acknowledging that "we are pilgrims" with a long day ahead. She urges living each day as if it were the last, knitting body and soul together even as they unravel. This passage encapsulates the chapter's tension between despair and endurance, illusion and reality.
- In the final lines, Miss MacIntosh offers a sober reflection that "people are never quite what they seem" and "nobody knows anybody," underscoring the chapter's themes of uncertainty, deception, and the limits of human understanding.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Vera calls Miss MacIntosh "the Rock of Ages in a land where all things crumbled." How does the opening portrait prepare for its own undoing?
- "I would have loved the imperfection because I could not love perfection." What does Vera discover about love?

- Miss MacIntosh says love “is a system of mutual deception.” Is she bitter, or honest?

Characters

- “Most especially, for reasons never quite known, the Emperor Constantine was anathema to her.” Why might Miss MacIntosh hate the emperor who made Christianity the empire’s faith?
- “My elder brothers called me George.” What does the chapter suggest about how Miss MacIntosh has lived between the roles given to women and to men?
- Vera says, “I will always love you, and I will never part from you.” Miss MacIntosh answers, “Though I be parted from myself.” What is she telling Vera?

Connections

- Vera is still thinking of “Miss MacIntosh’s marriage to Mr. Spitzer in that vasty deep.” How does the Spitzer dream carry into this breakfast?
- Miss MacIntosh hides “the missing breast which gave her the pain over which she long ago had triumphed simply by ignoring the pain.” How does her body tell a history the novel has kept hidden?
- “I was broke, and that was why we saved the electric lights.” How does this line change the rant against electric lights that came before?

Reflection

- “Nobody knows anybody.” Is it true?
- The umbrella, Miss MacIntosh says, “did more, over night, to bring equality than half a dozen revolutions.” Can an ordinary object change a society?
- Vera says, “We all have to assume a great many things are true when they are not true.” What do people live by that they know is not true?

Research: Characters

Miss MacIntosh

- Miss MacIntosh is described as the “Rock of Ages” in a crumbling world, a symbol of stability, clarity, and common sense.
- She embodies straightforwardness, rejecting illusions and fantasies, and insists on living within a “framework” of reality.
- Her physical appearance symbolizes her internal struggle: her ruddy hair like a “sunset burning with bees,” a broken nose, and eventually revealed baldness, all reflecting her life’s hardships and resilience.

- The black umbrella she carries indoors and out is, in Young's words, "a kind of canopy between her and reality. You don't get too close to her" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). It "always casts a shadow around her and forbids intimacy" (Marguerite Young, interview, WNYC radio, New York).
- Miss MacIntosh is a moral mentor and nursemaid figure who values practicality over imagination.
- She is skeptical of dreams, illusions, and modern distractions, such as electric lights, which she believes disturb natural life rhythms and privacy.
- She is combative and sharp, not hesitating to scold even divine figures like Emperor Constantine or God Himself for what she sees as excess or failure.
- Despite her stern exterior, she has a deep, incorruptible sense of humor and reveals moments of vulnerability, especially when discussing her baldness and personal losses.

Vera Cartwheel

- Vera narrates. Having seen Miss MacIntosh bald in the night, she wakes still half in the dream and for once rebels, striking the table so the cups jump and demanding the truth.
- Her cruelty turns at once to tenderness: once the wig is off she promises, "I will always love you, and I will never part from you," and she feels she will suffer all her life "the blows of conscience."

Research: Themes

Reality versus Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality

- Miss MacIntosh represents a rejection of illusions, emphasizing the importance of common sense and "just what was immediate and near."
- Vera struggles with this perspective, feeling trapped between dreams and the harshness of reality.
- The fog surrounding them symbolizes ambiguity, confusion, and the shifting nature of perception.
- The electric lights symbolize modern artificiality, disturbing natural darkness and the "dreamless sleep" necessary for authentic living.

Mortality and the Human Condition

See: Death and Mortality

- The chapter grapples with death, impermanence, and the fragility of life. Miss MacIntosh openly discusses her own mortality, symbolized by her baldness and

physical deterioration.

- She speaks candidly about the “burned-out wick” and the “empty breast,” metaphors for loss and the fading of vitality.
- The idea that “life is very short” and “the spirit dwells not long in any place” underscores a sense of existential urgency.
- Vera’s confrontation with Miss MacIntosh about their relationship and existence reflects a deeper search for meaning and honesty in the face of death.

Isolation and Connection

See: Isolation and Connection

- Despite Miss MacIntosh’s role as a caretaker, there is a profound emotional distance and complexity in their relationship.
- Vera demands honesty and openness, revealing a desire for genuine connection beyond social roles and appearances.
- Miss MacIntosh’s admission of her past struggles and loneliness highlights the theme of isolation in human experience.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Wig and Baldness

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Identity and the Self · Women, Gender, and Marriage · Marguerite Young on Her Craft

- Miss MacIntosh’s wig symbolizes the facade of social norms and appearances, which she ultimately reveals as a protective but deceptive covering. Young described the wig as the illusion itself, “the dream by which she lived” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965), and the hair it replaces as “the symbol of the dream and of the feminine in life that she never had” (Marguerite Young, interview with Duncan MacDonald, Observation Point, 1965).
- Her baldness, exposed in a moment of vulnerability, represents raw truth, mortality, and the stripping away of illusions.

The Umbrella

See: The Umbrella

- The umbrella protects her “sand-colored skin.” Being hairless, Miss MacIntosh, Young said, “is very exposed to colors, to lights, which burn her skin. That’s why she always carried, even on sunny days, that black umbrella” (Marguerite Young, interview, WNYC radio, New York). It also keeps others at a distance: “You don’t get too close to her” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965).

- It also symbolizes autonomy and control, as she “scolded a wave” or would defend herself against phantoms.

Electric Lights versus Natural Darkness

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Electric lights symbolize modernity, artificiality, and the loss of privacy and natural rhythms.
- Miss MacIntosh longs for the natural darkness, the “night of six months,” and the simple light of the moon or candle, reflecting a desire for authenticity and peace.

The Fog

See: Fog and Mist

- The fog is a recurring image symbolizing ambiguity, uncertainty, and the elusive nature of truth and identity.
- Miss MacIntosh insists that “never would she yield to the fog,” asserting her steadfastness and clarity.

Research: Resources

- “as the Rock of Ages in a land where all things crumbled”: Rock of Ages is a Christian metaphor for God or Jesus, representing stability, strength, and a place of refuge from sin and the storms of life. The phrase originates from the Bible and is famously used in the hymn “Rock of Ages,” by Augustus Toplady in 1775.
  - In the King James Bible the margin of Isaiah 26:4 gives “rock of ages” for “everlasting strength.” Toplady’s hymn begins, “Rock of Ages, cleft for me, / Let me hide myself in thee.” See The Bible.
- “as the surefooted Pilgrim”: A person on a spiritual journey who remains firm and resolute in their beliefs despite hardships or adversity. This interpretation aligns with the idea of a pilgrim drawing on faith to overcome challenges and continue on their path.
  - Later Vera calls their life “a Pilgrim’s Progress from nowhere to nowhere,” after John Bunyan’s allegory The Pilgrim’s Progress (1678).
- “the simulacrum, the graven image of truth”: Simulacrum is a representation, imitation, or copy of a person or thing. In a postmodern context, it refers to a copy without an original, or a copy that has become detached from reality. (Jean Baudrillard’s Simulacra and Simulation, 1981, is after 1964.)
  - “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image” (Exodus 20:4, KJV). See The Bible.
- “She scolded a wave, a drifting sail, an old board brought in by the tide”: Compare William F. Buckley Jr. in 1955: “A conservative is someone who stands athwart history,

yelling Stop, at a time when no one is inclined to do so, or to have much patience with those who so urge it." See King Canute below.

- "the Emperor Constantine who had changed the calendar": Constantine the Great, the first Christian emperor, legalized Christianity and in 321 made Sunday, "the venerable day of the Sun," the day of rest. Miss MacIntosh scolds him for changing the calendar and for an institutional Christianity that, in her view, set imposed order in place of natural rhythms and common sense. See On Emperor Constantine and Augustine and Christian Theology.
    - In 321 Constantine ordered that "the venerable day of the Sun" be a day of rest for city courts and workshops, the first Sunday law.
- "her old silver-dollar watch": Compare the Ingersoll "dollar watch" (1896), sold for a dollar as "the watch that made the dollar famous."
- "It would be impractical for the infernal spirits to conceive their own damnation": "The mind is its own place, and in itself / Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (John Milton, Paradise Lost, 1.254-255, 1667). See Milton.
- "the fog that wrapped around us like the principle of ambiguity itself": Ambiguity runs through the novel's structure and style as well as its fog. Mrs. Hogden is both vulgar and strangely serene; Miss MacIntosh, the figure of common sense, has a hidden past; Mr. Spitzer cannot tell himself from his twin. Vera's narration, prone to hallucination and dream, keeps objective truth out of reach, and motifs return with slight variations. Young offers no final truths. See Fog and Mist and Illusion and Reality.
- "Because of Benjamin Franklin who should have known better": Miss MacIntosh views Benjamin Franklin as a well-intentioned but ultimately disruptive figure whose innovations, especially electric lighting, have intruded on natural life, privacy, and morality, reflecting her deep-seated preference for simplicity, natural order, and skepticism toward modernity.
    - Franklin flew his kite into a thunderstorm in 1752 to show that lightning is electricity, and invented the lightning rod.
- "there were the Elevated above us and the Subway beneath us": "Elevated" in U.S. transportation refers to elevated railways (or "els"), which are train systems built on steel, concrete, or brick structures high above city streets to avoid surface traffic, with Chicago's iconic "L" (short for "elevated") being the most famous example, alongside systems in NYC (largely removed), Philadelphia, and parts of others like Boston and LA, providing crucial, congestion-free urban transit.
    - "Subway" is an urban, high-capacity, electric railway system, often underground (hence the name), moving large numbers of people; it's also called metro, rapid transit, or sometimes "the L" (elevated) or "the Tube," operating on exclusive tracks separate from roads, with major examples in NYC, Chicago, DC, and Boston. Boston opened America's first subway, under Tremont Street, in 1897.
    - "Grand Central Station" is a commuter rail terminal at 42nd Street and Park Avenue in Midtown Manhattan, New York City. Grand Central is the southern terminus of the

Metro-North Railroad's Harlem, Hudson and New Haven Lines, serving the northern parts of the New York metropolitan area. The present Grand Central Terminal opened in 1913.

- "God Who brings the blackness of the day": "Wilt thou break a leaf driven to and fro?" (Job 13:25, KJV); "and maketh the day dark with night" (Amos 5:8, KJV). See The Book of Job.
- "she preferring either the light of the Apocalypse or of Genesis": "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Genesis 1:3, KJV); "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it" (Revelation 21:23, KJV). See Genesis and Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- "she would tell Thomas Edison": Thomas Edison was an American inventor, businessman, and manufacturer who is considered one of history's greatest inventors. He was responsible for more inventions than any other inventor, acquiring 1,093 patents in his lifetime. Edison's inventions, including the light bulb, phonograph, and alkaline storage batteries, revolutionized the world and had a profound impact on everyday life. His first lasting carbon-filament bulb burned in 1879.
  - "War of the Currents" was a bitter commercial and technical battle in the late 1880s and early 1890s between the direct current (DC) system championed by Thomas Edison and the alternating current (AC) system promoted by George Westinghouse and Nikola Tesla. Edison launched a public misinformation campaign, including publicly electrocuting animals with AC, to portray it as dangerous and inferior to protect his DC patents and market share. This was not a public revolution against all electricity, but rather a corporate and technological battle that fueled public anxiety.
- "Death came like a thief in the night": "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:2, KJV). See The Bible.
- "the electric lights are a monopoly": Electric utilities are often considered natural monopolies due to massive infrastructure costs (power plants, grid), making it inefficient to have competing lines to every home, leading to government-regulated monopolies for distribution, though generation and retail markets have seen increasing competition, challenging the traditional model. While the infrastructure (wires) remains largely monopolistic, the industry structure is evolving, with debates around breaking up these monopolies for better consumer benefits.
  - Stockholders (or shareholders) are individuals or entities that own shares, representing partial ownership, in a corporation, gaining rights like voting and dividends but limited liability for company debts. They profit from company success through stock appreciation and dividends, while facing risks like investment loss if the company performs poorly. Common stockholders vote on directors, while preferred stockholders get dividends first, and their influence varies by ownership percentage. Criticisms of stockholders often center on shareholder primacy, arguing it fuels short-termism, excessive executive pay, increased inequality (benefiting the wealthy), and can lead companies to neglect other stakeholders (employees,

environment, community) for profit, creating agency problems where managers serve themselves or short-term gains rather than long-term value.

- “We will return to bayberry candles”: New England colonists boiled the waxy berries of the bayberry shrub to make fragrant green candles that burned without smoking. See Lamps, Candles, and Light.
- “even Eskimos in igloos”: “Eskimo” is a broad, controversial term for the Indigenous peoples of the Arctic (Inuit, Yupik, Iñupiat, Kalaallit) across Greenland, Canada, Alaska, and Siberia, but it’s often considered offensive, with most preferring their specific names meaning “real people,” like Inuit or Yupik. These cultures traditionally thrive in harsh Arctic environments through hunting and fishing, sharing ancient roots from Asia and unique adaptations to the cold, though many now live in modern settlements and practice various faiths.
- “poor Polynesians in boats”: Polynesians are indigenous peoples from the vast “Polynesian Triangle” of the Pacific (Hawaii, New Zealand, Easter Island), known for incredible ocean voyaging, unique double-hulled canoes, and sophisticated star/swell navigation, originating from Austronesian seafarers who settled the islands over 3,000 years ago, developing shared languages, cultures, and traditions, with major groups including Maori, Samoans, Hawaiians, Tongans, and Tahitians. They are celebrated for their epic migrations, rich oral traditions, art (like Moai statues), and deep connection to the sea, though colonial impacts have affected their traditional ways.
- “Electric lights, indeed, and great X-rays!”: X-rays began in 1895 with German physicist Wilhelm Conrad Rontgen’s accidental discovery of a mysterious, invisible radiation while experimenting with cathode rays, which he named “X-rays” due to their unknown nature. This breakthrough quickly revolutionized medicine, allowing doctors to see inside the body for the first time without surgery, leading to rapid adoption for diagnosing fractures, though the dangers of radiation weren’t understood early on. Over time, safety measures, digital imaging, and advanced techniques like CT scans evolved, building on this foundational discovery to create modern radiology.
- “There were all these bright lights of Broadway”: Broadway’s history began with Dutch settlement, named for its width, evolving from a trade route to New York’s entertainment heart, moving uptown with the city, embracing vaudeville, and exploding into a musical powerhouse during its Golden Age (1940s-60s) with Rodgers & Hammerstein, then revitalizing in the 1990s with mega-musicals and Disney, cementing its global fame for polished, diverse productions today, notes Dance Informa Magazine. (The 1990s revival is after 1964.) Broadway’s electric signs made it the Great White Way by about 1902.
- “all these bright lights of Skid Row”: Skid Row originated from Seattle’s logging days as “skid roads” where logs were dragged (skidded) down hills to mills, evolving into a term for impoverished urban areas where transient, often unemployed men (“down-and-outs”) congregated due to cheap lodging, cheap liquor, and missions, especially during the Great Depression, with Los Angeles’s Skid Row becoming famous for its massive homeless population, cheap hotels, and social services. The history reflects shifts from

resource extraction to urban poverty, the impact of economic crises, and evolving policies towards the homeless, becoming synonymous with large concentrations of unhoused people, addiction, and mental health challenges.

- “the old naphtha flares of the old lamp-lighters”: Naphtha is a flammable liquid hydrocarbon mixture, a key intermediate in petroleum refining, used widely as a solvent, cleaner, and feedstock for gasoline, jet fuel, and petrochemicals, derived from crude oil or natural gas, varying from colorless to reddish-brown with a gasoline-like odor, and known for its volatility and potential health risks like irritation and CNS effects with overexposure. See Lamps, Candles, and Light.
- “this, the missing breast which gave her the pain”: The Edwin Smith Papyrus, an Egyptian surgical text of about 1600 BC copying older sources, describes bulging tumors of the breast and says there is no treatment. See Ancient Egypt and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
    - In 1804 a Japanese surgeon is recorded as having performed a mastectomy. The surgeon was Hanaoka Seishū, who operated under a general anesthetic of his own making.
    - In 1811 the novelist Frances Burney had a mastectomy in Paris without anesthesia and wrote her sister the most famous account of it (1812). See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
    - In 1882, William Halsted performed the first modern mastectomy. His radical mastectomy, which also took the chest muscles, stayed standard for most of the next century and left many women disfigured and disabled.
- “Diogenes, in broad daylight, had carried a lantern”: Diogenes of Sinope, also known as Diogenes the Cynic, was a controversial ancient Greek philosopher and founder of the Cynic school of thought. He lived a life of asceticism, rejecting societal norms and material possessions in favor of nature and simple pleasures. Diogenes was known for his provocative actions and sharp wit, which aimed to expose hypocrisy and greed in society and intellectual circles. The story of the lantern comes from Diogenes Laërtius, Lives of the Philosophers (third century). See Lamps, Candles, and Light.
- “perhaps a man had married a man, and perhaps a woman had married a woman”: Compare the “Boston marriage,” the nineteenth-century name for two women who made a home together, as in Henry James’s The Bostonians (1886); and the life of Murray Hall, a New York Tammany politician who lived as a man for decades, married twice, and was found at death in 1901 to have been assigned female at birth. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “certainly the Franklin stove”: The Franklin Stove, invented by Benjamin Franklin in 1742, was a revolutionary cast-iron heating device designed to be a more efficient, less smoky alternative to open fireplaces, using less wood to provide more heat by circulating air and radiating warmth in all directions, functioning as an early furnace for its era’s climate crisis and wood shortage. It worked by drawing smoke and heat through a hollow baffle and an “inverted siphon” to extract more warmth before exiting, though it was sometimes difficult to draft and required less wood for better comfort.

- “he had opposed the domination of George III”: George III was King of Great Britain and Ireland from 25 October 1760 until his death in 1820. The Acts of Union 1800 unified Great Britain and Ireland into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, with George as its king. George III is often accused of obstinately trying to keep Great Britain at war with the rebels (American Revolution), despite the opinions of his own ministers.
- “Poor Richard’s Almanack”: Poor Richard’s Almanack was a popular annual publication by Benjamin Franklin (under the pseudonym “Richard Saunders”) from 1732 to 1758, known for its calendar, weather forecasts, and witty proverbs promoting thrift, industry, and self-reliance, which became a cornerstone of American culture and values. It was a bestseller in the American colonies, selling around 10,000 copies yearly, and served as a vehicle for Franklin’s practical wisdom for the common people.
  - “Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise” (Poor Richard, 1735).
- “he had also tampered with God’s nest egg”: Benjamin Franklin “tampered with God’s nest egg and most private creation keeping us up all day and half the night” metaphorically refers to Franklin’s experiments with electricity, which Miss MacIntosh blames for electric lighting. Miss MacIntosh expresses a strong aversion to electric lights, which she sees as an unnatural and disruptive force in human life.
- “the carriage and the four white horses and the black coachman”: See The Black Coachman.
- “No old lamp-lighters wanted”: These jobs have evolved or declined significantly due to technological advancements, mass production, changes in consumer habits, and modern logistics.
  - Ship chandlers are specialized suppliers for the maritime industry, providing everything from food (provisions) and cleaning supplies to technical equipment, safety gear, and deck stores (ropes, anchors) for ships and their crews, acting as crucial logistical partners to keep vessels operational and crews supplied globally.
  - An ironmonger (British English) is a retailer or shop that sells hardware, tools, household items, and metal goods, like hinges, locks, pans, and garden tools, essentially a traditional hardware dealer in American English.
  - Many umbrella repairmen, or “mush-fakers,” were mobile, going from house to house or setting up on streets to mend umbrellas. They would often make one good umbrella out of parts scavenged from several broken ones. A popular song in 1938, “The Umbrella Man” recorded by the Kay Kyser Orchestra, highlighted this common occupation. Frankford Umbrellas started in 1898 in the U.S. as a door-to-door repair service and grew into a manufacturing and repair company in Philadelphia. They repaired various types of umbrellas, including patio and beach umbrellas as well as rain umbrellas. Beehler Umbrella Factory was located in Baltimore, Maryland, this was the first umbrella factory in the U.S., founded in 1828. Baltimore became a hub for umbrella manufacturing, shipping over 1.5 million umbrellas annually by the early 20th century. Uncle Sam Umbrella Shop was a New York City staple, founded

in 1866, provided sales and repairs for decades, serving notable figures like Charlie Chaplin and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Umbrella repair was a necessary trade when umbrellas were durable, often made with quality materials like whalebone (early on) and later steel ribs, designed to last and be repaired. The “throwaway society” eventually led to the decline of the repair business, as mass-produced, inexpensive umbrellas made it easier for people to buy a new one rather than fix an old one. (Frankford Umbrellas is a business still running after 1964.)

    - Tin roofers specialized in installing tin-plated iron/steel sheets, a popular, affordable, fire-resistant material that rose in the 19th century with the Industrial Revolution, evolving from imported tinplate to domestically produced, corrugated, and galvanized sheets (tin over iron/steel) for homes, barns, and factories, offering better durability and ease of installation than older methods, though often called “tin” roofs, they were actually steel coated in tin.
    - Rag pickers (or rag-and-bone men) were vital urban scavengers, primarily poor immigrants in the 19th/early 20th centuries, who gathered discarded textiles, bones, metal, and glass from streets and dumps to sell to middlemen for processing into new materials, forming an essential, albeit low-status, part of early recycling and industrial supply chains, especially for paper and textiles, surviving on meager earnings from this dirty work.

- “What is a monsoon?”: The questions Miss MacIntosh poses about monsoons (a rainy period in South and Southeast Asia between May and September), mackerel skies (a sky filled with rows of high-altitude cirrocumulus or mid-level altocumulus clouds that form a rippling, wavy pattern, resembling the scales of a mackerel fish. This formation indicates moisture and atmospheric waves, often signaling approaching weather changes, leading to the old saying, “Mackerel sky, not twenty-four hours dry”), the Bering Strait (is a narrow waterway separating Asia (Russia) from North America (Alaska), connecting the Pacific Ocean’s Bering Sea to the Arctic Ocean, famous as the site of the Ice Age land bridge (Beringia) for human migration and currently a vital wildlife corridor with a US-Russia boundary, known for cold, stormy waters and the time-bending Diomede Islands), and Hyperborean lights (refers to the poetic or mythical descriptions of the sun and continuous daylight in the legendary land of Hyperborea, a paradisiacal realm in Greek mythology) are a test of practical knowledge. She asks whether Vera has learned geography, arithmetic, navigation, and household management, for without them one is condemned to “darkest ignorance,” unfit to be a poor man’s wife once the wedding feast is over. See the mackerel sky in the Chapter 62 resources.
- “Where are the Hyperborean lights?”: See the Hyperboreans in the Chapter 62 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “she with her fire red hair gleaming like the lights in a fiery furnace”: The three young men thrown into Nebuchadnezzar’s fiery furnace came out unharmed: “nor was an hair of their head singed” (Daniel 3:27, KJV). See The Bible and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.

- “a kind of fool’s paradise”: “If ye should lead her into a fool’s paradise” (William Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, 2.4). See Shakespeare.
- “She surely could not expect me to be interested in the ramifications of the Stock Exchange”: Vera cannot share Miss MacIntosh’s interest in the practical world: bull and bear markets, high finance, Australian shipping, cup racing, the marriage of salmon, the buoys of the harbor. Her own world is “the world within,” and she trembles “at the threshold of life” while these things make her “ears roar with distant reverberations.”
- “Australian shipping or cup racing”: The America’s Cup, the oldest trophy in international sport, has been raced for since the schooner America won it off the Isle of Wight in 1851.
- “the antiquated structure of Brooklyn Bridge”: The Brooklyn Bridge opened in 1883, then the longest suspension bridge in the world; Emily Warren Roebling saw it through after her husband, its engineer, was disabled by caisson disease. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “the spar buoys which have a spar attached”: Young’s list of buoys is exact: the spar buoy is a floating pole, the nun buoy a cone, the whistling buoy blows with the swell, and the bell buoy rings with the waves.
- “and if ever the golden bowl is broken, or the wheel at the cistern”: “Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern” (Ecclesiastes 12:6, KJV). Miss MacIntosh breaks off and adds, “The Bible exaggerates.” See Ecclesiastes.
- “How does it happen that you have no hair along your skin?”: Alopecia universalis is considered an autoimmune disease where the person does not grow any hair on any part of their body but is otherwise healthy. See On alopecia universalis and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “Are you a salamander that you sit there burning in your own light?”: Since Pliny, the salamander was said to live in fire unharmed; Paracelsus made it the spirit of the element of fire.
- “some ventriloquist had tricked me into being his wooden dummy”: Compare Edgar Bergen and his dummy Charlie McCarthy, stars of American radio from 1937.
- “There was, I noticed for the first time, a crescentic white marking on her upper right eyelid”: Compare vitiligo, the loss of skin color in white patches, an autoimmune condition often found with alopecia.
- “Heaven preserve you from a beardless man”: Miss MacIntosh warns against a beardless man and a hairy woman, and asks Vera to “Consider well, my dear, if you mean what you are saying, if this is your infinite desire for nothing.” A screech owl, the old omen of death, flies by. Her prophecy echoes the darkened sun and moon of Revelation: “The sun and the moon will shine in the same sky, and yet the earth will not be lighted but will be wrapped in darkness like the night.” No birds will sing, “There shall be bare and ruined choirs,” as in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 73. “The flower will

perish while it is still in the seed. The tides will not return what the tides take out.” At the end, “There will be only, my dear, the dream.”

    - Old proverbs in several languages warn against both a beardless man and a bearded woman.

- “A screech owl flew by just then”: The screech owl’s cry was long taken for an omen of death. See Birds.
- “The sun and the moon will shine in the same sky”: “The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come” (Joel 2:31, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “There shall be bare and ruined choirs”: “Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang” (William Shakespeare, Sonnet 73). See Shakespeare.
- “ours is a Pilgrim’s Progress from nowhere to nowhere”: See the surefooted Pilgrim above.
- “Nonsense, oh, nonsense which kills us”: Miss MacIntosh answers Vera’s dreaming: “imagination is nothing. The life is what counts.” She refuses false comfort, will not let anyone “turn the spade over the living heart,” and says “I shall surely disappear as surely as the sun sets,” her own choice and beyond Vera’s control. Her riddles point to fate beyond arithmetic: “What are two and two but one? What are four and four but three? Who holds the cards?” Constantine and Canute stand for human limits against time and the sea. Vera, trembling, wishes she could take back her words.
- “Shall I tear my hair?”: See mourning that tears the hair in the Chapter 61 resources. See Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “the Emperor Constantine or King Canute or Crispin or Clarence or Cuthbert”: King Canute, or Cnut, ruled England, Denmark, and Norway. Miss MacIntosh invokes him against those who “waste our lives in the vain expectation of that which might never happen,” dreaming of “what was not, of what would never be.” Catherine names Canute too, in her opium dreams, and Miss MacIntosh insists the “opium paradise was never God’s way of life.” The story of Canute setting his throne on the shore and bidding the tide stand still, to show his courtiers that no king commands the sea, comes from Henry of Huntingdon (twelfth century). See On King Canute and The History of Opium.
    - Crispin or Saints Crispin and Crispinian are the Christian patron saints of cobblers, curriers, tanners, and leather workers. They were beheaded during the reign of Diocletian. “And Crispin Crispian shall ne’er go by” (William Shakespeare, Henry V, 4.3).
    - Clarence may refer to the Duke of Clarence which is a substantive title traditionally awarded to junior members of the British Royal Family. George, Duke of Clarence, was drowned in a butt of malmsey wine in the Tower in 1478, as Shakespeare shows in Richard III.
    - Cuthbert may refer to Cuthbert of Lindisfarne who was an Anglo-Saxon saint of the early Northumbrian church in the Celtic tradition. He was a monk, bishop and

hermit, associated with the monasteries of Melrose and Lindisfarne in the Kingdom of Northumbria, today in north eastern England and South Eastern Scotland.

- “My head swaying like harebells in the wind”: Campanula rotundifolia, the harebell or common harebell, Scottish bluebell, or bluebell in Scotland, is a species of flowering plant in the bellflower family Campanulaceae.
- “It certainly seems a No Man’s Land”: “No Man’s Land” is the disputed ground between the front lines or trenches of two opposing armies.
    - Miss MacIntosh speaks of a “No Man’s Land” where she has been killed again and again, mourning others rather than herself, a skeleton wandering through endless waters. Her worst enemy is the “invisible assassin,” one’s own heart. With the wig gone her head is “naked of all its illusion of planetary glory,” and life a “vain, shallow pretense.” “Time moves us when we move not.” She feels “rooked” by God, “God’s poorest and lowest.” Then she turns practical, telling the history of the umbrella from royal privilege to common protection, and calls for “celestial navigation” to carry on with life’s “mournful business.”
- “killed by the oldest preacher, he with the flaming hair”: “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher; all is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2, KJV). See Ecclesiastes.
- “Long hair is short wisdom”: An old German proverb said of women, “Lange Haare, kurzer Sinn,” long hair, short sense; the bald Miss MacIntosh turns it back. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “it’s a wise child who knows his own father”: Shakespeare turns the proverb around: “It is a wise father that knows his own child” (The Merchant of Venice, 2.2). See Shakespeare.
- “Here’s the livid skull that might be any fool’s or king’s”: “Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio” (William Shakespeare, Hamlet, 5.1). See Shakespeare.
- “a plague, a plague, a light, a light!”: Compare “A plague o’ both your houses!” (Romeo and Juliet, 3.1) and the king’s cry “Give me some light. Away!” (Hamlet, 3.2). See Shakespeare.
- “Ursa Major, Charles’ Wain, Charybdis! Scyllal”: Ursa Major is also known as the Great Bear and is a constellation in the northern sky, whose associated mythology likely dates back into prehistory. See Astronomy.
    - Charles’ Wain is the Big Dipper. A folk etymology holds that this derived from Charlemagne, but the name is common to all the Germanic languages and the original reference was to the men’s wagon, in contrast to the women’s wagon, the Little Dipper.
    - Scylla and Charybdis are sea monsters in Greek mythology. To be “between Scylla and Charybdis” therefore means to be presented with two opposite dangers, the task being to find a route that avoids both. Odysseus passes between them in the Odyssey, Book 12. See Greek Mythology.
- “Where’s my hair, that woman’s glory?”: “But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering” (1 Corinthians 11:15, KJV). See The Bible,

Hair, Wig, and Baldness, and Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- “Drape all the mirrors with black”: Mirrors in a house of mourning were covered, by Jewish custom during shiva and in Victorian homes, so the soul of the dead would not be caught or the living distracted by vanity. See Mirrors and Reflections and Weddings and Funerals.
- “a Mr. Jonas Hanway”: Jonas Hanway was an English merchant, writer and philanthropist. He was the first male Londoner to carry an umbrella and was a noted opponent of tea drinking. Hanway created seventy-four printed works, mostly pamphlets, on a wide variety of subjects. Of literary importance is the Historical Account of British Trade over the Caspian Sea, with a Journal of Travels, etc. (London, 1753). He is also cited frequently for his work with the Foundling Hospital in London, particularly his pamphlets detailing the earliest comparative “histories” of the foundation versus similar institutions abroad. See On the umbrella’s history and The Umbrella.
    - Hanway also campaigned for the boy chimney sweeps, and the Chimney Sweepers Act of 1788 followed.
- “the mackintosh raincoat”: Charles Macintosh of Glasgow patented his waterproof cloth, rubber sandwiched between two layers of fabric, in 1823; Miss MacIntosh carries the coat’s name.
- “Some may be like Jonah”: Jonah from the Book of Jonah was swallowed by a large fish where he prays to God for three days. He is then released. The story of Jonah in the Bible teaches about God’s universal mercy and grace, showing that his compassion extends to all people, not just the Israelites. It also highlights the dangers of disobedience and prejudice, as the prophet Jonah attempts to flee God’s command to preach to the hated city of Nineveh. “Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (Jonah 1:17, KJV). See The Bible.
- “but some may be like Noah wanting to come up”: Noah is the last of the pre-flood patriarchs of the Book of Genesis. He builds an ark and takes pairs of animals in order to survive the great flood. The biblical story of Noah’s Ark signifies a profound message about divine judgment, mercy, and salvation. It illustrates that God judges wickedness and sin but also provides a way for salvation for those who are righteous, like Noah, and those who have faith. The story highlights themes of God’s faithfulness through the covenant of the rainbow, and in Christian theology, the ark is often seen as a foreshadowing of Christ as the ultimate source of salvation. The dove came back with “an olive leaf pluckt off” (Genesis 8:11, KJV). See Genesis.
    - The runner who brought Athens the news of Marathon (490 BC) is said to have cried “Rejoice, we conquer!” and died. Wimbledon has played lawn tennis since 1877.
- “Upon a primrose bank I lie”: Her farewell, “if ever that may be which is not,” ends with a casual “cheerio.” She has slept in doorways and been broke, and saved on electric lights. Her baldness, missing breast, and crooked wig are the marks of her losses, and

taking off the wig is her honesty. Words cannot “harness the winds,” and love is “a system of mutual deception.” Had she been a man, “I could have slipped unnoticed through the crowds,” and “No one would have laughed.” “Life brings many blows”; we knit our bones together “though they unravel faster than we knit,” and “people are never quite what they seem. Nobody knows anybody.” She suffers most “especially when there are rainbows.”

- “I was broke, and that was why we saved the electric lights”: Poverty is a form of stress that research has shown alters a person’s behavior and development. The Great Depression would have been recent history for the characters in this story and Marguerite Young herself. The average American family lived by the Depression-era motto: “Use it up, wear it out, make do or do without.” Many tried to keep up appearances and carry on with life as close to normal as possible while they adapted to new economic circumstances. Households embraced a new level of frugality in daily life. They kept kitchen gardens, patched worn-out clothes and passed on trips. See On the Great Depression.
- “Fine words butter no parsnips”: An English proverb of the seventeenth century: talk alone feeds no one.
- “My elder brothers called me George”: Compare George Sand (1804-1876) and George Eliot (1819-1880), women who wrote as George. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and Identity and the Self.
- “My sisters had long ropes of hair. A man could climb them”: “Rapunzel, Rapunzel, let down your hair” (Brothers Grimm, 1812). See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “It is woman who makes man’s life so short and robs him of his hair”: “And she made him sleep upon her knees; and she called for a man, and she caused him to shave off the seven locks of his head” (Judges 16:19, KJV). Delilah’s shears took Samson’s strength. See The Bible and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “this old Admiral Dewey corset”: After Admiral George Dewey’s victory at Manila Bay in 1898, everything from corsets to cigars was sold under his name.
- “Oh, my poor Columbine with the broken nose!”: Columbine is the clever maidservant of the Italian commedia dell’arte, sweetheart of Harlequin.
- “Purple emperor!”: The purple emperor is a butterfly of European oak woods; imperial purple, dyed from Tyrian shellfish, was the color of emperors such as Constantine. See Butterflies and Moths.
- “beauty is as beauty does”: Compare the proverb “Handsome is that handsome does,” as Oliver Goldsmith gives it in The Vicar of Wakefield (1766).
- “We must sweep the waves back”: Compare Sydney Smith’s Mrs. Partington, who in a great storm of 1824 tried to mop the Atlantic out of her house: “She was excellent at a slop or a puddle, but she should not have meddled with a tempest” (speech at Taunton, 1831). See King Canute above. See The Sea and Water.

- “Nobody knows anybody”: See On nobody knows anybody and Isolation and Connection.
- “I suffer especially when there are rainbows”: “I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth” (Genesis 9:13, KJV), God’s promise after the flood. See Genesis.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Acme

The highest point of something; the peak.

Anathema

A thing or person hated; a curse.

Artifice

Clever trickery, or the art of making things seem other than they are.

Balderdash

Nonsense.

Ballast

Heavy material, such as stones, carried low in a ship to keep it steady.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Bayberry

A shrub of the Atlantic coast whose waxy berries were boiled to make fragrant candles.

Beetling

Jutting out and overhanging, as beetling brows or cliffs.

Belie

To show to be false.

Benighted

Overtaken by darkness; ignorant.

Bespeak

To show or indicate.

Burden

The refrain of a song; also a load.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Chandler

A dealer in supplies, as a ship chandler; once a candle-maker.

Cistern

A tank for storing water, often underground.

Cognizance

Awareness; notice.

Congealed

Thickened or stiffened, as with cold.

Constitutional

A walk taken regularly for the sake of one’s health.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Counterpart

A person or thing that closely matches another.

Crescentic

Shaped like a crescent.

Defile

A narrow pass between mountains.

Denizen

An inhabitant of a place.

Denudement

A stripping bare.

Deprivation

The lack or loss of something needed.

Distraught

Deeply upset.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Elicit

To draw out.

Enigmatic

Mysterious; puzzling.

Errant

Wandering; straying from the proper course.

Escutcheon

The shield bearing a coat of arms.

Eunuch

A man who has been castrated. Eunuchs were employed for centuries to guard harems and to serve as officials in royal courts in the Middle East, China, and Byzantium. See The eunuch (Ch 35).

Faugh

An exclamation of disgust.

Fly-specked

Spotted with the tiny marks left by flies.

Gannet

A large white seabird that dives for fish.

Glow-worm

A beetle whose wingless female and larvae give off a greenish light.

Hackney

A carriage for hire.

Harebell

A wildflower with nodding blue bell-shaped flowers.

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Hieroglyphics

Picture writing, as of ancient Egypt; any writing hard to read.

Hoar-frost

White frost.

Homily

A sermon; a moral saying.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Igloo

An Inuit house built of snow blocks.

Imploring

Begging earnestly.

Imponderable

Something that cannot be measured, weighed, or judged.

Impoverished

Made poor.

Inclemency

Harshness, especially of weather.

Incongruous

Out of place; not in keeping with its surroundings.

Incorruptible

Not subject to decay or to bribery.

Intestate

Having made no will.

Ironmonger

A dealer in hardware.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Lodestar

A guiding star, especially the polestar.

Lugubrious

Mournful; gloomy.

Mackerel sky

A sky of rippled clouds like the markings of a mackerel.

Mackintosh

A raincoat of rubberized cloth, named for its inventor, Charles Macintosh.

Maelstrom

A powerful whirlpool; any violent, confused situation.

Mauve

A pale purple.

Modicum

A small amount.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Mongoose

A small, quick animal of Asia and Africa that kills snakes.

Monsoon

A seasonal wind in South Asia that brings months of heavy rain.

Nether

Lower; under.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Pall

A cloth spread over a coffin; anything dark that covers.

Phosphorescent

Glowing faintly in the dark.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Ramification

A branching consequence.

Raucous

Harsh and loud.

Renunciation

The act of giving something up.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Scrutiny

Close, searching examination.

Seer

A person who sees the future; a prophet.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Simulacrum

An image or likeness; a mere imitation.

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard. Spar is also the name for certain shiny, easily split crystalline minerals, such as Iceland spar.

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Taffeta

A crisp, shiny silk.

Tallow

Animal fat used for candles and soap. Tallow-colored is a dull, yellowish white.

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Terra firma

Solid ground.

Transient

Passing quickly; not lasting. As a noun, a hotel guest who stays only a short time.

Turgid

Swollen; also, pompous in style.

Turtleneck

A high, close, turned-over collar on a sweater.

Twaddle

Silly talk.

Unassuming

Modest.

Vagaries

Unpredictable changes or whims.

Vagary

A whim; an odd notion.

Virginal

A small, legless harpsichord set on a table, popular in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.

Vizor

An old spelling of visor, the movable front of a helmet.

Waterproof

An old word for a raincoat, as in Miss MacIntosh's "plaid, faded waterproof."

Weathercock

A weathervane shaped like a rooster; also, a person who changes with every wind.

Whaler

A whaling ship or a man who hunts whales.

Chapter 64

Summary

Solomon the turtle is gone; Miss MacIntosh has put him out of doors, and for the first time she calls Vera “darling.” She tells Vera she loved only once, a dark dancing girl named Lorena who laughed at her in the orphanage, became a fan dancer and stripper, was paroled to her care, and ran away again. For days afterward she keeps taking her wig off and putting it back. She tells her history: born bald in What Cheer, Iowa, the daughter of a poor shoemaker and coffin-maker; a doll’s toupee at three and a wig of hair stolen from the plow horses; boys fishing for her wig from the orchard boughs; a traveling phrenologist who gave her bald head the prize; a baptism in an icy river where the whole congregation saw her bare head; years in orphanages and a school for the blind; a forger at Alcatraz who sent her Christmas cards; a Chicago barber who could not grow one hair for a million dollars. Vera, who already knows that Miss MacIntosh will be committed to the deep, loves her more now than before. Their last month together has begun.

Characters present

Miss MacIntosh · Vera Cartwheel · Solomon the Turtle · Lorena

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Fear and Courage · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Love · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Fog and Mist · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Horses and Carriages · Shadows · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella · Weddings and Funerals

Allusions: American Religious Movements · Ancient Egypt · Ecclesiastes · Exploration and the Poles · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Music and Composers · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Book of Job · The Civil War · The History of Opium · Women’s Suffrage

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with Vera noticing Solomon’s absence and feeling a newfound appreciation for his presence, symbolizing the theme of unnoticed value and loss.
- Miss MacIntosh reveals she loved only once, a beautiful dancing girl named Lorena, whose life was marked by escape and tragedy. This passage adds layers to Miss MacIntosh’s character, showing her vulnerability and past connections to those society might reject.

- A significant portion of the chapter is devoted to Miss MacIntosh's lifelong baldness. She explains that she was born bald, wore a toupee as a child, and has never had hair, making her different and marginalized. Her baldness symbolizes loneliness, alienation, and the human condition of exposure and vulnerability.
- The story of the barber who could do nothing for her bald head illustrates the hopelessness of her condition and her acceptance of it as an intrinsic part of her identity. The barber's eloquence about his inability to grow even a single hair underscores the finality of her condition.
- Miss MacIntosh's resourcefulness and desperation are shown through her making a wig from stolen horses' hairs, symbolizing her attempt to mask her difference and blend in, yet also emphasizing her isolation and the futility of this attempt.
- The chapter describes how boys tried to hook her wig with fishing lines and how she was afraid of many things, including animals and people, which highlights her deep-seated fear and social alienation from a young age.
- Miss MacIntosh claims descent from a Gaelic prince who was also bald and lost his crown, presenting a tragic nobility that contrasts with her humble, marginalized existence. She rejects the idle rich and social pretensions, affirming her identity rooted in practicality and resilience.
- Throughout the chapter, there are poetic meditations on mortality, the ephemeral nature of beauty and life, and the essential loneliness of the human condition. Miss MacIntosh's baldness becomes a metaphor for universal mourning and the stripping away of illusions.
- Near the end, she is portrayed as a firm, solid woman who, despite her internal dissolution, stands for stability and common sense in a shifting world, symbolized by her black umbrella and practical nature.
- Miss MacIntosh challenges established religious narratives (e.g., Emperor Constantine's changes to the calendar) and extols the humble macintosh, both the apple and the raincoat, as a symbol of practical, unpretentious survival, contrasting with grand but empty imperial and religious traditions.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Miss MacIntosh calls her "Darling," and Vera writes, "Darling! I sank on my knees, faintly." Why does one word undo her?
- "I have always been bald, ever since I was a child." How does this change what Vera thought she knew?
- The phrenologist finds "the most beautiful brain box he had ever seen in the world of the living." Why does Young give the bald child the prize?

Characters

- Vera asks, “Was it a woman or a man?” What does it mean that Miss MacIntosh’s one love was Lorena?
- “She sought the light as I have sought the shadow.” How are Lorena and Miss MacIntosh opposites, and how are they alike?
- The forger sent his cards “to exhibit the beauty of his penmanship.” Why did Miss MacIntosh keep faith with him?

Connections

- Miss MacIntosh says, “I walked into the traffic flow.” How does this prepare for her walk into the sea?
- Miss MacIntosh would ask Constantine “why he had changed reality.” Why does the emperor keep returning from Chapter 63?
- “Before her body she committed to the deep.” How does Vera’s foreknowledge change the reading of this last month?

Reflection

- Perhaps “a hair was important only because she had none.” Is that true of most things people long for?
- “No one wants to be different.” Is it true?
- “Perhaps she illustrated the difficulty of living with the illusion which may be one’s self.” What illusions does every self live with?

Research: Characters

Miss MacIntosh

- The central figure of the chapter, an orphanage matron who has suffered lifelong baldness.
- She is portrayed as a strong yet vulnerable woman, bearing the weight of loneliness and social alienation.
- Her baldness is both a physical condition and a metaphor for her isolation and difference from others.
- Miss MacIntosh evolves from a figure shrouded in mystery to a deeply human character marked by resilience and vulnerability.
- Her storytelling reveals layers of her personality, from pride and courage to sadness and regret.

Vera Cartwheel

- A person who cares deeply for Miss MacIntosh, showing compassion and love.
- Through her eyes the reader sees the complexity of Miss MacIntosh's character and her struggles.
- Vera's growing understanding and affection for Miss MacIntosh deepen the reader's empathy.

Solomon (pet turtle)

- Mentioned briefly as a lethargic creature absent at the beginning, symbolizing a kind of comfort or presence that is missing.

Lorena

- Lorena is depicted as a beautiful dancing girl, dark and fat, with long hair described like a "midnight curtain concealing the star until the star was revealed." She first encountered Miss MacIntosh when the latter was working in an orphanage.
- Lorena laughed at Miss MacIntosh and then ran away, eventually becoming a strip-tease dancer. Years later, Lorena was paroled to Miss MacIntosh's care, but she ran away again, and Miss MacIntosh could not pursue her due to her role as parole officer.
- Lorena symbolizes a more flamboyant, elusive, and perhaps tragic aspect of femininity and life experience, contrasting sharply with the sober, practical, and grounded Miss MacIntosh. While Miss MacIntosh is associated with order, responsibility, and a no-nonsense approach to life, Lorena embodies escape, performance, and the allure of the spotlight.
- Miss MacIntosh's relationship with Lorena is tinged with affection and regret: they were "very dear friends" for a time, but Lorena's life took a path of repeated flight and apparent self-destruction, as, Miss MacIntosh imagines, she "slept with many men" and aged into baldness, a fate that mirrors Miss MacIntosh's own physical barrenness and loneliness.
- Miss MacIntosh reflects on Lorena's invitation to join her in the strip-tease, suggesting Lorena believed Miss MacIntosh would have made a sensational artist in that world. This highlights the tension between Lorena's world of public display and Miss MacIntosh's private, concealed existence (especially with her baldness and wig).
- Lorena's life is marked by a search for light and visibility, "danc[ing] in the spotlight," while Miss MacIntosh sought the shadow, the hidden, and the protective fog.
- Lorena enriches the narrative by providing a foil to Miss MacIntosh's character by showing a different trajectory of womanhood, freedom, and loss. Lorena's story also deepens the themes of love, disappointment, and identity, as Miss MacIntosh mourns not only her own solitude but also the loss of a connection that might have been different if circumstances had allowed.

- The mention of Lorena evokes a poignant sense of fragmented relationships and missed possibilities in the world the novel inhabits.

A forger

- The forger is a minor but symbolically significant figure mentioned in the context of Miss MacIntosh's past connections with orphans under her care. The forger is one of only two orphans with whom Miss MacIntosh maintained contact after they left the orphanage, the other being Lorena, the dancing girl.
- He was incarcerated at Alcatraz, a notorious prison, and despite his criminal status, he maintained a connection with Miss MacIntosh by sending her beautifully decorated Christmas cards every year. These cards showcased his skill in penmanship, as he was able to imitate signatures ranging from Abraham Lincoln to William Jennings Bryan with remarkable artistry. His ability to produce such forgeries suggests a complex character capable of both criminality and refined craftsmanship.
- Miss MacIntosh's relationship with the forger reflects her enduring, if fraught, loyalty and care for those she once supervised.
- Symbolically, the forger embodies the blurred lines between authenticity and imitation, truth and falsehood, mirroring Miss MacIntosh's own struggles with identity, appearance (notably her baldness and wigs), and the facades people maintain. His skill in forgery contrasts with her straightforward, no-nonsense character, highlighting the tension between illusions and reality pervasive in the novel.

Research: Themes

Loneliness and Isolation

See: Isolation and Connection

- Miss MacIntosh's baldness sets her apart physically and socially, causing her to feel like an outsider.
- Her wandering through life, changing jobs, and lack of lasting relationships underline a profound sense of isolation.

Identity and Difference

See: Identity and the Self

- Baldness symbolizes not only her physical appearance but also her difference and the struggle to be accepted.
- Her attempts to wear wigs and create a semblance of normalcy reflect the universal human desire to fit in.

Resilience and Endurance

See: Fear and Courage

- Despite her hardships, Miss MacIntosh exhibits strength and dignity.
- She fights against despair and maintains a firm stance in the face of adversity, symbolized by her unwavering grip on her black umbrella.

Mortality and the Human Condition

See: Death and Mortality

- The narrative meditates on the inevitability of death and the transient nature of beauty and life.
- Baldness becomes a metaphor for universal human vulnerability and the “essential loneliness” each person must face.

Love and Loss

See: Love · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Miss MacIntosh’s reflections on Lorena and her own life reveal deep emotional wounds.
- The absence of romantic fulfillment and the loss of connections highlight themes of regret and yearning.

Reality versus Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality

- The chapter contrasts the harsh realities of Miss MacIntosh’s life with her dreams and the illusions she once held.
- Vera’s love and understanding challenge the idea of superficial appearances.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Baldness

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- Represents vulnerability, difference, and mourning. It is a physical manifestation of Miss MacIntosh’s inner loneliness and social alienation.

Wig

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- The wig symbolizes the mask people wear to hide their true selves and conform to societal expectations. Miss MacIntosh's frequent removal and replacement of the wig depict her struggle with identity. Young described the wig as the illusion itself, "the dream by which she lived" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965).

Black Umbrella

See: The Umbrella

- Shields her bald head and skin from the light and casts a shadow that keeps others away. Young said it "always casts a shadow around her and forbids intimacy" (Marguerite Young, interview, WNYC radio, New York).

Fog and Shadows

See: Fog and Mist · Shadows

- Reflect confusion, concealment, the unknown, and the liminal space between reality and dreams.

Sea and Water Imagery

See: The Sea and Water

- Symbolize life's constant movement, change, and the inevitability of death.

Research: Resources

- "Solomon is fifty years old": Box turtles commonly live more than fifty years, and some pass a hundred. See Solomon the Turtle.
- "Darling, you will never miss him": This is the first time Miss MacIntosh calls Vera "darling," and Vera sinks to her knees. The word gives the novel its title.
- "Was it a woman or a man?": Vera asks without assuming, and Miss MacIntosh answers that there was no man, only "a beautiful dancing girl." Her one love was a woman. See Lorena, Love, and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "she ran away and became a strip-tease dancer": Burlesque striptease flourished in the 1920s and 1930s, until New York refused to renew the burlesque theaters' licenses in 1937 under Mayor La Guardia. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "I walked into the traffic flow": Miss MacIntosh "...wandered. I wandered on and on. I broke my nose. I lost my breast. I had no place. I walked into the traffic flow." Walking into the traffic flow may have been an accident but it also seems to be her first attempt at suicide. See Suicide in History and Literature.
- "She was a fan dancer": See Sally Rand's fan dance in the Chapter 61 resources.

- “that flowers once grew at the North Pole”: Fossil forests and the pollen of palms show that the Arctic was warm and green about fifty million years ago, and frozen mammoths, the elephants of the Ice Age, have been dug out of the Siberian permafrost. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “it’s cold enough in What Cheer, Iowa”: What Cheer is a real coal-mining town in Keokuk County, Iowa. Its name is said to come from Roger Williams’s greeting from the Narragansett, “What cheer, netop?” (1636). Later Vera and Miss MacIntosh cry “what cheer!” in the face of all adversity.
- “a poor little shoe-maker”: The proverb says the shoemaker’s children go barefoot; Miss MacIntosh adds that the coffin-maker’s child had no coffin.
- “two years at the University of Iowa”: The University of Iowa admitted women from its first classes in 1855, among the first public universities in the country to do so. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “no more than was in the old Farmers’ Almanac”: The Farmers’ Almanac has been published since 1818, with its weather forecasts, planting tables, and household advice. See Poor Richard’s Almanack in the Chapter 63 resources.
- “had rolled like the rolling stone which gathers no moss”: “A rolling stone gathers no moss” goes back to the Latin of Publilius Syrus in the first century BC.
- “had taught bowling in a bowling alley, knocking down ninepins”: Legend says that when states banned ninepins for gambling in the 1830s and 1840s, players added a tenth pin and invented tenpins.
- “had been a matron in various orphan asylums”: Orphan asylums in the U.S. grew rapidly from the 1830s to the early 1900s, driven by immigration, poverty, and epidemics, providing refuge for thousands, often run by religious groups and separating children from harsh almshouses. While intended to protect children, they often housed many whose parents were alive but impoverished, and faced criticism for overcrowding and neglect, leading to reforms emphasizing family-based care and smaller, suburban institutions by the mid-20th century, shifting away from large, congregate settings. Women played a foundational role in US orphan asylums, from elite founders like Isabella Graham establishing institutions in the early 19th century to Catholic nuns and working-class women like Margaret Haughery providing daily care, all while navigating societal expectations, with some women encouraged by Jewish orphanages even becoming college-educated teachers or nurses, shaping the moral and practical care of orphaned children within these developing welfare systems. Racial prejudice persisted, though, with Black trustees only being hired much later.
- “had worked in a school for the blind”: The history of U.S. schools for the blind began in 1829 with the Perkins School for the Blind, followed by New York (1831) and Philadelphia (1832), establishing early residential models inspired by Europe, with pioneers like Samuel Gridley Howe developing embossed reading systems before Braille became standard. State support grew with Ohio (1837), leading to widespread institutions, while innovations like the first Braille press (Missouri, 1865) and advocacy

by figures like Helen Keller drove expansion, culminating in federal support (APH, 1879) and eventual integration efforts (mainstreaming in public schools by the 1970s).

- “a pale narcissus break through rock”: Vera imagines a “pale narcissus” breaking through rock, life and beauty in the barrenness of Miss MacIntosh’s baldness. See On the pale narcissus. See also Narcissus and Echo in the Chapter 58 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “May I never lose my umbrella, for my umbrella is my friend”: The umbrella and old plaid mackintosh shelter Miss MacIntosh from reality rather than from fantasy. Young called the umbrella “a kind of canopy between her and reality” and compared it to the umbrella of Robinson Crusoe, “a Calvinistic version of the Fall of Man” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See The Umbrella.
    - Crusoe makes himself an umbrella of skins on his island (Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, 1719).
- “Vanity, vanity, all is vanity, sayeth the poet”: Ecclesiastes 1:2-11 “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” This phrase conveys the preacher’s meditation on the fleeting nature of worldly things and human endeavors under the sun. It expresses the idea that much of what people strive for (wealth, wisdom, pleasure) is ultimately empty or futile because it does not provide lasting meaning or satisfaction. It is used by Miss MacIntosh to reflect on the futility and emptiness she perceives in life, especially in relation to her own condition and experiences. The phrase captures a sense of existential weariness and the recognition that many pursuits and concerns, such as appearances, social acceptance, or even personal desires, are ultimately transient and meaningless. Miss MacIntosh calls the Preacher a poet. See On Ecclesiastes. See the Preacher in the Chapter 63 resources. See Ecclesiastes.
- “a forger at Alcatraz”: Alcatraz, in San Francisco Bay, was a federal prison from 1934 to 1963. See On the forger at Alcatraz.
    - Abraham Lincoln was the 16th president of the United States, serving from 1861 until his assassination in 1865. He led the United States through the American Civil War, defeating the Confederate States and playing a major role in the abolition of slavery. See The Civil War.
    - William Jennings Bryan was an American lawyer, orator, and politician. He was a dominant force in the Democratic Party, running three times as the party’s nominee for President of the United States in the 1896, 1900, and 1908 elections. His “Cross of Gold” speech won him the nomination in 1896.
- “as seas might give up their dead”: See Revelation 20:13 in the Chapter 61 resources.
- “A barber in Chicago told me he could do nothing”: Young asked her beauty operator whether a bald woman had ever come in. One had, he said: “This lady came in, lifted her wig, and there was this head as bald as a billiard ball. And she said, what can you do for me? And he said, I couldn’t grow one hair on your head for a million dollars. And if I could, I wouldn’t need a million dollars.” Young said, “I have Miss McIntosh go to a Chicago barber and have this exact scene in the book” (Marguerite Young, interview

with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Miss MacIntosh and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.

- “the barber pole which was the sign of the blood-letter”: The phrase refers to the historical origin of the barber pole symbol. Traditionally, the barber pole (a red and white striped pole) symbolized the barber’s role not only in cutting hair but also in bloodletting, a common medical treatment in earlier centuries. Bloodletters were practitioners who used leeches or other means to draw blood from patients to treat various ailments. The description sets a vivid scene in the barber shop Miss MacIntosh visited, linking the place to these archaic and somewhat grim practices, which underscores the hopelessness Miss MacIntosh felt when she sought help for her baldness there and was told nothing could be done. The red stripe stood for blood and the white for bandages; barbers and surgeons were one guild in England until 1745. See On the barber pole.
- “Bald I came into this world, and bald I will go out of it”: “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither” (Job 1:21, KJV). See The Book of Job and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “the gold of Croesus”: Croesus was the king of Lydia and known for his wealth. When Croesus asked Solon who was the happiest of men, Solon told him to call no man happy until he was dead (Herodotus, Histories, Book 1).
- “a barber of Seville”: The Barber of Seville is considered one of the greatest masterpieces of comedy in music known as an opera buffa. Rossini’s opera (1816) is based on Beaumarchais’s play (1775). See Music and Composers.
- “the firmament laid upon the firmament”: “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters” (Genesis 1:6, KJV). See Genesis.
- “Before her body she committed to the deep”: “We therefore commit his body to the deep” (Book of Common Prayer, burial at sea). Vera, writing afterward, already knows how Miss MacIntosh will die. See Weddings and Funerals and The Sea and Water.
- “this was the universal baldness and sign of mourning”: In the Bible, shaving the head is a sign of mourning: “Make thee bald, and poll thee for thy delicate children; enlarge thy baldness as the eagle” (Micah 1:16, KJV). See The Bible, Hair, Wig, and Baldness, and Grief, Loss, and Mourning.
- “Whose were these bones?”: “Son of man, can these bones live?” (Ezekiel 37:3, KJV). See The Bible.
- “The flesh as grass fading before my eyes”: “All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field” (Isaiah 40:6, KJV). See The Bible.
- “a pair of old black gloves”: Young had Miss MacIntosh walk into the sea in black gloves “which she had carefully darned the night before.” Unsure what they meant, she asked a psychiatrist friend, who explained “all the meanings of the word black and gloves in relation to psychology and guilt” (Marguerite Young, interview with Charles Ruas, WBAI radio, New York). Two or three years after she wrote the scene, a man killed himself off Long Island: “He wore only a pair of black gloves,” which made her

feel “I had struck something in reality there, too” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Miss MacIntosh and Suicide in History and Literature.

- “the outgoing of the morning and the outgoing of the evening”: “Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice” (Psalm 65:8, KJV). See The Bible.
- “even upon the wings of the wind”: “Who walketh upon the wings of the wind” (Psalm 104:3, KJV). See The Bible.
- “not those of commission, only those of omission”: Compare the General Confession of the Book of Common Prayer: “We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done.”
- “Whom God hath created, let God not put away”: Compare the marriage service: “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder” (Matthew 19:6, KJV). See The Bible and Weddings and Funerals.
- “she was this old Baldy even then”: “Old Baldy” is Miss MacIntosh herself, bald from childhood and wearing a wig. She traces her line to a bald Gaelic prince lost at sea, his “golden crown floating on the waters,” cast up on the shores of Scotland, so her baldness carries a history of fallen royalty, exile, and endurance.
- “the journeyman phrenologist who was a great designer of octagon houses”: A phrenologist is someone who uses phrenology to study the head. It is a pseudoscience that uses the measurements of the skull to predict mental traits. See On phrenology.
    - The phrenologist sounds like Orson Squire Fowler, America’s most famous phrenologist, who also preached the octagon house in A Home for All (1848).
    - The phrenologist believes males are smarter than females. In the US gender disparity impacts students in different ways. Girls outperform boys in reading and writing in nearly every U.S. school district. By eighth grade, girls are almost a full grade level ahead of boys in reading. Boys may be more likely to have learning disabilities or be influenced by masculine norms that de-prioritize reading. Boys are more likely to experience behavioral problems and receive disciplinary action in school, including suspensions. This affects their learning outcomes and can contribute to a widening achievement gap. While gender gaps in math have narrowed, boys in affluent, educated, and predominantly white districts still tend to outperform girls. In poorer, more diverse areas, girls sometimes outperform boys. Girls are more likely than boys to graduate from high school on time. In 2021, the on-time graduation rate for girls was 88.4%, compared to 81.9% for boys. Women have outnumbered men in higher education since the 1980s. A 2024 analysis found that among recent high school graduates, women enrolled in college at a rate 9 percentage points higher than men. Enrollment growth for women at four-year universities continues to rise, while male enrollment has stagnated. Women earn a majority of associate’s, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees. As of 2024, 40.1% of women had completed four or more years of college, compared to 37.1% of men. This reverses a historical pattern where men once earned a larger share of all degrees. Women are more likely to complete their degrees. Data from the National

Student Clearinghouse shows that across all school types, women graduate at a rate of 67% compared to 60% for men. At four-year institutions, the six-year completion rate is 7 percentage points higher for women. Women disproportionately carry student loan debt. They are more likely than men to take out student loans and graduate with an average of $7,000 more debt. The gender gap in education is most pronounced in STEM fields and careers. Women are severely underrepresented in engineering and computer science. In 2018, women earned just 22% of bachelor's degrees in engineering and 19% in computer science. Conversely, women are overrepresented in health-related STEM fields like biological sciences and psychology. Women comprise only 34% of the U.S. STEM workforce. This varies widely by field, with women accounting for just 16% of engineers in 2023. A 2023 Gallup survey found that male Gen Z youth are significantly more interested in STEM careers than their female counterparts. Girls report less exposure to technical STEM concepts, such as computer programming and electrical circuits, in school. Female Gen Z students are nearly 20 percentage points more likely than males to say they are not interested in a STEM career because they don't think they would be good at it. Gender stereotypes can influence how girls and boys perceive their own abilities, particularly in STEM. Academic success, especially in reading, is sometimes discouraged by traditional norms of masculinity. A student's socioeconomic status intersects with gender. For example, the male college enrollment gap is wider for Black and Hispanic men. Financial constraints also affect college-bound women more, with a Pew Research survey finding women more likely than men to say they couldn't afford a four-year degree. Girls tend to develop more effective self-regulated learning skills, which include planning and organization. This contributes to their greater academic success. Gender biases among educators can influence how they perceive and treat students, sometimes underestimating girls' math abilities. The lower educational attainment of men has consequences for their economic mobility. For women, educational gains in fields like STEM do not always translate to comparable pay, and they face a persistent wage gap within the STEM workforce. The underrepresentation of women in high-earning STEM fields and the lagging achievement of boys in school represent an underutilization of talent that can hinder economic growth. The segregation of fields of study by gender perpetuates occupational segregation in the workforce, reinforcing traditional gender roles and limiting opportunities. (The school statistics are after 1964.)

- "as if she were that melon which is hardest to know": "Men and Melons are hard to know" (Benjamin Franklin, Poor Richard's Almanack, 1733).
- "the day before God moved over the face of the waters": "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Genesis 1:2, KJV). See Genesis.
- "that sea greater than the Sea of Azov": The Sea of Azov is a sea in Eastern Europe connected to the Black Sea by the Strait of Kerch.
- "all those old nonconformist Bible quoters": "nonconformist Bible quoters" can be understood as conservative religious individuals or groups who were critical of

anything that deviated from their interpretation of scripture or social norms. They disapproved of the phrenologist's high praise of Miss MacIntosh, perhaps because it conflicted with their worldview or challenged their authority.

- "the golden bowl was broken": See the golden bowl of Ecclesiastes 12:6 in the Chapter 63 resources. See Ecclesiastes.
- "She should walk in narrow ways with her head covered": "But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven" (1 Corinthians 11:5, KJV). Paul's rule fell hardest on a girl born bald. See The Bible, Hair, Wig, and Baldness, and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "when, as a little child, she was baptized in an icy river": Baptists and other frontier churches baptized by full immersion in rivers and creeks, breaking the ice in winter if they had to. The near-drowning foreshadows her death at sea. See American Religious Movements.
- "She had certainly learned to live with no protection": Miss MacIntosh states that she learned to live without protection. As a woman this "protection" is a many layered thing especially in the past. Unless she was able to move from under her father's/family's care to a husband's care then she was left with nothing in a very literal sense. See On learning to live without protection and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "Driving each day a team of great Percherons": The Percheron is a breed of draft horse that originated in the Huisne river valley in western France. See Horses and Carriages.
- "Red Cross gauze": The history of the Red Cross begins with the 1859 Battle of Solferino, where Henry Dunant was moved to call for national relief societies to help the wounded. This led to the founding of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in 1863 and the first Geneva Convention in 1864. In the United States, Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross in 1881, establishing its presence and leading its early efforts in disaster relief and aiding the U.S. military.
    - "Red Cross" was also the trademark Johnson & Johnson put on its sterile gauze and cotton from the late 1880s.
- "Old Friday barking always at her heels": Old Friday, the old blind sheep dog, is Miss MacIntosh's faithful companion in her solitary last days. See The Old Blind Sheep Dog. Crusoe's companion, too, was Friday.
- "was she not a MacIntosh": MacIntosh is a Scottish name whose motto is "Touch not the cat bot a glove," that is, without a glove. The Mackintoshes belong to Clan Chattan, the clan of the cat. See On the MacIntosh motto.
    - The House of Stuart (Stewart) was a royal house of Scotland, Ireland, England and Great Britain.
- "those who allowed others to carry their umbrellas for them": See Jonas Hanway and the umbrella in the Chapter 63 resources. See The Umbrella.
- "here in this democracy where death must level all": See Shirley's "Death the Leveller" in the Chapter 60 resources. See Death and Mortality.

- “their perfidious opium paradise”: See The History of Opium and Catherine Cartwheel.
- “she having refused the hand of the true King of Sweden”: King of Sweden refers to Mr. Bonebreaker and his belief that he was descended from royalty. See Mr. Titus Bonebreaker, the Gospel salesman in Chapter 65 whose grandmother told him he was the true King of Sweden.
- “her red bloomer leg”: Red bloomers, named after reformer Amelia Bloomer, emerged in the 1850s as a radical symbol of women’s dress reform for health and freedom, featuring loose trousers under a short skirt for mobility, but faced public scorn as “unwomanly” and threatening gender norms, leading many suffragists to adopt less controversial symbols like a red shawl, though bloomers persisted as gym/cycling wear. See Women’s Suffrage.
- “her striped sock unravelling”: Striped socks were often used to denote servants, jesters, prostitutes, or prisoners, marking them as outsiders during the medieval period. The stigma faded as sports emerged in the 19th century; baseball teams like the Baltimore Orioles wore striped stockings for team identity. Stripes appeared in children’s wear in the Victorian Era, often associated with whimsical characters like fairies, creating a paradox with their earlier negative connotations.
- “if she should meet with Mr. Res Tacamah”: See Mr. Res Tacamah.
- “if she should meet with Mr. Chandelier and his floating prisms”: See Mr. Chandelier.
- “We would not see the phantom driver driving a phantom carriage”: See The Black Coachman.
- “by making old God rest on Sunday, the first day of the week”: “But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God” (Exodus 20:10, KJV). See Constantine’s Sunday law in the Chapter 63 resources.
    - The Church of Rome is the Roman Catholic Church.
- “the macintosh that grew on the rosy boughs of the old Iowa”: The McIntosh apple came from a seedling John McIntosh found on his farm in Dundela, Ontario, in 1811, not from Iowa. See the Macintosh raincoat in the Chapter 63 resources.
- “from sea to shining sea”: “And crown thy good with brotherhood / From sea to shining sea!” (Katharine Lee Bates, “America the Beautiful,” 1895).
- “the macintosh being no fruit in Eden on the Tree of Knowledge”: Eden is the Garden of Eden described as the biblical paradise in Genesis. The Tree of Knowledge is one of two specific trees in the story of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2-3, along with the tree of life. Alternatively, some scholars have argued that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is just another name for the tree of life. Genesis never calls the forbidden fruit an apple. See Genesis.
    - Babylon was the capital city of the ancient Babylonian Empire in the Mesopotamian area in antiquity.
    - The Egyptian Book of the Dead is an ancient Egyptian funerary text generally written on papyrus and used from the beginning of the New Kingdom (around 1550 BCE) to around 50 BCE. See Ancient Egypt.

- “the macintosh being not those golden apples falling upward”: Golden apples belong to Greek myth: the apples of the Hesperides that Heracles fetched, the apples Atalanta stooped for, and the apple of discord Paris gave to Aphrodite. See Greek Mythology.
  - The golden apples of myth symbolize lofty ideals or corruptions, while the macintosh apple represents the practical, real-world legacy of Miss MacIntosh’s forefathers, rooted in honest labor and the necessities of life. This contrast underscores Miss MacIntosh’s grounded, no-nonsense character and her emphasis on reality over illusion or fantasy.

Vocabulary

Bracken

A large coarse fern.

Caliph

The title of the chief Muslim ruler, understood as a successor to the Prophet Muhammad.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Cockscomb

The red crest of a rooster; also a jester’s cap, or a garden flower shaped like a crest.

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Constitutional

A walk taken regularly for the sake of one’s health.

Denuded

Stripped bare.

Disdain

Scorn; contempt.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Frugal

Sparing; careful with money.

Gauze

A thin, transparent fabric.

Gnarled

Knobbly and twisted, as old trees or hands.

High-hat

Slang of the 1920s: to treat someone with snobbish disdain.

Hurricane lamp

An oil lamp with a glass chimney to shield the flame from wind.

Incarceration

Imprisonment.

Lethargic

Sluggish and drowsy.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mackintosh

A raincoat of rubberized cloth, named for its inventor, Charles Macintosh.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Matron

A woman in charge of an institution such as an orphanage.

Mauve

A pale purple.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Ninepins

A bowling game with nine pins, forerunner of tenpins.

Nonconformist

A Protestant outside the established church; anyone who does not conform.

Percheron

A heavy French draft horse.

Peregrine

A wanderer or pilgrim; also a falcon.

Perfidious

Treacherous.

Perjurer

One who lies under oath.

Phrenologist

One who claims to read character from the bumps of the skull.

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Raucous

Harsh and loud.

Rhapsodic

Full of rapturous feeling.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Statistician

One who collects and studies numbers about people and things.

Tallow

Animal fat used for candles and soap. Tallow-colored is a dull, yellowish white.

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Tarpaulin

A heavy waterproof cloth for covering things.

Thatched

Covered with straw or reeds, like a roof; of hair, thick and shaggy.

Tincture

To tinge.

Toupee

A small wig.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists' dream of turning base metal into gold.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Vortex

A whirlpool or whirlwind.

Whaler

A whaling ship or a man who hunts whales.

Winding sheet

The cloth a corpse is wrapped in for burial.

Chapter 65

Content note: *Mr. Bonebreaker, a missionary, speaks of “the dirty Jew” and the stars he wins for each Jew he converts.*

Summary

As August turns to September, Miss MacIntosh, bald and half dressed, plays solitaire and mends a pair of black gloves; Vera reveals that these are the gloves she wore when she walked into the ocean one September morning, leaving her wig, her corset, and her umbrella on the beach. The umbrella was Mr. Bonebreaker’s, and Miss MacIntosh tells the story. Weak after losing her left breast and setting ninepins in a Chicago bowling alley, she was found reeling in the street by Titus Bonebreaker, a vegetarian Gospel salesman from the Ozarks who preached the end of the world through a trumpet and believed his grandmother’s story that he was the true King of Sweden. He called her the little sister who had no breasts, praised the hair she did not have, gave her his watch, and kept postponing their wedding. On the night before it, she stood before him naked and bald under an electric bulb. He fled, leaving his umbrella, and later married a foreign girl to give her child a name. Miss MacIntosh worked among the blind, drifted east, spent her savings in Buffalo on white clothes and an ashen wig, and stood alone among the honeymooners at Niagara Falls.

Characters present

Miss MacIntosh · Mr. Titus Bonebreaker · Richard MacIntosh · John Knox MacIntosh · Mercy MacIntosh · Vera Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Love · Society, Class, and Race · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Angels, Devils, and Myth · Clocks and Watches · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Eyes and Blindness · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Buddhism · Hinduism · Marguerite Young on Her Craft

Allusions: American Religious Movements · Ancient Egypt · Don Quixote · Ecclesiastes · Exploration and the Poles · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Judaism · Music and Composers · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, Vera reflects on Miss MacIntosh's many moods and the symbolic nature of her baldness. Her bald head, described as a "prism or a flame," becomes a metaphor for her essential loneliness and mystery, a symbol of life and death intertwined.
- Miss MacIntosh expresses disdain for "old kings of gold and silver towers," traditional dreams of grandeur, and religious or royal symbolism such as the King James Bible and king crabs. She values the natural world and simple facts, rejecting illusions and pretenses. This passage highlights her grounded perspective and her rejection of false hopes or societal conventions.
- A large part of the chapter focuses on Mr. Bonebreaker, the Gospel salesman. His character is described vividly: a man driven by religious zeal, preaching the end of the world, carrying a long black umbrella, and possessing a complex personality filled with contradictions.
- The narrative details the courtship and engagement of Miss MacIntosh and Mr. Bonebreaker, which is fraught with difficulties. Mr. Bonebreaker's inability to accept Miss MacIntosh's physical reality, her baldness and mutilation, is a critical moment. When she reveals herself without her wig and shows her wounds, he reacts with shock and flees, leaving behind his umbrella and Bible literature.
- Throughout the chapter, Miss MacIntosh contemplates mortality and the nature of existence. She plans simply to live as long as she can and then to die without ceremony (no coffin, no forwarding address) accepting life and death on her own terms. Her quiet strength and acceptance contrast with Mr. Bonebreaker's fiery religiosity.
- After Mr. Bonebreaker leaves, Miss MacIntosh supports herself by working with the blind in Chicago, finding some solace among those who cannot see her physical wounds. Eventually, she flees Chicago, drifting eastward with a sense of loneliness and the painful memory of her failed romance. This passage portrays her resilience and the painful solitude she endures.
- The black umbrella and the luminous watch given by Mr. Bonebreaker serve as symbols of their relationship and of faith and protection. After he flees, she keeps these items, but they are reminders of a lost and failed connection. The umbrella especially symbolizes shelter and salvation that proved illusory.
- Throughout the text, there is a striking contrast between Miss MacIntosh's sober, pragmatic view of the world and Mr. Bonebreaker's apocalyptic and evangelical fervor. He preaches the end of the world, judgment, and salvation, while she quietly endures and accepts life's hardships, reflecting a tension between religious hope and human reality.

- Miss MacIntosh’s visit to Niagara Falls, a place of honeymooners and new beginnings, is poignant. She stands alone, no bridegroom or escort, with only her black umbrella. The noise and joy around her contrast sharply with her solitude and lost dreams.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “It was the one and only time a man possessed her, body and soul.” What does “possessed” mean for an embrace that lasts a moment?
- Mr. Bonebreaker calls her “that little sister who had no breasts.” How does he turn Scripture into a wound?
- “She was neither sinful nor beautiful.” How does Miss MacIntosh measure herself against his compliments?

Characters

- Mr. Bonebreaker eats no meat, “but he would eat an egg, never supposing that it was the unborn he ate with such gusto.” What do his inconsistencies show?
- Miss MacIntosh “could not agree that the Jews should be singled out for the brightest, biggest stars,” and at her mission “People of all races were to be admitted.” Where does she stand apart from him?
- When she stands before him, “He was like a crazy, snared bird when he saw her.” Why does the man who preached the end of the world flee from one bald woman?

Connections

- The gloves she mends are “those very black gloves she must have worn” into the sea. How does Vera’s foreknowledge change this chapter?
- “The sun and the moon shone in the same pearly sky when she walked into the ocean.” Where did Miss MacIntosh foretell this in Chapter 63?
- On the beach lay “her black umbrella, Mr. Bonebreaker’s umbrella.” How does knowing where the umbrella came from change it?

Reflection

- “Only in love does one notice these things.” Is that true?
- “Life is never in accordance with what we think it is.” When has that been true?
- “There is surely a man somewhere in every woman’s life.” What does Miss MacIntosh, whose one love was Lorena, mean by this?

Research: Characters

Miss MacIntosh

- A woman of many moods and contradictions, both physically and emotionally marked by her ailments.
- She is bald, missing a breast, and wears wigs to mask her reality.
- Profoundly lonely and marked by a sense of loss, she is simultaneously resigned and hopeful.
- She embodies a “pilgrim’s progress from nowhere to nowhere,” with a simple, austere view of life and death.
- Her internal conflict centers on her past, her physical condition, and her tenuous relationship with faith and society.
- She is portrayed as both vulnerable and strong, practical yet mystical.

Mr. Titus Bonebreaker

- A passionate, zealous Gospel salesman from Missouri, characterized by his fervor and eccentricity.
- He preaches about the impending end of the world, salvation, and the need for repentance.
- He is physically gaunt and stoop-shouldered, with distinctive features like a beaked nose and bright eyes.
- Despite his religious zeal, he is inconsistent and flawed (e.g., his diet, brushes with police, personal hygiene).
- He represents religious fanaticism and the human desire for meaning and redemption amid decay and despair.
- His relationship with Miss MacIntosh is complex: he idealizes her, but ultimately fails to accept her fully.
- His preaching is openly racist and antisemitic: Black men are to be shipped back to Africa as “the sons of Ham,” and each Jew he saves earns him a star twice as bright. Miss MacIntosh disagrees with him, “quite flatly.”
- His first name may refer to Titus the Roman emperor from 79 to 81 AD, who was also a celebrated military general. He is known for leading the Roman army to victory in the First Jewish-Roman War, which resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. His brief reign as emperor is notable for the eruption of Mount Vesuvius and the opening of the Colosseum. Titus is also the companion to whom Paul wrote the Epistle to Titus.

Richard MacIntosh

- He is Miss MacIntosh's brother, a primitive Christian bishop from Iowa who went to the Easter Islands to convert the heathen and disappeared among the head-hunters, and "had either been eaten by them or converted by them." He represents a failed attempt to impose a particular belief system onto a different culture, and his fate is a source of anxiety for Miss MacIntosh.

John Knox MacIntosh

- He is Miss MacIntosh's father.

Mercy MacIntosh

- She is Miss MacIntosh's mother.

Research: Themes

Loneliness and Isolation

See: Isolation and Connection

- Miss MacIntosh's life is defined by solitude, both physical and emotional.
- Her baldness and physical wounds symbolize her vulnerability and societal alienation.
- She finds some solace among the blind, where her own differences are less visible.

Faith, Salvation, and Doubt

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The chapter explores the tension between religious fervor, spiritual hope, and personal doubt.
- Mr. Bonebreaker's apocalyptic preaching contrasts with Miss MacIntosh's pragmatic and skeptical attitude.
- Her rejection of his God and his ultimate flight from her when confronted with her full reality illustrates this tension.

The Body and Physical Affliction

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Women, Gender, and Marriage

- The physical condition of Miss MacIntosh (her baldness, lost breast, and scars) are central to the narrative.
- They symbolize both human frailty and inner strength.
- Her mending of black gloves carries guilt. Young's psychiatrist friend explained "all the meanings of the word black and gloves in relation to psychology and guilt" (Marguerite

Young, interview with Charles Ruas, WBAI radio, New York), and she told Studs Terkel, “I finally understood why it was again a symbol of guilt” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965).

The End of Time and Apocalypse

See: Time

- Mr. Bonebreaker’s constant preaching about the “Last Day,” the destruction of Chicago, and the fall of creation permeates the narrative.
- This apocalyptic vision frames the personal drama within a cosmic scale.

Identity, Appearance, and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Identity and the Self

- Miss MacIntosh’s wearing of wigs and her attempt to hide her baldness reflects issues of identity and societal perception.
- The contrast between appearances and inner reality is a recurring motif.
- Mr. Bonebreaker’s idealized view of her contrasts sharply with her own self-perception.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Black Umbrella

See: The Umbrella

- Carried by Mr. Bonebreaker, symbolizes protection, shelter, and religious zeal.
- When left behind, it signifies abandonment and the collapse of Miss MacIntosh’s hopes.

Baldness and Hairlessness

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- Represents vulnerability, loss, and the stripping away of pretense.
- Contrasted with Mr. Bonebreaker’s idealized descriptions of hair and beauty.

Mutilated Crockery and Black Gloves

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Symbols of care, brokenness, and preparation for hardship or death.

Niagara Falls and Honeymooners’ Hotel

See: The Sea and Water

- Represents the irony of Miss MacIntosh’s solitude amidst joy and new beginnings for others.

The Watch and Biblical Quotations

See: Clocks and Watches · Angels, Devils, and Myth

- Mr. Bonebreaker’s watch symbolizes time running out, the urgency of salvation, and the inevitability of the end.

Research: Resources

- “the old King James version which was, in her pale esteem, befogged”: The King James Bible (1611) was made at the order of James I, the Stuart king; Miss MacIntosh objects to it as she objects to all royalty, “even to king crabs, kingfishers, king posts.” See The Bible.
- “just as she had done to the King of Sweden”: See the King of Sweden in the Chapter 64 resources, and Mr. Bonebreaker below. See Mr. Titus Bonebreaker.
- “playing solitaire with a pack of the old playing cards”: Solitaire originated in Europe in the late 18th century, likely in Germany or Scandinavia, with early versions potentially used for fortune-telling. The game, also known as Patience, spread to France and England in the 19th century, with the first rule books appearing around the 1870s. See the solitary player in the Chapter 60 resources. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “In Chinese gambling dens”: Vera recounts Miss MacIntosh’s memories and opinions, which include several stereotypes about Chinese people: Miss MacIntosh states, “Did I know that the Chinese are a nearly hairless people, that Chinese men prefer a hairless woman with small breasts?” This perpetuates a stereotype about the physical characteristics of Chinese individuals. Miss MacIntosh mentions Chinese gambling dens where men play solitaire and are watched to prevent cheating the “invisible partner.” This associates Chinese culture with gambling and implies a need for surveillance to ensure fair play. Miss MacIntosh claims to have learned solitaire in San Francisco’s Chinatown, suggesting a connection between the game and Chinese culture.
- “called by many the Windy City”: Chicago’s nickname mocked its boastful promoters and politicians, its “windy” talkers, as much as its weather. A popular story credits Charles A. Dana of the New York Sun, writing in 1890 while Chicago and New York competed to host the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, but his editorial has never been found, and the name was already in print by 1876, when a Cincinnati Enquirer headline, “That Windy City,” joked about both a tornado and Chicago’s speakers (Barry Popik, in Evan Andrews, “Why Is Chicago Called the Windy City?,” History.com). Chicagoans came to wear the name with pride. The lake does bring strong winds to the waterfront, and the cold winter wind is called “The Hawk.” See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.

    - Chicago’s history began with Indigenous peoples, followed by French fur traders and the first permanent settler, Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, in the late 1700s. The city was officially founded in 1837 and grew into a major transportation hub for canals and railroads, becoming an industrial and commercial center by the late 19th century. The city experienced rapid expansion, and key events include the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, which destroyed much of the city but led to a period of robust rebuilding, and the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition, which boosted the city’s reputation.
    - Chicago’s history spans from Native American roots as Shikaakwa (wild onion place) through its rapid 19th-century growth into a major industrial hub, the Gilded Age’s steel and meatpacking dominance, the devastating Great Fire of 1871, its rise as a cultural center (World’s Fairs, jazz), the Prohibition-era crime, the political machine era under Mayor Richard J. Daley, and its emergence as a modern metropolis, all while grappling with significant immigration, racial tension, and urban development leading up to the turbulent late 1960s.
- “the old playing cards with the Dutch windmills flying on their backs”: Waddingtons in England, produced playing cards featuring Dutch windmills on the backs, often in sealed, faux-leather boxes, with designs popular in the 1950s and 1960s for their quaint, scenic appeal. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “Chasing windmills—Miss MacIntosh had always been chasing windmills”: Miss MacIntosh told Vera she had been chasing Dutch windmills. Another character, Mrs. Hogden, claims to have lived in a Dutch windmill. Moses Hunnecker, the bus driver of Chapter 1, is also imagined as “some mad Don Quixote chasing windmills.” Windmills in the Dutch style stand in the United States too, among them the Fabyan Windmill outside Chicago and the two in San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park (1903, 1908), the two cities of Miss MacIntosh’s solitaire. Tilting at windmills is an idiom for attacking imaginary enemies from the novel Don Quixote by Miguel de Cervantes. It is a founding book in Western literature and is labeled the first modern novel. Antonio Rivas of Dickinson College called it “a very good reminder of why we read, why we watch movies, why we need fiction and imagination” (“Chasing Windmills,” Dickinson College, April 21, 2015). According to Mark Aldrich of Dickinson College, in a video for the novel’s 400th anniversary (Dickinson College, 2015, YouTube), Don Quixote is the story of an older man who has lost his mind over his obsession with literature and decides to go and live these adventures of time past. Little by little through his friendship with his companion he recovers his mind. It is ultimately the journey of one man finding out who he really is. Quixote is the highest aspirations of human beings. It pits the world of imagination against the terrible reality of modern life. It highlights the challenges of understanding one’s identity. There is a parallel between Don Quixote and Miss MacIntosh My Darling in that it is not a book of issues but of tissues, like an onion, you find layer after layer upon subsequent rereadings. Don Quixote stands for change and renovating society. He wants to help the poor and the oppressed. See On tilting at windmills, Don Quixote, and Moses Hunnecker.

- “her brother Richard who had disappeared among the islands of Oceania”: Oceania is a vast geographical region in the Pacific Ocean, encompassing Australia, New Guinea, New Zealand, and thousands of smaller islands, traditionally divided into Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia, plus Australasia (Australia/NZ). It’s defined by the ocean, featuring diverse climates and landforms, from large continental islands like Australia to tiny coral atolls, with cultures shaped by unique island isolation and later European colonization. See On Richard MacIntosh and the Easter Islands.
    - Richard MacIntosh is Miss MacIntosh’s brother.
    - “Polynesian head-hunters”: Polynesian headhunting, particularly prominent in places like the Solomon Islands (Melanesia, often grouped with Polynesian cultures in historical accounts) and among the Māori of New Zealand, wasn’t just about violence; it served deep cultural, spiritual, and economic purposes, often tied to ancestor worship, capturing soul matter, avenging deaths, enhancing warrior status, and controlling land, with practices evolving and often intensifying or changing due to European contact and the trade in preserved heads (mokomokai).
- “in old San Francisco’s old Chinatown”: Chinatown, San Francisco is the oldest in North America and was founded in the 1840s by Chinese immigrants seeking opportunity during the Gold Rush but found refuge from discrimination. It grew into a tight-knit community that preserved Chinese culture and provided mutual support, despite facing prejudice that led to events like the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. The neighborhood was rebuilt after the 1906 earthquake and has since become a vibrant cultural hub, officially renamed “Chinatown” by the press in 1853.
- “just before the Golden Gate was built”: Miss MacIntosh claims to have been there right before the Golden Gate Bridge was built. This would place her there before the bridge opened in 1937; construction began in 1933. She also claims it may have been foggy so she didn’t see it.
- “And the Arabs had their topknots by which God might fish for them”: The topknot hairstyle has ancient origins in various cultures, often symbolizing status, maturity, or spiritual significance. Historically, it was adopted by samurai in Japan for practical reasons, such as securing their helmets, while in ancient China it was worn by scholars and nobility. In South Asian traditions, it holds religious meaning, and in Korean society, it was used to signify adulthood. Many Muslim men in Egypt once shaved the head but left a small tuft, the “shoosheh,” on the crown; Edward William Lane was told it was kept so that a Muslim slain by an unbeliever would not have his head carried in an unclean way (An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians, 1836). The belief Miss MacIntosh repeats, that God would draw the faithful up to heaven by the tuft, is folk belief rather than Islamic teaching; the hadith forbid qaza’, shaving part of the head and leaving the rest (Sahih al-Bukhari, Book of Dress).
    - Western travelers told of Muslim men, Turks especially, who shaved the head but for one lock by which they would be drawn up into paradise; Young gives the belief to “the Arabs.”

- “that there is a great hole at the North Pole”: In 1818 John Cleves Symmes Jr. announced that the earth is hollow and open at the poles. In the 1880s Cyrus Teed’s Koreshan Unity in Chicago taught the reverse, that we live on the inside of a hollow earth. See Exploration and the Poles.
- “No matter how many explorers draw how many maps of the Himalayas”: The Himalayas are Earth’s highest and youngest mountain range, forming a massive arc across Asia, known as the “Abode of Snow,” containing Mount Everest and over 110 peaks over 24,000 feet, creating a major climatic barrier and source of major rivers like the Ganges and Brahmaputra, vital to billions in India and beyond. Formed by the collision of the Indian and Eurasian tectonic plates, the range features three main parallel ranges (Great, Lesser, Outer) and supports unique ecosystems, with glaciers providing water to billions.
- “my fourteenth year”: Vera is fourteen in this last month with Miss MacIntosh.
- “she walked into the roaring ocean on a cold September morning”: Miss MacIntosh died or disappeared sometime in September. Vera tells it here, before Miss MacIntosh has finished her story. See Suicide in History and Literature.
- “her old Admiral Dewey corset was found draped over a rock”: See the Admiral Dewey corset in the Chapter 63 resources.
- “The sun and the moon shone in the same pearly sky when she walked into the ocean”: In Chapter 63 Miss MacIntosh foretold that “the sun and the moon will shine in the same sky, and yet the earth will not be lighted.” See the Chapter 63 resources.
- “her work in the bowling alley where, every evening, it was her duty to set ninepins up”: Bowling alleys evolved from ancient games, gaining indoor structure in 19th-century America, particularly among German immigrants, shifting from nine-pin to ten-pin to circumvent gambling bans, and transforming into modern entertainment venues with automatic pinsetters and widespread media appeal, especially after the 1950s, though they’ve always been associated with socializing and gambling. Pinsetters began as young boys and girls (“pinboys”) manually resetting pins and returning balls, a common, low-paying job in early 20th-century alleys, often enduring harsh conditions. It was hard, hot work, requiring speed and agility to avoid fast-moving balls and pins, as recounted by both men and women who did the job. See ninepins in the Chapter 64 resources.
- “to wrestle with the dark angel of death”: “And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day” (Genesis 32:24, KJV). See Genesis.
- “Mr. Bonebreaker, a Gospel salesman, saw her reeling”: The surname Bonebrake is an Americanized version of the German name Beinbrech and means “bone break.” The original Beinbrech family lineage began in Switzerland in the 17th century, and the name evolved through various spellings before becoming Bonebrake in America. The name likely served as a metonymic occupational name for a herbalist, possibly referring to medicinal plants. See On the name Bonebreaker. Titus Bonebreaker.
- “for whom the Lord loveth, the Lord chasteneth”: “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Hebrews 12:6, KJV). See

The Bible.

- “A man, said he, shall be as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land”: “And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind… as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land” (Isaiah 32:2, KJV). See The Bible.
- “as dead leaves are cast forth and burned”: “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned” (John 15:6, KJV). See The Bible.
- “as the sheep from the goats, as the wheat from the tares”: “And he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats” (Matthew 25:32, KJV); the wheat and the tares are in Matthew 13:24-30. See Revelation and the Apocalypse and The Bible.
- “Mr. Bonebreaker was born in Missouri, in the Ozark foothills”: The Missouri Ozarks begin with Native American tribes like the Osage, followed by French claim and Spanish jurisdiction. Significant white settlement started in the 1800s, driven by settlers from the Appalachian region, and the area was a major destination during the Trail of Tears. Throughout the 19th century, industries like lead mining and farming flourished. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
    - “I come from a country that raises corn and cotton, cockleburs and Democrats… I’m from Missouri. You have got to show me,” said Congressman Willard Duncan Vandiver in 1899, and Missouri became the Show-Me State.
- “his work as a clerk in a St. Louis shoe store”: St. Louis, Missouri, was founded by French fur traders in 1764 at a strategic location on the Mississippi River. It became the “Gateway to the West” after being purchased by the United States in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803 and was the starting point for the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The city grew into a major trade center, fueled by its river and railroad access, and hosted the 1904 World’s Fair and Olympics. Key historical moments include its 1823 incorporation, its strategic importance during the Civil War, and the famous Dred Scott case at the Old Courthouse.
    - St. Louis’s history spans from a French fur trading settlement in 1764, becoming a crucial Mississippi River hub, booming during the steamboat era, hosting the 1904 World’s Fair, growing into a major industrial city, experiencing rapid suburbanization and population shifts post-WWII (seeing a peak then decline), and navigating racial tensions and social changes leading up to the mid-1960s, all while evolving from “Mound City” (ancient earthwork mounds of the Illini Confederacy) to a significant American metropolis.
- “that which eye has not seen and ear has not heard”: “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Corinthians 2:9, KJV). See The Bible.
- “and the numbers of the hairs in her head, and the least sparrow”: “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matthew 10:30, KJV), said to a woman who has none. See The Bible and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.

- “lest we likewise perish”: “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3, KJV). See The Bible.
- “Weep not, Hagar, for thy little son”: According to the Bible, Hagar was the Egyptian slave of Sarah, Abram’s wife. Sarah had been barren for a long time and sought a way to fulfill God’s promise that Abram would be father of many nations, especially since they had grown old, so she offered Hagar to Abram to be his concubine. Hagar bore Abraham’s son, Ishmael. “What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not” (Genesis 21:17, KJV). Where the King James has “he will be a wild man” (Genesis 16:12), the Hebrew reads “a wild ass of a man,” as Mr. Bonebreaker has it; see Ishmael in the Chapter 62 resources. See Genesis and Ancient Egypt.
- “and she hath no breasts”: “We have a little sister, and she hath no breasts: what shall we do for our sister in the day when she shall be spoken for? If she be a wall, we will build upon her a palace of silver” (Song of Solomon 8:8-9, KJV). Mr. Bonebreaker makes the palace a tower. See The Bible and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “What is the perishing meat of this world?”: “Labour not for the meat which perisheth” (John 6:27, KJV). See The Bible.
- “old Masonic banners”: Freemasonry, a fraternal order descended from the stonemasons’ guilds, was one of the largest social institutions in America, and lodges often met in hotels and public halls hung with their banners. American membership peaked at about four million around 1959.
- “when God prepared the heavens and set a compass upon the face of the depth”: “When he prepared the heavens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth” (Proverbs 8:27, KJV). See The Bible.
- “the ravens of the valley shall pluck us”: “The eye that mocketh at his father… the ravens of the valley shall pick it out” (Proverbs 30:17, KJV). See The Bible.
- “Man is but a frail reed in the wild storm”: Compare Pascal: man is but a reed, the weakest in nature, but a thinking reed (Pensées, 1670).
- “Unfruitful are the works of darkness”: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Ephesians 5:11, KJV). See The Bible.
- “One woe is past”: “One woe is past; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter” (Revelation 9:12, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “Men shall be crushed before the moth”: “Them that dwell in houses of clay… which are crushed before the moth” (Job 4:19, KJV); “For what is your life? It is even a vapour” (James 4:14, KJV). See The Book of Job.
- “we who are saved are not like to whited sepulchres”: “Ye are like unto whited sepulchres” (Matthew 23:27, KJV). See The Bible.
- “man caught as a wild bull in a net”: “As a wild bull in a net” (Isaiah 51:20, KJV); God speaks “out of the whirlwind” in Job 38:1. See The Book of Job.
- “To hoar hairs will I carry you”: “And even to hoar hairs will I carry you” (Isaiah 46:4, KJV). Miss MacIntosh cannot say that she has none. See The Bible and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.

- “in old China the wise men wore horsehair hats”: The horsehair hat was the mark of the scholar-gentleman in Korea, where it is called the gat.
- “where the canker cannot touch us”: “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt” (Matthew 6:19, KJV). See The Bible.
- “She had been a poor creature, yes, with wide blue eyes”: We get another detail about Miss MacIntosh’s appearance.
- “for his bones were out of joint”: “I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint” (Psalm 22:14, KJV). This biblical reference is consistent with Mr. Bonebreaker’s character, who is deeply religious yet flawed and struggling, using scripture to make sense of his life and to assert his role as a preacher of impending judgment and salvation. The phrase encapsulates both his physical frailty and his spiritual earnestness in a poetic, scriptural metaphor. “I may tell all my bones” (Psalm 22:17, KJV).
- “where there were black marble beds”: In Mr. Bonebreaker’s heaven, which will take Miss MacIntosh only if she weeps, the beds are black marble, the stone of tombs and monuments.
- “since in heaven nobody remembers anybody”: Mr. Bonebreaker tells Miss MacIntosh that in heaven he would not remember her or her face. His heaven erases earthly bonds and memory, a bleak promise to a woman already alone. “For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage” (Matthew 22:30, KJV). See On since in heaven nobody remembers anybody.
- “our fathers have eaten sour grapes, that the worm is mother of us all”: “The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge” (Ezekiel 18:2, KJV); “to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister” (Job 17:14, KJV). See The Book of Job.
- “the Egyptians were spoiled”: “And they spoiled the Egyptians” (Exodus 12:36, KJV): the Israelites, leaving Egypt, carried off the Egyptians’ silver and gold. See The Bible and Ancient Egypt.
    - “the Egyptians were spoiled” implies that the Egyptians, once a mighty and revered people, became corrupt or morally ruined in his religious worldview. This phrase is part of Mr. Bonebreaker’s sweeping religious rhetoric about the decline of the world and the need for salvation before the Last Day.
- “Babylon was sunken into the sea”: In Revelation Babylon is the great city of sin, thrown down by divine judgment, and Mr. Bonebreaker uses its fall as a sign of the coming end of the world. “And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down” (Revelation 18:21, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “he had dwelled for a long time in the Land of Ham”: In the Psalms the land of Ham is Egypt: “Israel also came into Egypt; and Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham” (Psalm 105:23, KJV). See The Bible and Ancient Egypt.

- “She was fruit he had plucked from the Dead Sea”: The Dead Sea, also known by other names, is a landlocked salt lake bordered by Jordan to the east, the Israeli-occupied West Bank to the west and Israel to the southwest. It lies in the endorheic basin of the Jordan Rift Valley, and its main tributary is the Jordan River. (Wikipedia)
    - Dead Sea fruit, the apples of Sodom, were said to look ripe but to dissolve into smoke and ashes in the hand (Josephus, The Jewish War, Book 4).
    - “Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?” (Matthew 7:16, KJV). See The Bible.
- “God gave snow like wool”: “He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes” (Psalm 147:16, KJV). See The Bible.
- “her hands were the pureness”: “Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin” (Matthew 6:28, KJV). See The Bible.
- “She had gone down into the valley of the shadow to get him”: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death” (Psalm 23:4, KJV). See The Bible.
- “Her head was filled with dew, he said”: Mr. Bonebreaker courts her with the Song of Solomon: “my head is filled with dew” (5:2), “thy hair is as a flock of goats” (4:1), “Thy neck is as a tower of ivory” (7:4), “Many waters cannot quench love” (8:7), and Job’s “eyelids of the morning” (41:18), all KJV. Every compliment is to her hair or her beauty. See The Bible and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “Georgia MacIntosh, who was born in a snowstorm”: Her full name is Georgia; her brothers called her George. See her name in the Chapter 63 resources.
- “John Knox MacIntosh, her father”: John Knox MacIntosh and Mercy MacIntosh are Georgia MacIntosh’s parents. See On John Knox MacIntosh.
    - John Knox was a Scottish minister, Reformed theologian, and writer who was a leader of the country’s Reformation. He was the founder of the Church of Scotland.
    - Young claimed descent from John Knox on her mother’s side. While writing the novel she “discovered that the Macintoshes, this really astonished me, were descendants from a prince, a bald prince, who was washed up on the shores of Scotland,” so that “Miss Macintosh is really a bald prince, disguised with a red wig and the woman’s gear” (Marguerite Young, interview, WNYC radio, New York). See John Knox MacIntosh, Miss MacIntosh, and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “the mountains full of horses”: “The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire” (2 Kings 6:17, KJV). See The Bible.
- “Miss MacIntosh was the brightest star in his crown”: Revival hymns promised the soul-winner a star in his crown for each soul saved, as in Eliza Hewitt’s “Will There Be Any Stars in My Crown?” (1897), after “they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3, KJV). See American Religious Movements.
    - “The star of the Turk” most likely refers to the crescent and star on the Ottoman flag and emblems. It could also recall the Gallipoli Star (Ottoman War Medal), a WWI Turkish military decoration for bravery, or the famous Mechanical Turk, an 18th-century chess-playing automaton.

- “the star of the dirty Jew”: “Dirty Jew” is a widely recognized and offensive antisemitic slur with historical roots in hate speech and discrimination. The term is a standard antisemitic taunt used in real-world attacks and verbal abuse against Jewish people. During the Holocaust, the yellow Star of David identification marker that Jews were forced to wear encouraged people to use slurs like “dirty Jew” and to harass them. The phrase draws on ancient anti-Jewish themes that falsely associated Jews with filth or spreading disease. Miss MacIntosh objects, “quite flatly,” that the Jews should not be singled out. See Judaism.
- “the neighborhoods of Old Jewry”: “Old Jewry” in London was the center of England’s medieval Jewish community, thriving from the Norman Conquest (1066) through the 13th century as financiers and merchants, but faced increasing persecution, discriminatory laws like the 1275 Statute of Jewry, and accusations (e.g., coin clipping), culminating in King Edward I’s expulsion of all Jews from England in 1290, ending centuries of Jewish life in that area until their readmission under Cromwell in 1657.
    - In Chicago the Jewish neighborhood around Maxwell Street on the Near West Side was known from the 1880s as the ghetto. See Judaism.
- “Why should the black men, the railroad porters, the shoe-shiners”: The history of returning enslaved people to Africa, known as the Back-to-Africa Movement, involved efforts by groups like the American Colonization Society (ACS) in the 19th century to send freed slaves to colonies like Liberia and Sierra Leone, aiming to create homelands for Black people in Africa. While supported by some, including President Lincoln at times, it faced strong opposition from many African Americans who saw it as racist and a way to strengthen slavery, with thousands settling in Liberia before the Civil War despite harsh conditions and high mortality. Founded in 1816 by white elites, the ACS established Liberia (settled 1822) as a colony for freed U.S. slaves, modeled partly on British efforts in Sierra Leone. Paul Cuffee was an early proponent who, in 1815, transported free Black people to Sierra Leone, envisioning trade and immigration. The British settled formerly enslaved people in Sierra Leone starting in the late 1780s, a model the ACS followed. See Society, Class, and Race.
    - In the Bible, Ham, one of Noah’s three sons, had four sons: Cush, Mizraim, Phut, and Canaan, who became ancestors of peoples in Africa and the Middle East, particularly Ethiopia, Egypt, Libya, and Canaan (modern Israel/Palestine). The story in Genesis details how Ham saw his father Noah naked while drunk, leading Noah to curse Ham’s son, Canaan, rather than Ham himself, a narrative known as the Curse of Ham. After the Flood, Noah became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent. Ham saw his father’s nakedness and told his brothers, Shem and Japheth. Shem and Japheth, however, respectfully covered Noah without looking. Noah, upon waking, cursed Canaan (Ham’s son) to be a “servant of servants” to his brothers (Genesis 9:25, KJV), a passage later misused to justify slavery. In the American South the Curse of Ham was preached as God’s own warrant for enslaving Africans, and Mr. Bonebreaker still calls Black men “the sons of Ham.” See Society, Class, and Race.

- “a narrow-hearted man like all Missourians”: Miss MacIntosh perceives Mr. Bonebreaker has a narrow or limited heart because of his rigid and sometimes judgmental religious views, his intolerance towards certain groups, and his conservative attitudes. This narrow-heartedness implies a lack of broad compassion or understanding beyond his own particular worldview.
- “the Justice of the Peace”: A Justice of the Peace is a local public officer handling minor legal matters like small claims, traffic violations, and misdemeanors, and performing administrative duties such as officiating marriages, administering oaths, and witnessing signatures; they are often laypersons (not required to be lawyers) trained in local law, serving as accessible community judicial figures in many common law jurisdictions. Their powers are limited, focusing on local, less serious disputes and essential civic functions, acting as a first point of contact with the legal system.
- “the great, loud-ticking watch, luminous and waterproof”: Luminous dials were painted with radium paint from the 1910s. The young women who painted them, the Radium Girls, were poisoned by pointing their brushes between their lips; in Ottawa, Illinois, the Radium Dial Company’s painters won their case in 1938, and their fight helped establish workers’ right to compensation for occupational disease. See Clocks and Watches and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “first the sermon and then the soup”: Rescue missions such as Chicago’s Pacific Garden Mission (1877) fed the poor after the sermon, not before. The Salvation Army promised “soup, soap, and salvation,” and Joe Hill’s union song “The Preacher and the Slave” (1911) mocked the arrangement as “pie in the sky.” See American Religious Movements.
- “It was most deranging. The yoke of God”: “Take my yoke upon you” (Matthew 11:29, KJV).
- “All the old mansions on the Lake Michigan front”: Old mansions lined the Lake Michigan front, especially in affluent areas like Chicago’s North Shore and Michigan’s Grosse Pointe, showcasing Gilded Age opulence with grand architecture (Italian Renaissance, French-inspired), extensive grounds, luxurious interiors (parquet floors, wood paneling, ballrooms), and historic significance, with examples including the historic David Adler Mansion.
- “the barren who had borne seven times”: “So that the barren hath born seven” (1 Samuel 2:5, KJV); “Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not” (Galatians 4:27, KJV). See The Bible.
- “relapse into the language of baseball”: The language of baseball, or “baseballese,” was rich with colorful, evocative slang like “banjo hitter” (soft contact) or “daisy cutter” (hard grounder), alongside foundational terms such as “ace” (pitcher) and “dish” (home plate). It featured unique terms for plays like “around the horn” (infield relay) and players like “baller” or “hurler,” reflecting a simpler, more traditional game before extensive media exposure amplified modern jargon. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries some Christian leaders saw the sport as a moral threat. Many communities had laws that banned baseball games on Sundays to encourage church attendance

and prevent “rowdy behavior” often associated with saloons and alcohol consumption. State laws even forced some professional teams, like the Boston Red Sox, to play Sunday games at different fields away from churches. Some religious groups viewed baseball as a frivolous activity that distracted from intellectual and spiritual pursuits. Debates emerged about whether good Christians should play or watch baseball, especially on the Sabbath. Individual Jewish players, notably Hank Greenberg (in the 1930s) and Sandy Koufax (in the 1965 World Series), gained national attention and became heroes to many in their community by choosing not to play on the Jewish high holiday of Yom Kippur, a public declaration of faith that highlighted the choice between religious observance and professional demands. Simultaneously, baseball became a powerful cultural force in America, developing many characteristics that paralleled religious institutions. The game was given a deliberate creation myth in the early 1900s, attributing its invention to Abner Doubleday in Cooperstown, NY, which became a “sacred” origin site (now the home of the Baseball Hall of Fame). The sport developed its own rich repository of legends, rituals, and traditions (e.g., the seventh-inning stretch song “Take Me Out to the Ball Game,” the “Curse of the Bambino” (a phrase from 1990), the “infield fly rule”) that fostered a sense of continuity and shared experience. Iconic players like Babe Ruth were treated with reverence, their personal artifacts (bats, uniforms, gloves) becoming the “relics” of modern-day fandom, housed in the “shrine” of the Hall of Fame. The shared experience of fandom, with fans gathering in stadiums or living rooms, created strong bonds of community and belonging, much like a religious congregation. See Christopher H. Evans and William R. Herzog II, eds., The Faith of Fifty Million: Baseball, Religion, and American Culture (2002). Flag: after 1964, Koufax (1965) and the “Curse of the Bambino” (1990).

- “He was on the baseball diamond again”: Compare Billy Sunday, who played outfield for the Chicago White Stockings, was converted at Chicago’s Pacific Garden Mission in 1886, and became the most famous revival preacher in America, preaching in the slang of the ballpark. See American Religious Movements.
- “Chicago was as fat as grease”: “Their heart is as fat as grease” (Psalm 119:70, KJV); “What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest?” (Psalm 114:5, KJV). See The Bible.
- “Selah, Selah”: “Selah” is a Hebrew word of uncertain meaning, probably a musical or liturgical direction, often read as a call to pause and reflect. It appears seventy-one times in the Psalms and three times in Habakkuk.
- “Love lifted me”: The hymn “Love Lifted Me,” written by James Rowe in 1912 with music by Howard E. Smith, tells a story of salvation using the biblical account of Peter walking on water (Matthew 14) as a metaphor for being pulled from sin by Jesus’s love, with Smith composing the melody despite severe arthritis, creating a powerful testament to divine rescue and devotion. See On Love Lifted Me and Music and Composers.
- “In his father’s house were many mansions”: “In my Father’s house are many mansions” (John 14:2, KJV). See The Bible.

- “the French beaver kings”: St. Louis was founded in 1764 by the fur traders Pierre Laclède and Auguste Chouteau, and the Chouteau family grew rich on beaver pelts.
    - “French Beaver Kings” may refer to French fur traders, known as coureurs de bois, established a significant presence around Chicago from the late 17th century, using the vital portage connecting the Great Lakes and Mississippi River for the lucrative beaver trade, leading to French outposts, missionary work (like Marquette’s), early forts (Fort Chicago), and enduring French-Indigenous Métis communities, with figures like Jean Baptiste Point du Sable and Antoine Ouilmette becoming key figures in this fur-driven economy, long before Chicago became a major American city.
- “the German beer kings”: St. Louis’s “German Beer Kings” were immigrant brewers like Eberhard Anheuser, Adolphus Busch, the Lemp family, and the Griesediecks, who built brewing empires in the mid-19th century by introducing lager beers and leveraging St. Louis’s German population and unique limestone caves for brewing, transforming local businesses into national brands like Anheuser-Busch (Budweiser) and creating a rich brewing heritage.
- “the locusts have no king”: “The locusts have no king, yet go they forth all of them by bands” (Proverbs 30:27, KJV). See The Bible.
- “many slaughter yards”: Chicago’s Union Stock Yards, opened in 1865, became the world’s largest meatpacking center, transforming America’s food system by centralizing livestock processing through rail, making Chicago the “hog butcher for the world,” attracting waves of immigrant labor, and spurring related industries, but its reign ended in 1971 due to industry shifts, leaving behind legacy sites like its famous entrance gate and a lasting impact on Chicago’s economy and immigrant communities. Carl Sandburg called Chicago “Hog Butcher for the World” (“Chicago,” 1914). Flag: after 1964, the closing of the stock yards in 1971.
- “As in water, face answers to face”: “As in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man” (Proverbs 27:19, KJV). See The Bible.
- “a great Chicago hotel fire”: “great Chicago hotel fire” may refer to the near-destruction of the Grand Pacific Hotel during the massive 1871 Great Chicago Fire, which destroyed much of the city, and later, tragic incidents like the 1946 LaSalle Hotel Fire.
- “the bar sinister”: The bar sinister, properly a bend or baton sinister, is popularly taken as the heraldic mark of illegitimate birth. Mr. Bonebreaker believes it shut him out from a throne, and decides that all the kings who sit on thrones are crossed by it as he is. See Mr. Titus Bonebreaker.
- “Almanach de Gotha”: Almanach de Gotha is a directory of Europe’s royalty and higher nobility. It was published from 1763 to 1944.
- “he could take the Hapsburgs by storm, sweep the Stuarts off their feet”: The Habsburgs were a powerful German royal dynasty that ruled vast European territories for centuries, rising from Swiss origins in the 10th century to dominate the Holy Roman Empire and control Spain, Austria (as Austria-Hungary), and extensive colonies through strategic marriages and shrewd politics, eventually ending with World War I.

Their empire peaked under Charles V, uniting Spain, the Netherlands, and Austria, but the dynasty's vast reach and complex succession eventually led to internal strains, culminating in the dissolution of their empire after WWI.

    - The Stuart dynasty ruled Scotland from the late 14th century and later England, Scotland, and Ireland from 1603 to 1714, unifying the crowns under James VI of Scotland (James I of England) and overseeing a turbulent era of civil war, religious conflict, plague, and the Great Fire of London, ultimately ending with Queen Anne and leading to the Hanoverian succession, establishing England as a constitutional monarchy.

- "his was the shield of the unicorn": In medieval art, unicorns were tamed only by virgins, making them symbols of purity, often featured on shields alongside figures like the Virgin Mary. The unicorn, often chained and rearing, appears in heraldry, notably with the lion in the British Royal Arms and Canadian symbols, representing royal power.
- "I have put away childish things": Mr. Bonebreaker tells his street audience, "I have put away bicycles, billiards, card playing, smoking, drinking, the things of my childhood." Yet there was "a child in Mr. Bonebreaker as in us all, according to Miss MacIntosh, a child, a human frailty." His dream of a heavenly crown, his backsliding, his brushes with the law and occasional violence, and his wild, scattered preaching show the child still there. "When I was a child, I spake as a child… but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Corinthians 13:11, KJV). See The Bible.
- "like a shadow running backward": The shadow on the sundial of Ahaz went back ten degrees as a sign to King Hezekiah (2 Kings 20:10). See The Bible.
- "He was poor as Tobit's dog": In the Book of Tobit, found in the Apocrypha of the 1611 King James Bible and in Catholic and Orthodox Bibles, a dog faithfully accompanies Tobias, Tobit's son, and the angel Raphael on their journey: "So they went forth both, and the young man's dog with them" (Tobit 5:16, KJV). In Christianity, dogs represent faithfulness. See The Bible.
- "What of her crown of patience?": In Stoicism, patience is a key virtue for achieving inner tranquility and living a good life; Epictetus summed up his teaching as "bear and forbear" (Aulus Gellius, Attic Nights 17.19). In Hindu thought, patience is viewed as the capacity to wait, endure opposites, and act calmly without anxiety, anger, or resentment; in the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna tells Arjuna to endure heat and cold, pleasure and pain, which come and go (2:14). "Patience is bitter, but its fruit is sweet," often credited to Aristotle, comes from Rousseau's Julie, or the New Heloise (1761), Part 1, Letter 46. Miss MacIntosh's patience is active endurance, practical and unsentimental, daily perseverance in place of dreams and self-pity. See the Chapter 40 resources. See Hinduism.
- "the day he figured would be the day after the world would end": Compare the Millerites, who followed William Miller's prophecy that Christ would return in 1843 or 1844; when October 22, 1844, passed, they called it the Great Disappointment. The

Seventh-day Adventists, who grew out of them, also urged a meatless diet, as Mr. Bonebreaker keeps. See American Religious Movements.

    - Religious food restrictions, seen across Judaism (Kashrut), Islam (Halal/Haram), Hinduism (no beef), Jainism (strict vegetarianism, no roots), and early Christianity (abstain from idol-sacrificed food, blood), have ancient roots, often linked to divine command, health/sanitation (pork, blood), ecological reasons, or cultural identity, evolving over time from specific scriptural interpretations (like Jesus declaring all foods clean) to broader ethical principles like non-violence, shaping practices from what to eat to how it's prepared. Religions emphasizing vegetarianism include Jainism (which mandates it for non-violence), Buddhism and Hinduism (strong traditions rooted in Ahimsa or non-violence), and certain Christian denominations like the Seventh-day Adventists, alongside practices in Sikhism, some Jewish traditions, and Eastern Orthodox Christianity during fasts. The core principles often involve compassion for animals, spiritual purity, and minimal harm (Ahimsa). Vegetarians, and vegans especially, must find other sources for nutrients most plentiful in animal foods, such as vitamin B12, iron, zinc, and omega-3 fats. Some anthropologists hold that eating meat, and later cooking, fueled the growth of the human brain (Richard Wrangham, Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human, 2009). Flag: after 1964, Wrangham (2009). See Buddhism and Hinduism.

- "Instead of a girdle, there would be a rent": "And it shall come to pass, that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle a rent; and instead of well set hair baldness" (Isaiah 3:24, KJV). See The Bible and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- "He himself had often said, quoting the Bible, that the wife should stand forth before her husband": "Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold… But let it be the hidden man of the heart" (1 Peter 3:3-4, KJV). See The Bible and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- "God loves the shorn lamb": "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb" (Laurence Sterne, A Sentimental Journey, 1768). See Sterne in the Chapter 55 resources.
- "You, too, can be washed as white as the new-fallen snow": "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isaiah 1:18, KJV). See The Bible.
- "See Chicago and live": A joke on the proverb "See Naples and die."
- "Chicago will roll back the waters": In 1900 Chicago reversed the flow of the Chicago River, turning its sewage away from Lake Michigan toward the Mississippi.
- "a future contender with the Hapsburgs, Medicis, Bourbons, Navarres": The Medici were a powerful Italian banking family and political dynasty that ruled Florence and Tuscany for centuries, becoming synonymous with the Italian Renaissance through their vast wealth, strategic political maneuvering, and unparalleled patronage of arts and sciences, sponsoring figures like Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci and producing four Popes before their dynasty ended in 1737. Starting as wool merchants, they built a massive bank, used financial power to gain political control, and fostered an explosion of Florentine culture, making Florence the heart of the Renaissance.

    - The House of Bourbon is a major European royal dynasty, originating from France as a branch of the Capetians, ruling France from 1589 to 1792 and again from 1814-1848, and later providing monarchs for Spain (since 1700, with interruptions, and currently), Naples, Sicily, and Parma. Key figures include France's Henry IV, the Sun King Louis XIV, and the ill-fated Louis XVI, whose execution ushered in the French Revolution, ending Bourbon rule in France until the restoration. Their legacy is tied to absolute monarchy, French cultural dominance, and widespread European influence, continuing today in Spain and Luxembourg.
    - The history of the Navarres involves the ancient, powerful Kingdom of Navarre in the Pyrenees, which produced French royalty like Henry IV of France, and distinct lines of American families, notably the French-Canadian Navarres who settled in Michigan (like Robert Navarre in Detroit) and the Potawatomi Navarre family in Kansas/Indian Territory, tracing back to early settlers like Pierre Navarre in Indiana.
- "she was herself the Argus-eyed": Argus had a hundred eyes, some always awake; Hera set him to watch Io (Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book 1). See Greek Mythology.
- "much like the blind leading the blind": "And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch" (Matthew 15:14, KJV). See Eyes and Blindness.
- "Shuffling off to Buffalo": Shuffle Off to Buffalo is a song from the 1933 musical film 42nd Street. The lyrics talk about traveling by train to Niagara in a sleeper car for a honeymoon.
- "Love is blind": The saying, meaning that love overlooks faults, is ancient; Plato wrote that the lover is blind about the beloved (Laws 731e). In English, Chaucer has "For love is blynd alday, and may nat see" ("The Merchant's Tale"), and Shakespeare's Jessica says, "But love is blind, and lovers cannot see / The pretty follies that themselves commit" (The Merchant of Venice, 2.6). See Love and Eyes and Blindness.
- "The blind would rub noses like the Chinese": People from cultures like the Inuit (using the kunik), Māori (the hongi), and peoples in some Persian Gulf countries (like the UAE and Saudi Arabia) use nose rubbing as a greeting, often to exchange breath or scents, signifying affection, respect, or a spiritual connection, rather than a Western-style kiss, with different cultural meanings attached.
- "drifting, rudderless in the state of Ohio": Ohio's history spans from its Native American roots, through European exploration and settlement (leading to statehood in 1803, though officially recognized later), its crucial role in the Civil War as a Union state with significant anti-slavery sentiment, rapid industrialization in the late 19th century fueled by cities like Cleveland and Akron, its identity as the "Mother of Presidents," and into the mid-20th century, solidifying its industrial might and diverse cultural influences from New England, New York, and the South.
- "why should she not see Niagara Falls": Niagara Falls, near Buffalo, New York, was a favorite honeymoon destination. The falls formed about 12,000 years ago as the glaciers retreated and the water of Lake Erie poured over the Niagara Escarpment toward Lake Ontario, carving the seven-mile Niagara Gorge. The first inhabitants were the Neutral and other Iroquoian-speaking peoples, and the name is believed to come

from the Iroquoian “Onguiaahra,” meaning “thundering noise.” The Jesuit Louis Hennepin wrote the first European eyewitness account in 1678. After the Erie Canal (1825) and the railroads, tourists and honeymooners came in crowds; legend makes Jérôme Bonaparte, Napoleon’s brother, the first honeymooner, in 1804. Commercial exploitation led Frederick Law Olmsted and others to campaign for New York’s Niagara Reservation, the first state park in the U.S., and Ontario’s Queen Victoria Niagara Falls Park, both established in 1885. In 1896 Niagara power reached Buffalo, more than twenty miles away, proving long-distance alternating current, with Nikola Tesla as a consultant to Westinghouse. In 1901 Annie Edson Taylor became the first person to go over the falls in a barrel. In 1848 an ice jam stopped the flow for up to 40 hours, and in 1969 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers turned off the American Falls to study erosion. Flag: after 1964, the 1969 dewatering. See On Niagara Falls and honeymooners.
    - The Maid of the Mist has carried visitors in oilskins to the foot of the falls since 1846.
- “so many Aphrodites and Apollos”: See Aphrodite in the Chapter 42 resources.
    - Apollo is one of the Olympian deities in Greek mythology. Apollo has been recognized as a god of archery, music and dance, truth and prophecy, healing and diseases, the Sun and light, poetry, and more. (Wikipedia)
- “Romeo and Juliet, Paul and Virginia, Eloise and Abelard, Tristram and the white Yseult”: Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare early in his career about two young Italian star-crossed lovers whose deaths ultimately reconcile their feuding families. (Wikipedia) See Shakespeare.
    - Paul and Virginia is a novel by Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, first published in 1788. The novel’s title characters are friends since birth who fall in love. It records the fate of a child of nature corrupted by the artificial sentimentality of the French upper classes in the late eighteenth century. (Wikipedia)
    - Eloise and Abelard refers to Heloise who was a French nun, philosopher, writer, scholar, and abbess. She is famous in history and popular culture for her love affair and correspondence with the leading medieval logician and theologian Peter Abelard, who became her colleague, collaborator and husband. (Wikipedia) More in the Chapter 52 resources.
    - Tristan and Iseult or Yseult is a chivalric romance told in numerous variations since the 12th century. The tale is a tragedy about the illicit love between the Cornish knight Tristan (Tristram) and the Irish princess Iseult (Isolde, Yseult). (Wikipedia)
- “handing out cards promising quick and easy divorces”: In 1931 Nevada cut its residency for divorce to six weeks, and Reno became the divorce capital. See Weddings and Funerals.
- “a Moody’s Bible chained to a post”: Young’s “Moody’s Bible” recalls Dwight L. Moody, the Chicago evangelist whose Bible Institute opened in 1886; the Gideons began placing Bibles in hotel rooms in 1908. See American Religious Movements.

- “the serpent bite without enchantment”: “Surely the serpent will bite without enchantment” (Ecclesiastes 10:11, KJV). See Ecclesiastes.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Acme

The highest point of something; the peak.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Arabesque

An ornament of intertwined flowing lines, leaves, and tendrils.

Avarice

Greed for wealth.

Bemused

Puzzled and lost in thought.

Cambric

A fine, thin white linen or cotton cloth.

Canker

A blight or ulcer that eats away at a plant or the body; anything that corrupts from within.

Chamber pot

A bowl kept under the bed for use as a toilet at night.

Chameleon

A lizard that can change the color of its skin.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chimera

A monster of Greek myth, part lion, part goat, part serpent; any wild, impossible fancy.

Coiffured

With the hair carefully styled.

Connubial

Of marriage.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Deluge

A great flood or downpour. The Deluge is Noah’s flood.

Delusive

Misleading; giving a false impression.

Denuded

Stripped bare.

Dour

Stern and gloomy.

Effaced

Erased; wiped out.

Fallacy

A mistaken belief, or a flaw in reasoning that makes an argument unsound.

Fly-specked

Spotted with the tiny marks left by flies.

Forebodings

Feelings that something bad is about to happen.

Harangue

To lecture loudly and at length.

Hoar-frost

White frost.

Homespun

Simple and plain; originally, cloth spun at home.

Hostelry

An inn.

Hurricane lamp

An oil lamp with a glass chimney to shield the flame from wind.

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Infanticide

The killing of an infant.

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Inscrutably

In a way that cannot be understood.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

King post

The upright beam in the middle of a roof truss.

Kingpin

The central pin in bowling; the most important person in a group.

Laudanum

A tincture of opium.

Listlessly

Without energy or interest.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mackintosh

A raincoat of rubberized cloth, named for its inventor, Charles Macintosh.

Mauve

A pale purple.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Monsoon

A seasonal wind in South Asia that brings months of heavy rain.

Ninepins

A bowling game with nine pins, forerunner of tenpins.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Oilskin

Cloth made waterproof with oil; a raincoat of it.

Ominous

Threatening; foreboding.

Pavilion

A large tent; a light ornamental building.

Perfidious

Treacherous.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Protuberance

A bulge or swelling.

Pugilist

A boxer.

Quiescent

Still; at rest.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Sable

Black.

Saffron

Orange-yellow, the color of the spice.

Sallow

Of a sickly yellow color.

Salubrious

Healthful.

Scrupulous

Very careful to do what is right.

Seed pearl

A very small pearl.

Seine

To fish with a large hanging net.

Selah

A Hebrew word in the Psalms, perhaps a pause.

Sentient

Able to feel and perceive.

Sepulchre

A tomb cut in rock or built of stone.

Sequin

A small shining disk sewn on clothing; first the zecchino, a Venetian gold coin.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Spiritous

Alcoholic; an old spelling of spirituous.

Stubble

The short stalks left after a harvest.

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Tares

Weeds among the grain.

Thimble

A small cap worn on the finger to push the needle in sewing.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Waterproof

An old word for a raincoat, as in Miss MacIntosh’s “plaid, faded waterproof.”

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Winding sheet

The cloth a corpse is wrapped in for burial.

Chapter 66

Summary

Through a storm, Miss MacIntosh, dressed like a whaler, fires questions at Vera about the life of the eel, the calendar, the North Pole, and the states adjoining Kansas. In her last month she tells Vera her secrets: that her ovaries were removed when she was young; that on her vacations in New York she made an imaginary fortune at the Stock Exchange, for which she was sure Vera's mother had her followed by a Pinkerton; and that there she met a wooden-legged Arctic explorer, "a Great Dane who had left home at an early age," who begged her to give him her money and come with him to the North Pole, then vanished without leaving his name. Vera wonders whether everyone, from Lorena to her own mother, always knew that Miss MacIntosh was bald. The chapter closes on her walk into the sea at dawn, her clothes and wig strewn on the beach, and Vera's elegy for her, while old Friday barks by the waves.

Characters present

Miss MacIntosh · Catherine Cartwheel · Vera Cartwheel · Mr. Titus Bonebreaker · Old Friday · Lorena

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Fate and Chance · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Identity and the Self · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Society, Class, and Race · The Search for Meaning · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Clocks and Watches · Clouds and Storms · Dogs · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella

Allusions: American Religious Movements · Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Exploration and the Poles · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Judaism · Milton · Napoleon and Wellington · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Civil War · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- At the outset, Miss MacIntosh is described as dressed for a long voyage (whaler's hat, sea boots) ready for protection amid a storm, though she insists they are not going anywhere. Her booming voice and strong presence contrast with the child narrator's perception of her eccentric normalcy. She expresses pity for fishermen, sailors, fishes,

and even stars, acknowledging nature's cruelty toward the weak. This passage sets a tone of resilience, foreboding, and her deep connection with nature's harshness.

- Despite the storm and darkness, Miss MacIntosh insists on continuing lessons, asking questions about the heart, geography, history, and more. She shows impatience but also a dedication to education. Vera later reflects that these lessons were far from orthodox and took on new significance after Miss MacIntosh's disappearance.
- A turning point is that the secret is now shared: Miss MacIntosh has been bald all her life under the red wig, and Vera wonders who else had always known. Her loneliness is profound; she loathes children despite being a nursemaid, yearns for adult companionship, and feels disconnected even in bustling cities like New York.
- Miss MacIntosh's interactions with a nameless wooden-legged Arctic explorer at the Stock Exchange are important. She admires Captain Cook, debates the discovery of the North Pole, and contemplates socialism and finance. The explorer's persistent proposals to take her to the Arctic, contrasted with her preoccupation with finance and her own cautious independence, reveal two isolated souls longing for escape and meaning.
- Miss MacIntosh's reflections about her amputations (physical and metaphorical), her lost femininity (due to baldness and removed ovaries), and her unfulfilled love life deepen the sense of tragedy. She contrasts her fate with old traditions and societal expectations of women, expressing a complex relationship with identity and desire. She hopes for a world without colonialism, extravagance, and selfishness.
- The chapter culminates with a haunting depiction of her disappearance: her clothes strewn on the beach, the red wig torn, and only remnants left behind. Vera contemplates the metaphor of amputated feet walking on their own, the sea as her coffin, and the endless cycles of nature and memory. The chapter closes with the image of old Friday (the dog) barking by the sea.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "It is a bad night," she says of the storm, "and I almost pity the stars." What does her pity reveal about her?
- She calls the Stock Exchange "a palace of evil," yet "she had her own seat there, for she had appropriated it." Why does imaginary money suit her?
- "Money was the root of all evil, she did believe." The King James Bible says "the love of money" (1 Timothy 6:10). What does her version leave out?

Characters

- "Greater dog, he said, was man." What does the explorer mean, and what does it tell us about him?

- “He patted her long black umbrella—he patted his wooden leg—he made love to wood and cloth but not to her.” What does he want from her?
- “Never could she kneel before man, and no man knelt before her.” What does Miss MacIntosh refuse, and what does it cost her?

Connections

- “Who had not known that Miss MacIntosh was bald?” How does Vera’s list change the secret she discovered?
- Miss MacIntosh was “like that wounded doe who stands with its blind eye toward the sea.” Where did her danger come from?
- “Yet once more, Miss MacIntosh, my darling, and once more.” Why does Vera borrow the music of Milton’s elegy for a drowned friend?

Reflection

- “The ultimate of fear was that there was nothing to be afraid of.” What can that mean?
- “If only she could have known one person well.” Is that the loneliest wish in the chapter?
- “Sometimes far from the tree from which it had fallen, the apple was found.” What does she mean, and of whom is she thinking?

Research: Characters

Miss MacIntosh

- A strong, eccentric woman who dresses for storms and long voyages. She is bald, always wearing a red wig, which is a hidden truth only discovered later. Her voice is booming and manly, and she exhibits contradictory traits: a resolute socialist with disdain for wealth and extravagance but also an astute student of finance.
- Represents resilience, the burden of loneliness, and the struggle for self-identity. Her baldness symbolizes vulnerability and a unique form of naked truth.
- She harbors dreams of love, adventure, and escape from societal norms, but also suffers from deep isolation and self-awareness of her physical and emotional amputations.
- Acts as a strict, demanding teacher who pushes Vera to learn relentlessly, even amid storms and symbolic death.

The Arctic Explorer at the Stock Exchange

- A wooden-legged, talkative man with a haunting past who invites Miss MacIntosh to join him on an expedition to the North Pole. His character is mysterious and symbolic

of isolation, survival, and the lure of the unknown.

- Embodies the exploration of the unknown, physical and emotional scars, and the harsh reality beyond civilization.
- A complex connection based on shared loneliness and amputations; he proposes a life of silence and isolation, contrasting with Miss MacIntosh's attachment to her worldly concerns.
- He wants her money: she must "draw out her money from the bank and put it all into his name," though her fortune is imaginary and she has never placed her first ten cents.
- He calls himself "Greater Dog who had once eaten his dead master," the same story Miss MacIntosh tells of a dog in What Cheer.

Catherine Cartwheel

- She is described as being "pent up in bed" and dreaming in an "over-heated room." This suggests she is physically unwell and possibly confined to her bed for an extended period.
- Vera mentions that her mother sometimes dreams "opium dreams" and entertains "too many hallucinations" for her health's sake. This implies a detachment from reality and a possible reliance on drugs or other means to escape her physical condition.
- Vera notes that her mother has strange dreams where she never recognizes living men, only the dead ones. This indicates a preoccupation with the past and a possible inability to connect with the present.
- Miss MacIntosh criticizes her mother for lacking common sense, specifically citing the gift of an Eskimo cookbook as an example. This suggests a disconnect between the mother's actions and practical reality.
- The gifts Vera's mother gives Miss MacIntosh (a silk nightgown and the Eskimo cookbook) point to a certain level of wealth and privilege.
- Vera wonders if her mother always knew Miss MacIntosh was bald, despite it being a secret. If true, this could indicate a deeper understanding or perception than she lets on.

Vera Cartwheel

- Vera is deeply influenced by Miss MacIntosh, to the point of reflecting her moods and taking on "every color except my own." This suggests a lack of a strong, independent identity in her childhood, making her highly susceptible to Miss MacIntosh's unusual worldview.
- Vera is often confused by Miss MacIntosh's lessons and pronouncements. She admits to being "very stupid, undeveloped" and unable to answer basic questions. However, this also implies a certain level of intellectual curiosity, even if she struggles to grasp the concepts.

- As a child, Vera takes Miss MacIntosh's eccentricities for granted, considering them "commonplace." This acceptance highlights her innocence and the way children often normalize the unusual behavior of adults in their lives.
- The narrative is framed as a recollection from "long years after Miss MacIntosh's disappearance." This distance allows Vera to view the lessons with "a new light," recognizing their unorthodox nature. The nostalgic tone suggests that Miss MacIntosh, despite her strangeness, had a significant impact on Vera's life and development.
- Vera seems haunted by Miss MacIntosh's disappearance and the circumstances surrounding it. The recurring imagery of storms, drowning, and the sea suggests a deep sense of loss and unresolved questions. She can still hear Miss MacIntosh's voice "roaring above the storm," indicating a lasting psychological impact.
- Vera's observation that Miss MacIntosh wished to tell her all her secrets during the last month of her life suggests a growing awareness and understanding of her nursemaid's complexities. She begins to perceive Miss MacIntosh's loneliness, her longing for adult companionship, and her hidden vulnerabilities, such as her baldness.
- Even as a child, Vera seems to possess a keen eye for the absurd. She notices the incongruities in Miss MacIntosh's behavior, such as her wearing a whaler's hat during lessons or receiving an Eskimo cookbook as a gift when she never cooks. This suggests an underlying sense of humor and an ability to recognize the strangeness of the world around her.
- In retrospect, Vera reflects on her own shortcomings and tendencies, such as her proneness to hallucinations and her lack of a distinct identity. This introspection suggests a desire to understand herself and her relationship with Miss MacIntosh on a deeper level.

Mr. Bonebreaker

- Miss MacIntosh reflects that Mr. Bonebreaker belonged to an old religion where women must kneel before men, similar to the customs of What Cheer, Iowa, where women wash men's feet. She contrasts this with her own situation, noting her baldness and lack of traditionally feminine features, which prevent her from fulfilling such a role.
- Mr. Bonebreaker seems to represent a lost opportunity for love and connection in Miss MacIntosh's life. He is associated with the idea that she could never kneel before a man, implying a rejection of traditional gender roles and a sense of isolation.
- It is said that Mr. Bonebreaker fled leaving his umbrella behind.
- Miss MacIntosh's baldness is a significant factor in her perception of her relationship with Mr. Bonebreaker. She believes her lack of hair and other physical attributes made her unattractive and contributed to the failure of their relationship.
- Mr. Bonebreaker is mentioned as one of the people who knew Miss MacIntosh was bald.

Old Friday (pet dog)

- Old Friday is consistently present at Miss MacIntosh's heels, even after her disappearance. He barks "much as if he might still be aware of her, a moving shadow, a shadow of a black umbrella moving over water and sand —as if perhaps she had never gone or had returned." This suggests that Old Friday retains a memory of Miss MacIntosh and remains loyal to her, even when others have moved on.
- The text implies that Old Friday might perceive something beyond what others can see. Vera questions, "had he not known the denudation and the dream, the reality and the illusion, how each must live by some pretense?." This suggests that Old Friday is aware of the underlying truths and illusions that define Miss MacIntosh's existence.
- Even after Miss MacIntosh's apparent drowning, Old Friday continues to bark by the sea, suggesting a continuation of life and memory even in the face of loss. The waves return "with all but her, waves swollen with winds, the waves like sheep with a thousand bells, aye, while she and the shores and sounding waves wash far away in echo and response."
- Old Friday's barking by the sea after Miss MacIntosh's disappearance can be interpreted as a symbol of inconsolable grief and mourning. He is a constant reminder of her absence.

Lorena

- Lorena appears only briefly but her presence is significant in relation to Miss MacIntosh and the broader themes of the novel.
- In Chapter 64, Lorena is described as a beautiful dancing girl with dark hair, described as fat, who ran away and became a strip-tease dancer. This characterization contrasts sharply with Miss MacIntosh's practical, no-nonsense, and grounded nature. Lorena represents a more sensual, flamboyant, and perhaps socially transgressive aspect of femininity, set against Miss MacIntosh's sobriety, austerity, and emotional reserve.
- Lorena's knowledge of Miss MacIntosh's baldness before Vera discovers it suggests an intimacy or at least a closer social awareness of Miss MacIntosh's vulnerability and true self.
- Lorena's laughter behind her fan and her awareness of this physical fact highlight the difference in how women in the novel perceive and interact with each other, often marked by a mixture of judgment, awareness, and perhaps envy or pity.
- Lorena helps underscore Miss MacIntosh's loneliness and isolation. While Lorena embodies escape, sensuality, and perhaps a more conventional form of social engagement (albeit in a marginal way), Miss MacIntosh remains solitary, bald, and burdened by her practical concerns and emotional detachment.

Research: Themes

Isolation and Loneliness

See: Isolation and Connection

- Miss MacIntosh's baldness and social detachment highlight profound loneliness, despite her physical presence among others.
- The Arctic explorer's life and invitation symbolize a complete withdrawal from society into the harsh, silent wilderness.
- Vera, as a child, reflects this isolation by absorbing the moods and eccentricities of Miss MacIntosh without fully understanding them.

Truth and Illusion

See: Illusion and Reality

- Miss MacIntosh claims to always speak the "bald truth," a pun on her physical baldness and metaphorical truthfulness.
- Her imaginary financial dealings on the Stock Exchange represent the illusion of control and wealth in a chaotic world.
- The explorer's tales mix reality with fantasy, blurring the lines between truth, myth, and personal delusion.

The Harshness of Nature and Fate

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Fate and Chance

- The recurrent imagery of storms, drowning, and the sea as a coffin symbolize the inevitability of death and nature's indifference.
- Miss MacIntosh's preoccupation with the fishermen, drowned sailors, and drowned things on the beach emphasizes vulnerability.
- The Arctic setting and references to icebergs, glaciers, and the North Pole evoke an unforgiving environment that mirrors internal struggles.

Identity and Physical Amputation

See: Identity and the Self

- Both Miss MacIntosh and the Arctic explorer carry physical and emotional amputations (her baldness and removed ovaries; his lost leg), symbolizing loss and survival.
- Their shared disabilities forge a silent kinship and mutual understanding of alienation.
- Miss MacIntosh's lost hair and wig symbolize the loss of traditional feminine identity and seduction.

Education and Knowledge

See: The Search for Meaning

- Miss MacIntosh's relentless questioning, despite her indifference to answers, reflects a ritualistic pursuit of knowledge.
- Vera's difficulty in answering symbolizes innocence and underdevelopment, contrasting with Miss MacIntosh's eccentric wisdom.
- Subjects range from geography and history to biology and social science, showing a broad but fragmented understanding of the world.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Hurricane Lamp

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light · Clouds and Storms

- Represents fragile knowledge and guidance amid darkness and storms.

The Sea and Waves

See: The Sea and Water

- Symbolize the passage of time, death, and the subconscious.

The Black Umbrella

See: The Umbrella

- Miss MacIntosh's shield against the world; her barrier protecting her from close human contact.

The Red Wig

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- A mask hiding her baldness, symbolizing concealment of vulnerability.

Stock Exchange

See: Gambling and Playing Cards · Society, Class, and Race

- A place of illusionary wealth and human folly; also a site where she confronts capitalism and socialism.

Iceberg and North Pole Imagery

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Symbolize isolation, the unknown, and the emotional coldness of the characters.

The Amputated Foot and Head

See: Death and Mortality · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Metaphors for loss, survival, and the persistence of the dream or spirit beyond physical destruction.

Research: Resources

- “What is the altitude of Tibet?”: The Tibetan Plateau averages more than 14,000 feet above sea level, the highest plateau on earth, called the Roof of the World.
- “Who was Martin Luther?”: Martin Luther (1483-1546), the German monk whose Ninety-five Theses of 1517 began the Protestant Reformation.
- “What is the life of the eel?”: The eels of Europe and America are born in the Sargasso Sea, drift thousands of miles to the rivers, and return to the sea to spawn and die. The Danish biologist Johannes Schmidt traced their birthplace in the early 1920s. See The Sea and Water.
- “what were the states adjoining Kansas”: Nebraska, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Colorado. The geographic center of the forty-eight contiguous states lies in Kansas, near Lebanon.
- “Who changed the calendar”: Julius Caesar reformed the Roman calendar in 46 BC, and Pope Gregory XIII gave us the Gregorian calendar in 1582; Britain and its colonies adopted it in 1752, when September 2 was followed by September 14. Constantine’s change was to time itself: in 321 he made Sunday a day of rest, and his Council of Nicaea (325) set the rule for the date of Easter. See Constantine and the calendar in the Chapter 22 resources and the Chapter 63 resources.
- “Who was Captain Cook?”: Miss MacIntosh’s “Captain Cook” is Dr. Frederick A. Cook (1865-1940), the American who claimed to have reached the North Pole in April 1908, a year before Peary. The University of Copenhagen rejected his records in 1909. In 1923 he was convicted of mail fraud for promoting oil stocks in Texas, served his sentence at Leavenworth until his parole in 1930, and was pardoned by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1940. Young merges him with Captain James Cook, the British navigator. See Exploration and the Poles.
  - Captain Cook or James Cook was a British explorer, navigator, cartographer, and captain in the British Royal Navy, famous for his three voyages between 1768 and 1779 in the Pacific Ocean and to New Zealand and Australia in particular. Recently his voyages were criticized for the promotion of colonialism. (Wikipedia)
- “it was Captain Cook and not Commander Peary”: Commander Peary or Robert Peary was an American explorer and officer in the United States Navy who made several expeditions to the Arctic in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He is best known for, in April 1909, leading an expedition that claimed to be the first to have reached the geographic North Pole. Explorer Matthew Henson, part of the expedition, is thought to have reached what they believed to be the North Pole narrowly before Peary.

(Wikipedia) Peary's backers were the Peary Arctic Club of wealthy New Yorkers, and the National Geographic Society endorsed his claim. See Exploration and the Poles.
    - In 1897 Peary brought six Inuit from Greenland to New York, where four of them died, among them Qisuk; the American Museum of Natural History staged a false burial for his son, Minik, and kept Qisuk's skeleton. Its remains were returned to Greenland in 1993. See Society, Class, and Race.
- "We will now skip the sinking of the Armada": The Spanish Armada of 1588, beaten in the Channel, was wrecked by storms off Scotland and Ireland, where thousands of sailors drowned.
- "Lecturing on socialism": Socialism is a left-wing political, social, and economic philosophy encompassing a range of economic and social systems characterized by social ownership of the means of production, as opposed to private ownership (Wikipedia). Vera recalls Miss MacIntosh lecturing on socialism while walking in the surf with her skirts pinned up and her black umbrella billowing above her head. Miss MacIntosh expresses disdain for the unequal distribution of wealth, stating that in New York City, "The rich threw dollar bills out of windows, and the poor did not catch the money." She hopes for a reformed world without rich people by the time Vera grows up. Despite her disapproval of wealth, Miss MacIntosh visits the Stock Exchange, which she calls "a palace of evil." She claims she goes there to level the rich so they should all be poor. Miss MacIntosh teaches Vera "the beauty of deprivation." She mentions her desire to improve the human race and her search for "simple humanity." She visits the Stock Exchange to make imaginary money but saves real money for her old age. She also mentions a past relationship with an Arctic explorer. The Arctic explorer, whom she met at the Stock Exchange, echoes some of Miss MacIntosh's criticisms of society, viewing it as empty and artificial. He suggests that she abandon her worldly goods and join him on an everlasting trek to the North Pole.
- "should I do with an Eskimo cook book": Many Inuit and Yupik people now consider "Eskimo" an outsider's name; Canada and Greenland use Inuit. A real Eskimo Cook Book, gathered by the students of the Shishmaref Day School in Alaska, was published in 1952 by the Alaska Crippled Children's Association.
- "Where is the Bering Sea?": The Bering Sea and Strait are named for Vitus Bering (1681-1741), a Dane in Russian service who sailed them in 1728 and died on what is now Bering Island in 1741. The explorer of this chapter is a Dane too. See Exploration and the Poles.
- "who is John L. Sullivan": John L. Sullivan was an American boxer dubbed the "Boston Strong Boy" by the press and recognized as the first heavyweight champion of gloved boxing. (Wikipedia) He was the last bare-knuckle heavyweight champion and lost his title to James J. Corbett in 1892; he died in 1918.
- "Going to New York on her occasional vacations": New York City's history spans from Lenape settlements, Dutch colonization (New Amsterdam), English rule, Revolutionary War, becoming a major port and immigration hub, skyscraper boom, and finally a global cultural and economic powerhouse, peaking in post-WWII influence with thriving

jazz, arts (Abstract Expressionism), and Broadway before the significant changes of the late 60s began to emerge, solidifying its unique, fast-paced identity.

- “she had often visited the Aquarium”: The New York Aquarium is the oldest continually operating aquarium in the United States, located on the Riegelmann Boardwalk in Coney Island, Brooklyn, New York City. It was founded at Castle Garden in Battery Park, Manhattan in 1896, and moved to Coney Island in 1957. (Wikipedia)
- “Money was the root of all evil”: “For the love of money is the root of all evil” (1 Timothy 6:10, KJV). Miss MacIntosh drops “the love of.” See The Bible.
- “followed by this Pinkerton agent”: The Pinkerton National Detective Agency, founded in Chicago by Allan Pinkerton in 1850, hired Kate Warne in 1856, the first woman detective in America. Pinkertons were also hired by mill and mine owners to spy on and break strikes, as at Homestead in 1892. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “Grant’s Tomb, she had always visited it”: Grant’s Tomb or the General Grant National Memorial, is the final resting place of Ulysses S. Grant, 18th president of the United States, and his wife, Julia Grant. It is a classical domed mausoleum in the Morningside Heights neighborhood of Upper Manhattan in New York City. (Wikipedia) It was dedicated in 1897. See The Civil War.
- “in the shadow of Brooklyn Bridge”: The Brooklyn Bridge opened in 1883. When its engineer, Washington Roebling, was crippled by caisson disease, his wife Emily Warren Roebling carried his instructions to the site for years and learned the engineering herself; she was the first to cross the finished bridge. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “she herself had been an ugly duckling”: Hans Christian Andersen’s “The Ugly Duckling” (1843), the tale of another Dane.
- “an end of the British Empire and of all forms of Colonialism”: The British Empire’s history is a centuries-long process of expansion driven by exploration, trade, and colonization, beginning with settlements in North America and growing to encompass vast territories across the globe. Key events include the loss of the American colonies, direct British rule over India after the Indian Mutiny, the Scramble for Africa, and the eventual decline of the empire following the two World Wars as independence movements gained momentum. The empire’s legacy includes the spread of the English language and British political and educational systems, but also the violent suppression of resistance, exploitation of resources, and the enslavement of millions of Africans through the triangular trade.
    - Colonialism is a historical practice where one country dominates and controls another, often exploiting its resources and people. While it existed in antiquity, the modern era of colonialism, driven by European powers from the 15th to the 20th century, saw empires expand across the Americas, Africa, and Asia. The Spanish and Portuguese initiated colonization in the Americas, followed by the French and British who established empires in North America, the Caribbean, and other parts of the world. This process frequently involved violence, the subjugation of indigenous

populations, and the imposition of the colonizer's culture, language, and economic systems, with lasting negative impacts still felt today.

    - The history of Jewish return to Palestine is marked by two major periods: ancient exiles and returns, and the modern Zionist movement. Ancient returns occurred after the Babylonian exile around 538 BCE and were driven by religious and political events. The modern era saw a mass return fueled by the late 19th-century Zionist movement, which aimed to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine amidst rising antisemitism, culminating in the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. Around 587 BCE, the Babylonians destroyed the First Temple in Jerusalem and exiled many Jews. In 538 BCE, Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon and allowed the Jews to return to Judah and rebuild the Temple, which was completed in 515 BCE. The Romans destroyed the Second Temple in 70 CE during the First Jewish-Roman War, leading to a major Jewish diaspora and the loss of sovereignty. The Zionist movement, which began in the late 19th century, aimed to re-establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Organized immigration to Palestine began in 1882, with immigrants motivated by a combination of religious ideals and practical/economic considerations, though not yet modern Zionism. The movement gained momentum due to rising antisemitism and pogroms in Europe, which led to increased Jewish immigration to Palestine throughout the 1930s. The British limited Jewish immigration to Palestine with the "White Paper of 1939," which disappointed Zionists, though many Jews still arrived during this period. Following World War II and the liberation of concentration camp survivors, the United Nations partitioned Palestine. On May 14, 1948, the modern State of Israel was proclaimed, re-establishing Jewish sovereignty after nearly 2,000 years.

- "For otherwise, where would they go?": At the Évian Conference of July 1938, thirty-two nations met over the Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany, and nearly all refused to take more. In 1939 the ship St. Louis, carrying 937 passengers, most of them Jewish refugees, was turned away by Cuba, the United States, and Canada. See Judaism.
- "an end to the Tong wars": The Tong Wars were a series of violent disputes beginning in the late 19th century among rival Chinese Tong factions centered in the Chinatowns of various American cities, in particular San Francisco. Tong wars could be triggered by a variety of inter-gang grievances, from the public besmirching of another Tong's honor, to failure to make full payment for a "slave girl," to the murder of a rival Tong member. Each Tong had salaried soldiers, known as boo how doy, who fought in Chinatown alleys and streets over the control of opium, prostitution, gambling, and territory. In San Francisco's Chinatown district, the Tong Wars lasted until 1921, with the various criminal Tongs estimated between nineteen and as many as thirty at the peak of the conflict, though the actual number is uncertain, with frequent splintering and mergers between the various Tongs. While a loose alliance, consisting of the Chinatown police, Donaldina Cameron, the courts, and the Chinese community itself tried to stem the tide of the fighting Tongs, it was the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and subsequent fires caused by the earthquake that was the death knell for the Tongs

in San Francisco, as it destroyed the brothels, gambling dens, and opium houses that the criminal organizations had used for the majority of their revenue. Recovery was slow for most Tongs, so they abandoned the old Chinatown. (Wikipedia)

- “China, the Sleeping Dragon, would awaken”: China has been referred to as “the sleeping Dragon.” In China, the dragon stands for power, strength, and good luck. In the past, the Chinese emperor was referred to as the Dragon. China’s economy covers thousands of years with cycles of prosperity and decline. “Let China sleep, for when she wakes up, she will shake the world” is often credited to Napoleon, but no source has been found in his speeches or writings; the earliest known attribution is from 1911. See Napoleon and Wellington.
    - The Qing dynasty, with its mandarins, fell in the revolution of 1911, and the last emperor abdicated in 1912.
- “She once knew two dwarves”: It’s possible and actually quite common for two parents with dwarfism, especially achondroplasia, to have an average-sized child, as there’s a 25% chance for a child to inherit a “normal” height gene from each parent, resulting in an average-sized stature, while still having a 50% chance of a dwarf child like themselves, and a 25% chance for a severe, often fatal, form of dwarfism (homozygous).
- “the seed pods, her ovaries, had been removed”: Removing the ovaries is an oophorectomy, not a hysterectomy. In 1872 the Georgia surgeon Robert Battey began removing healthy ovaries to treat menstrual pain, “hysteria,” and “insanity,” and by the 1890s thousands of women in America and Europe, many of them young, had undergone the operation. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
    - Hysterectomies are rarely performed on women younger than thirty-five years old. It is a mystery as to what happened to Miss MacIntosh’s ovaries and difficult to pinpoint her age or anyone’s age except Vera in the novel.
- “She did hope that, before she died, the King of England would lose his crown”: Attempts to overthrow the English monarchy span centuries, from medieval power struggles like the Anarchy and Wars of the Roses, to the successful republican revolution during the English Civil War (leading to Charles I’s execution and the Commonwealth), the Glorious Revolution (limiting monarchical power), and the Jacobite Risings seeking Stuart restoration, all demonstrating persistent challenges to royal authority.
    - A King of England did lose his crown: Edward VIII abdicated in December 1936 to marry Wallis Simpson, an American divorcée.
- “She was not crowned by virtue”: “A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband” (Proverbs 12:4, KJV). See The Bible.
- “Had she not once had a love affair with the King of Sweden”: Mr. Bonebreaker, who believed he was the true King of Sweden. See the Chapter 65 resources. See Mr. Titus Bonebreaker.

- “that a path would open through the sea for her”: “And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea… and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided” (Exodus 14:21, KJV). See The Bible and Ancient Egypt.
- “if she had no breast, then he would build a tower upon a wall”: See the little sister who “hath no breasts” (Song of Solomon 8:8-9) in the Chapter 65 resources. See The Bible.
- “that there would be balm in Gilead”: “Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there?” (Jeremiah 8:22, KJV). The balm of Gilead was a healing resin from the hill country east of the Jordan, carried by traders: “a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt” (Genesis 37:25, KJV). The African American spiritual answers Jeremiah’s question: “There is a balm in Gilead / To make the wounded whole.” See The Bible.
- “a pillar of clouds by day, a pillar of fire by night”: “And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light” (Exodus 13:21, KJV). See The Bible and Ancient Egypt.
- “But Mr. Bonebreaker had belonged to that old religion”: This passage critiques patriarchal traditions by illustrating the extreme expectations placed on women to be subservient to men, using vivid, almost grotesque imagery of kneeling and hair used as a towel for washing men’s feet. “that old religion” and its description here refers to patriarchy of which Christianity is a part and instances of the changes from a matrilineal society and traditions to a patrilineal one are in the Bible (Marilyn French, From Eve to Dawn: A History of Women in the World, 2002). Patriarchy entitles men to admiration, sex, consent, and domestic labor from women. Men also receive better medical care and pain management and overall focus of health science for their bodies. Men also are able to practice bodily control which is often and routinely denied women. Misogyny and sexism go hand in hand with patriarchy although it is possible for men to practice one or the other and both need not be present at the same time. Sexism is the theoretical and ideological branch where beliefs, ideas and assumptions are used to rationalize and naturalize patriarchal norms and expectations. Misogyny is the “law enforcement” branch of patriarchy which polices and enforces gendered norms and expectations for girls and women (Kate Manne, Down Girl, 2017, and Entitled, 2020). Gerda Lerner documented men’s withholding knowledge and power from women through denying education for centuries (The Creation of Feminist Consciousness, 1993). Young upends many of these gendered norms in the novel. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and Mr. Titus Bonebreaker.
- “wash his dirty feet in a tin basin and dry them with her hair”: “And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head” (Luke 7:38, KJV). Feet washing, after John 13:14, is still practiced by the Brethren, Mennonites, and Primitive Baptists. See The Bible, Hair, Wig, and Baldness, and American Religious Movements.
- “there had been a rival love”: Miss MacIntosh could never kneel before a man, and no man knelt before her, “although there had been more than one man in her life, of

course, and there had been a rival love." She still hopes there "might still be a path opening for her in the sea."

- "the opium dreams my mother dreamed": Psychoactive substances and paranormal activity have been reported for over a thousand years. In the documentary Super High Me in 2007 Doug Benson smokes pot for thirty days straight. He took a series of tests before and after. His Psychic ESP test went from 1/25 to 7/25. See The History of Opium.
- "Once she went to an exhibit of kitchen robots": At the 1939 New York World's Fair, Westinghouse showed Elektro, a seven-foot talking robot, and staged a "Battle of the Centuries" in which a woman washing dishes by hand raced an electric dishwasher.
    - The American National Exhibition of 1959, held in Moscow, not New York, which featured a "miracle kitchen" that included a radio-controlled proto-roomba-like device. As part of a Cold War-era exhibition, the U.S. showcased a futuristic kitchen featuring a radio-controlled, two-way mirror device that resembled a proto-roomba. This exhibit was a counter-exhibit to a Soviet exhibition in Moscow, part of a propaganda battle.
- "At the head of Wall Street": From 1711 to 1762 New York's municipal slave market stood on Wall Street. See the Wall Street broker in the Chapter 54 resources. See Society, Class, and Race.
- "she would sit among the tombs at Trinity Churchyard": Trinity Churchyard, is located in Lower Manhattan near Wall Street and Broadway. Alexander Hamilton, Albert Gallatin, and Robert Fulton are buried in the downtown Trinity Churchyard.
- "in the graveyard at St. Mark's": St. Mark's Church-in-the-Bowery is an Episcopal Church in the East Village neighborhood of Manhattan in New York City. The property has been the site of continuous Christian worship for more than three and a half centuries, making it New York City's oldest site of continuous religious practice. (Wikipedia)
    - Peter Stuyvesant, the Dutch director-general of New Amsterdam, is buried there (1672). In 1654 he tried to turn away twenty-three Jewish refugees from Brazil, and the Dutch West India Company overruled him; he also held enslaved Africans. See Judaism and Society, Class, and Race.
- "in a bullish or a bearish market": A bull expects prices to rise, a bear expects them to fall; both terms come from the London exchanges of the eighteenth century. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
    - Since the Great Recession in 2008 there has been a great deal of investigative journalism on American and international financial institutions and their manipulation. Matt Taibbi has written a series of articles in the Rolling Stone magazine. Jon Stewart has recently done a series of video podcasts on financial concerns. Mark Blyth, a professor at Brown University, has also published books and articles.

- “if she had only had more than ten cents to her name”: John D. Rockefeller, whom she names below, handed out shiny new dimes to children and strangers in his old age.
- “she knew the shiftings of Anaconda”: “Anaconda” here likely alludes to the Anaconda Copper Mining Company, a well-known mining corporation historically traded on the stock market. Miss MacIntosh, though a poor nursemaid, imagines or studies the financial shifts and trends of such stocks, demonstrating her keen interest and understanding of finance despite her practical and modest lifestyle. It is a symbol of the volatile financial markets that Miss MacIntosh follows with astute observation and imagination, representing the unpredictable nature of investments where the infrastructure (rails, trains, lights) remains constant but the market values (rails being “up” or “down”) fluctuate unpredictably.
- “how American tin can might go up or down”: American Can Company, formed in 1901 by merging more than a hundred can makers, was called the Tin Can Trust.
    - American tinware began with colonial tinsmiths making pierced lanterns and household goods. The Civil War’s demand for canned food made the tin can cheap and common, carrying food from the industrial East to the frontier, and pressed tin ceilings became an affordable imitation of ornate plaster.
- “that six feet of earth which would be his”: Compare Tolstoy’s “How Much Land Does a Man Need?” (1886), whose greedy peasant runs himself to death trying to claim more land and is buried in a grave six feet long.
- “the coffin-maker’s child had not his coffin”: Compare the proverb “The shoemaker’s children go barefoot.”
- “She learned what intangible property was”: Intangible property refers to assets that lack physical form but hold significant economic value, representing legal or financial rights, ideas, or reputation, rather than objects like land or inventory: intellectual property (patents, copyrights, trademarks), brand names, trade secrets, licenses, franchises, customer lists, goodwill, and digital assets like software and databases. These properties derive value from their ability to generate income or provide exclusive use, making them crucial in business valuation.
- “or could corner all the gold”: On Black Friday, September 24, 1869, Jay Gould and Jim Fisk’s attempt to corner the gold market collapsed, ruining many speculators. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “she was richer than Rockefeller or the King of Sweden”: John D. Rockefeller (1839-1937), founder of Standard Oil, was the richest American of his age.
- “she had her own seat there, for she had appropriated it”: In 1870 Victoria Woodhull and her sister Tennessee Claflin opened the first brokerage on Wall Street owned by women. No woman held a seat on the New York Stock Exchange until Muriel Siebert bought one in December 1967. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “Her man’s watch ticking on her shoulder”: Mr. Bonebreaker’s watch. See the Chapter 65 resources. See Clocks and Watches.

- “piling up a vast fortune in American Anthracite”: Anthracite is hard coal, mined in the United States almost entirely in northeastern Pennsylvania, and it heated American homes and powered industry well into the twentieth century. Its fortunes came at a steep human cost, marked by mine disasters and bitter labor conflicts such as the Anthracite Coal Strike of 1902.
- “She would not invest in zippers”: Miss MacIntosh would not invest in zippers because in What Cheer they were considered a modern invention and against the will of God. This kind of restriction sounds similar to the Amish and Mennonites who have lived in Iowa for over 160 years. The zipper began as Whitcomb Judson’s “clasp locker” (1893) and Gideon Sundback’s “hookless fastener” (1913); B. F. Goodrich named it the zipper in 1923. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest and American Religious Movements.
- “sweeping up ticker tape”: The stock ticker, printing prices on paper tape, came to Wall Street in 1867. The first ticker-tape parade, in 1886, celebrated the dedication of the Statue of Liberty.
- “until the street was a sea of glass”: “And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal” (Revelation 4:6, KJV). See The Bible.
- “He told her that he had swept with his broom in all the great streets of the world”: The old broom-sweeper, not the Arctic explorer, describes his presence in many important and symbolic places around the world. This conveys his wide-ranging journey through the world, both literally and figuratively, and his connection to both the extraordinary and the ordinary.
    - Trafalgar Square evolved from the King’s Mews into a grand public space, commemorating the 1805 Battle of Trafalgar with Nelson’s Column (1843) and bronze lions (1867), featuring the National Gallery, fountains (1939), and serving as London’s premier site for political demonstrations, rallies, and public gatherings, solidifying its role as a cultural and political heart of the city.
    - Kremlin Square (Red Square) evolved from a medieval market/shantytown cleared by Ivan the Great into a ceremonial center, marketplace, execution site, and Soviet focal point for parades, marked by structures like St. Basil’s Cathedral (1550s) and the GUM store (late 19th century), becoming a stage for state power, revolution (1917), and post-war military displays, with Lenin’s Mausoleum and Kremlin Wall Necropolis established in the Soviet era before the major 1950s-60s renovations and public opening.
    - Golden Square London, evolved from a plague pit (Pesthouse Field) and horse grazing land (Gelding Close) into a fashionable aristocratic address in the 1700s, hosting diplomats and artists, then shifted to professionals and businesses by the 1800s, becoming a literary landmark featured in Dickens and known for its wool trade.
    - St. Mark’s Square (Piazza San Marco) began in the 9th century as a small space by the original St. Mark’s Basilica, evolving from a muddy field to Venice’s grand public heart, paved in brick by 1267, enlarged and adorned with natural stone patterns by

the 18th century, and featuring significant Renaissance architecture like the Doge's Palace and Campanile, solidifying its role as Europe's "drawing room" for centuries.

- "she did not own even a share in General Electric": General Electric (GE) began in 1892 from a merger of Edison General Electric and Thomson-Houston Electric Company, becoming an early tech giant known for pioneering lighting (Edison's bulb), appliances (electric stoves), and industrial equipment. GE expanded into radio, TV, jet engines (WWII), nuclear power, and established its famous research lab, driving American industrial growth through innovations like the first commercial power station (1882) and early home appliances, becoming a key Dow Jones component.
- "some other potters' field": Paupers' graves (also potter's fields) in the US were common, unmarked plots for the poor, unknown, or unclaimed, often managed by poorhouses or asylums, reflecting a societal stigma where a cheap, dignified burial was a mark of last resort, with burials sometimes in communal trenches and lacking individual headstones, a practice evolving from English poor laws and continuing through periods like the Civil War era's hardship. "And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in" (Matthew 27:7, KJV). New York's potter's field has been on Hart Island since 1869. See The Bible and Death and Mortality.
- "It would be a natural death, not a suicide": Miss MacIntosh is describing the myth that men jumped out of office windows after the market crash in 1929. John Kenneth Galbraith found that the suicide wave of 1929 was a legend; suicides in New York in the weeks after the crash were fewer than the year before (The Great Crash, 1929, 1955). See Suicide in History and Literature.
- "Every investment she made was hedged around by Ivory soap": Ivory soap is a flagship personal care brand created by the Procter & Gamble Company. Ivory's first slogan, "It Floats!," was introduced in 1891.
- "a wilted carnation at her feet or a wilted rosebud": The wilted carnation or rosebud is a poignant image of impermanence and the quiet sadness that accompanies Miss MacIntosh's life and her reflections on human nature and society.
- "America, she always said, was still the Land of Opportunity": The Land of Opportunity is a nickname for the United States and refers to socioeconomic mobility between social classes or economic levels.
- "this explorer who was wooden-legged": Compare Peter Freuchen (1886-1957), the Danish Arctic explorer who lost his left foot to frostbite in 1926, settled in New York, and won The $64,000 Question in 1956. See Exploration and the Poles.
- "born in Denmark hard by the castle of Elsinore": The description situates his origin geographically and culturally: he is from Denmark, specifically near Elsinore Castle, which is famously known as the setting of Shakespeare's play Hamlet. Elsinore Castle is a real fortress located in Helsingør, Denmark. Like Hamlet, he is a Dane marked by tragedy: he "had left home because of a great tragedy." See Shakespeare.
- "had killed twin sisters who had been hiding naked in the bushes": Compare Actaeon, who came upon Diana bathing naked, was changed into a stag, and was torn apart by

his own hounds (Ovid, Metamorphoses, Book 3). The “great huntsman” of the sky is Orion, whom the Greater Dog follows. See Greek Mythology and Astronomy.

- “Greater dog, he said, was man”: The Dog Star is a nickname for Sirius, a star in the constellation Canis Major (Greater Dog). See Astronomy and Dogs.
- “He told her that he was a Great Dane”: “Great Dane” is a German breed of large mastiff-sighthound, which descends from hunting dogs of the Middle Ages used to hunt bears, wild boar, and deer. This expresses the Arctic Explorer’s tough, solitary character marked by loss and endurance, a man who carries dog-like loyalty and survival instincts but is also physically and emotionally wounded. The explorer is a pun: a great Dane. See Dogs.
- “fringed like that of a Wilderness Scout”: “Wilderness Scout” in the U.S. wasn’t a formal program but emerged from early youth groups like Ernest Thompson Seton’s Woodcraft Indians (1902) and Daniel Carter Beard’s Sons of Daniel Boone (1905), which emphasized nature skills and American Indian lore, eventually merging into the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), which itself developed older youth programs like Senior Scouts and Explorers (1935) for advanced wilderness camping and challenging outdoor pursuits, exemplified by trips to Philmont and Canadian wilderness canoe expeditions. Wilderness scouts, frontiersmen, and explorers frequently wore fringed garments, like the “hunting frock” or buckskin jackets, because the fringe served practical purposes, shedding rain and helping the leather dry faster, in addition to being a cultural style adopted from or shared with Native Americans, making it ideal for frontier life.
- “they would both have done better as fiction writers”: Neither claim is accepted without doubt today. Cook’s records were rejected in 1909, and Peary’s own navigation and speeds have been questioned since. See Exploration and the Poles.
    - Polynesian voyagers may have reached Antarctic waters as early as the seventh century, more than a thousand years before Europeans. Māori oral traditions tell of Hui Te Rangiora and his crew sailing the vessel Te Ivi o Atea far south to “a foggy, misty and dark place not seen by the sun,” with icy summits “piercing the sky.” Ovens and middens found on subantarctic islands show Polynesians in far southern waters. The study argues that these oral histories, often overlooked by Western scholars, show Polynesians were probably the first humans to see Antarctica (Priscilla Wehi and others, “A short scan of Māori journeys to Antarctica,” Journal of the Royal Society of New Zealand, 2021). Cook crossed the Antarctic Circle in 1773 without sighting land, the first confirmed European sightings came in 1820, and Peary’s expeditions were in the Arctic. Flag: after 1964, the 2021 study.
- “slightly less than two moons’ breadth from Polaris”: In the mid-twentieth century Polaris stood about one degree from the celestial pole, and the full moon is half a degree wide, so the explorer is right. See Astronomy.
- “their amputations and their sense of having killed something young and helpless”: Miss MacIntosh, bald and missing a breast, and the explorer, who broke his leg fording a stream in Newfoundland and cut it off himself when gangrene set in, share literal

amputations. He believes they share a guilt as well, which the novel leaves unexplained.

- “Fording a shallow stream in Newfoundland”: The history of Newfoundland and Labrador covers the period from habitation by Archaic peoples thousands of years ago to the present day. Prior to European colonization, the lands encompassing present-day Newfoundland and Labrador were inhabited for millennia by different groups of Indigenous peoples. (Wikipedia)
- “Among the Eskimos, she would do as the Eskimos did”: The proverb “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” goes back to St. Ambrose’s advice to St. Augustine, which Augustine recorded in a letter.
- “they, the two of them, would walk to Russia”: Big Diomede, in Russia, and Little Diomede, in Alaska, lie about two and a half miles apart in the Bering Strait, and in hard winters the ice between them can be walked.
- “There was nothing to fear. Where nothing was known”: The phrase philosophically explores how fear depends on distinctions and knowledge, and how in a place of pure mystery or complete ignorance, those distinctions vanish, and with them, fear.
- “Far above King William Land, at the Magnetic Pole”: King William Land, also called King William Island, is an island in the Kitikmeot Region of Nunavut, which is part of the Arctic Archipelago. (Wikipedia) Franklin’s lost expedition perished near King William Island in 1845-1848, and James Clark Ross first reached the North Magnetic Pole nearby, on the Boothia Peninsula, in 1831. See Exploration and the Poles.
    - A Magnetic Pole is the planetary magnetic poles. On Earth it is the North and South magnetic poles where on the planet’s surface the planet’s magnetic field lines are vertical.
- “she would find that there is no word for corset”: The old claim that the Eskimo have many words for snow goes back to the anthropologist Franz Boas (1911); the explorer offers the reverse, a word they lack.
- “the spirit without the flesh”: “The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak” (Matthew 26:41, KJV). See The Bible.
- “the nights were six months long where they would go”: At the North Pole itself the sun sets near the September equinox and does not rise again until the March equinox, so the night there is about six months long. See Exploration and the Poles.
    - Alaska is not actually dark for six months of the year, even in the northern cities. The entire state experiences varying hours of sunlight and darkness all year long. They do get longer and longer hours of darkness until winter solstice, usually around December 21st.
- “It was pear-shaped”: On his third voyage Columbus wrote (1498) that the world is not round but shaped like a pear. In 1958 and 1959 measurements of the orbit of the satellite Vanguard 1 showed that the earth is in fact very slightly pear-shaped. See Astronomy.

- “for he reminded her of her father”: Miss MacIntosh was fond of the Arctic Explorer because he reminded her of her father who had to have his leg cut off when he was older.
- “her brother, who had gone far away to live among the head-hunters”: Richard MacIntosh. See the Chapter 65 resources.
- “women were like icebergs”: Compare Hemingway on writing: “The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water” (Death in the Afternoon, 1932).
- “he promised not to harm a hair of her head”: “But there shall not an hair of your head perish” (Luke 21:18, KJV), promised to a woman who has none. See The Bible and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “she had known a dog who had been Greater Man”: The explorer calls himself harmless, “Greater Dog,” and Miss MacIntosh recalls a dog in What Cheer who had been “Greater Man,” for he had eaten his drunken master, to whom he was chained and who had frozen to death in the Arctic cold. See Dogs.
- “The ultimate of fear was that there was nothing to be afraid of”: Compare Franklin Roosevelt’s first inaugural address (1933): “the only thing we have to fear is fear itself.”
- “who have no social security”: The Social Security Act of 1935 created old-age pensions in the United States. Miss MacIntosh, always saving for her old age, gives the poor old fish none. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “Lorena had known, laughing behind her fan”: See Lorena.
- “not knowing whether he was Peron or Joachim”: See Peron Spitzer and Joachim Spitzer.
- “old Friday, barking at her heels”: See Old Friday.
- “orchards of golden apples”: See the golden apples in the Chapter 64 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- “far from the tree from which it had fallen, the apple was found”: Miss MacIntosh reverses the proverb “The apple never falls far from the tree.”
- “when moon and sun were shining in the same firmament”: See the sun and moon in one sky in the Chapter 63 resources and the Chapter 65 resources.
- “her corset draped over a rock in a salt pool”: See her walk into the sea in the Chapter 65 resources. See Suicide in History and Literature.
- “she was like that wounded doe”: In Aesop’s fable of the one-eyed doe, a doe grazed by the sea with her blind eye toward the water, fearing only the land; hunters came by boat and shot her. Trouble comes from where it is least expected.
- “She went not by coach with the black coachman”: See The Black Coachman. Compare Emily Dickinson: “Because I could not stop for Death — / He kindly stopped for me —” (1890).
- “Yet once more, Miss MacIntosh, my darling, and once more”: Vera’s elegy echoes Milton’s “Lycidas” (1637), his lament for a friend drowned at sea: “Yet once more, O ye

laurels, and once more”; “He must not float upon his watery bier”; “Whilst thee the shores and sounding seas / Wash far away”; “Visit’st the bottom of the monstrous world”; “So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed”; “With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves.” See Milton, Grief, Loss, and Mourning, and The Sea and Water.

- “the other faces mourning as over the universal baldness”: See the universal baldness as a sign of mourning in the Chapter 64 resources. See Hair, Wig, and Baldness and Grief, Loss, and Mourning.

Vocabulary

Anthracite

Hard coal that burns with little smoke.

Artifice

Clever trickery, or the art of making things seem other than they are.

Astuteness

Shrewdness; keen judgment.

Bier

A stand on which a corpse or coffin is carried.

Blubber

The fat of whales and seals.

Cold-water flat

A tenement apartment with no hot running water.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Day-star

The morning star; also the sun.

Demented

Out of one’s mind.

Denudation

The act of stripping bare.

Deprivation

The lack or loss of something needed.

Faugh

An exclamation of disgust.

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Gangrene

The death and decay of body tissue.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Hurricane lamp

An oil lamp with a glass chimney to shield the flame from wind.

Igloo

An Inuit house built of snow blocks.

Lave

To wash or bathe.

Leghorn

A breed of chicken.

Limpid

Clear and transparent.

Mackintosh

A raincoat of rubberized cloth, named for its inventor, Charles Macintosh.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Monsoon

A seasonal wind in South Asia that brings months of heavy rain.

Myrrh

A fragrant resin used in incense and embalming.

Nebula

A cloud of gas and dust in space; once any hazy patch of light among the stars, including galaxies.

Obtrusive

Pushing oneself forward; unwelcome.

Oozy

Wet with soft mud or slime.

Parlay

To build a small stake into a large one by betting the winnings again.

Periphery

The outer edge.

Perjury

Lying under oath.

Phantasmagoric

Like a phantasmagoria, a shifting series of dreamlike or nightmarish images. A phantasmagoria was an eighteenth-century magic-lantern ghost show.

Pigmentation

The natural coloring of skin, hair, or other tissue.

Potter’s field

A burial ground for the poor and the unknown.

Proximity

Nearness.

Sand dollar

A flat, round sea urchin whose white skeleton is found on beaches.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Spinster

An unmarried woman, especially an older one. The word first meant a woman who spun thread.

Traipse

To walk about wearily or aimlessly.

Whaler

A whaling ship or a man who hunts whales.

Chapter 67

Summary

The bus reaches the Tavern at the end of its journey and cannot wedge into the space between a leaking milk truck and a hearse. Moses Hunnecker, drunk or so Vera thinks, curses old Doc, the mad Dr. Justice O'Leary, whose invisible ghost buggy, an old Ford full of the children Moses jeers at, he believes is taking the space. He sings scraps of old songs, boasts of the buzzards returning to Rush Creek, and threatens to scatter Doc all over the street. Vera, Madge, and Homer stay in their seats out of infinite weariness, for they have come home to no home. Madge laughs at a misery that is nothing new to her and likens them to people trapped in a crazy house of mirrors with no doors, and Homer wonders which door Jackie found.

Characters present

Moses Hunnecker · Justice O'Leary · Madge Capehorn · Homer Capehorn · Vera Cartwheel

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Allusions: Ecclesiastes · Music and Composers

Key passages

From the research

- Moses curses and talks to old Doc, an unseen presence whom children shoot at with bean-shooters. Moses says old Doc should move his "old ghost buggy" to let the bus park, and lectures him on traffic rules: chalk lines, detour signs, slow turns.
- Moses's exhaustion is palpable as he drapes himself over the steering wheel, singing softly and lamenting his situation. Homer and Madge are caught in an "infinite weariness," reluctant to leave the bus, suggesting a deeper existential fatigue or a reluctance to face reality. Moses's talk of increasing the town's population by three contrasts with old Doc's apparent failure to contribute positively, adding layers of irony and social commentary.
- Moses describes Old Doc's "old ghost buggy" as an old Ford without essential parts, and accuses Doc of being dead "from the shoulders down." Moses threatens to scatter "heathen Chinee" inside Doc's buggy and warns of a "hot time in the old town tonight" with buzzards arriving.
- Vera briefly contemplates that old Doc might be the undertaker in the hearse, blending the roles of doctor and death. Perhaps, she thinks, the undertaker was "the best

doctor," since after his work there could hardly be a complaint from the corpse.

- The passengers' rocking back and forth, Madge's high, thin laughter, and Homer's absent-mindedness contribute to a dreamlike, nightmarish atmosphere. Madge describes their stalled situation as being trapped in a crazy house with mirrored walls and no doors, evoking feelings of entrapment and confusion. Homer's mention of "Jackie" and tuberculosis introduces a note of illness and impending loss, heightening the emotional tension.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "Probably half the conversation in America occurs in this manner." What kind of conversation does Vera mean?
- "I'm increasing the population of this town by three, and that is more than you can ever bring." Who are the three, and what is Moses boasting of?
- "Perhaps the undertaker, cutting the jugular vein, was the best doctor." What joke is Vera making?

Characters

- Moses addresses "old Doc, a grizzled, unseen man." Who is old Doc, and why can only Moses see him?
- Madge laughs "at the bus-driver's misery, Doc's misery, which was nothing new to her." Why is it nothing new to her?
- "He was impatient as well as absent-minded, dreaming of a bride his wife might never know." What does this tell us about Homer and Madge?

Connections

- "After all, we had come home to no home." How does this answer the journey that began in Chapter 1?
- "The generations of buzzards do go on, honest to God." Compare "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh" (Ecclesiastes 1:4). What is Moses saying about old Doc?
- "Jackie found the door," Homer says. Which door does he mean?

Reflection

- "There had to be some traffic rules." Is Moses talking about traffic?
- "The past was the past, though. Time waited for no man." Does this chapter agree?

- “You felt along the glass, but you did not know how to get out, which mirror was a door.” When has life felt like that?

Research: Characters

Moses Hunnecker, the bus-driver

- A long-haired, possibly drunk or deeply weary man who curses and talks aloud to “old Doc,” an unseen figure. He embodies frustration, loneliness, and a struggle against an unyielding obstacle.

Old Doc, Dr. Justice O’Leary

- Old Doc is Dr. Justice O’Leary, the mad old doctor whose imaginary patients are “those pregnant women who were dead and whom old Doc seemed to think were living again” (Chapter 5). Only Moses sees him here.
- Moses sees him in an old “ghost buggy” (car), who occupies a parking space and seems to symbolize obstruction, death, or the past. As a doctor he may represent death or stagnation.

Madge

- Laughs breathlessly at Moses’s misery, indicating a detachment or acceptance of the surreal situation.

Homer

- Impatient and absent-minded, dreaming of a bride his wife might never know.

Vera

- Observes and reflects on the scene, feeling tired and dreamlike.

Research: Themes

- Loneliness and Communication with the Unseen: Moses talks to old Doc, who is unseen and possibly a ghost or symbolic figure. This “conversation” reflects the human need to vent frustration and to communicate even when no one is listening or present. It highlights isolation and the internal battles people face.
- The Struggle Between Life and Death: Old Doc’s “ghost buggy” and the hearse symbolize death or the past, while the bus and its passengers represent life moving forward. Moses’s frustration in trying to park reflects the tension between these forces, with death obstructing the path of life.

- Rules and Order vs Chaos: Moses imagines traffic rules (chalk lines, detours, traffic lights) as metaphors for social order and fairness. The chaotic reality, with obstacles like old Doc's ghost buggy, represents life's unpredictability and unfairness.
- Existential Weariness and Dreamlike Reality: Vera and passengers feel an "infinite weariness," and the situation is likened to being stuck on a ferris wheel or in a crazy house with mirrored walls and no exits. This surreal imagery evokes the feeling of being trapped in life's endless struggles and the confusion about how to move forward.
- The Passage of Time and Memory: Moses references the past ("the past was the past") and the inevitability of time moving on. Old Doc's presence and the image of buzzards returning evoke decay and the cyclical nature of life and death.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

- Moses pleads repeatedly with Doc to move over, symbolizing the desire for obstacles (death, the past, inertia) to yield to life and progress.
- "I can't give you anything but love, baby," sung by Moses, contrasts the harshness of his situation with a tender expression, perhaps hinting at the human capacity for care amid struggle.
- Moses's comment about the passengers in old Doc's buggy suggests confusion or denial about the nature of life, lineage, or reality. "They look like pigs to me one minute and birds the next," he says. "They don't look like their mama."
- It's "like being stalled on a ferris wheel at the top of the sky." Madge's description captures the surreal, trapped feeling of the moment.

Further notes from the text

- The bus tries to wedge into the space between a milk truck leaking from its cans and a hearse, birth and death on either side of the passengers. See Comedy in Chapter 67.
- Moses's cursing of old Doc becomes a comic theory of marriage and traffic: perhaps there should be a chalk line down the middle of every bed, with signs for detours, narrow shoulders, and steep inclines, or a man might be ditched.
- He boasts that he is bringing in real business, increasing the population of the town by three, more than Doc can say, and calls Doc's car an old ghost buggy that could be parked on a postage stamp.
- His report of the buzzards that have staged a return and brought their relatives, eighty or ninety seen over Rush Creek at sundown, ends with a cheerful jab: the generations of buzzards go on.
- Vera says the passengers stay in their seats out of infinite weariness: "we had come home to no home," and perhaps they wished to prolong the journey.
- Madge's laughter is high and thin, at the driver's misery and Doc's, while Homer dreams of a bride his wife might never know. Vera expects a bird to fly out of the bus-

driver’s beard.

Research: Resources

- “the pregnant girl with the bird upon her hat”: Hats trimmed with whole birds were the fashion around 1900. In 1896 two Boston women, Harriet Hemenway and Minna Hall, founded the Massachusetts Audubon Society to stop the slaughter of birds for the plumage trade, and the federal Lacey Act of 1900 and the Migratory Bird Treaty of 1918 followed. See Madge Capehorn and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “He addressed old Doc, a grizzled, unseen man”: Old Doc is Dr. Justice O’Leary. See Justice O’Leary.
- “Roosevelt in the White House”: There were two Roosevelt presidents, Theodore and Franklin D. Since Miss MacIntosh talked about not seeing the Golden Gate Bridge which was built in the 1930s it is a good guess and since Moses hates Democrats, he is probably talking about Franklin D. Roosevelt. In Chapter 5 Moses swore that as long as the Democrats were running the country, he would not cut his hair. See the Chapter 5 resources. He was the President of the US from 1933 until his death in April 1945, the only president elected four times.
- “Move over, Doc”: See Moses Hunnecker.
- “cretin idiots”: “Cretin” first named people with congenital iodine deficiency, from an Alpine French word for “Christian,” that is, a fellow human being; “water on their brains” is hydrocephalus. Both became insults.
- “I can’t give you anything but love, baby”: I Can’t Give You Anything But Love, Baby is an American song from 1928. The idea behind the song came during a stroll Fields and McHugh were taking one evening down Fifth Avenue. They saw a young couple window-shopping at Tiffany’s. McHugh and Fields understood that the couple could not afford to buy jewelry from Tiffany’s. They heard the man say, “Gee, honey, I’d like to get you a sparkler like that, but right now, I can’t give you nothin’ but love!” Within an hour McHugh and Fields came up with the song. (Wikipedia) The lyricist was Dorothy Fields, one of the first women to succeed as a Broadway and Hollywood songwriter, with Jimmy McHugh; the song was introduced in the all-Black revue Blackbirds of 1928. See Music and Composers and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “After all, we had come home to no home”: Compare Thomas Wolfe’s novel You Can’t Go Home Again (1940).
- “How many rabbit tests old Doc had run”: In the Friedman test (1931), a woman’s urine was injected into a female rabbit, whose ovaries were examined a few days later for signs of pregnancy. The rabbit was killed either way, so “the rabbit died” was never the sign. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “Time waited for no man”: The proverb “Time and tide wait for no man” is centuries old in English.

- “the one-hoss shay, she ain’t what she used to was”: Moses mixes Holmes’s “One-Hoss Shay” with the folk song “The Old Gray Mare,” who “ain’t what she used to be.”
    - The poem is Oliver Wendell Holmes’s “The Deacon’s Masterpiece; or, The Wonderful One-Hoss Shay” (1858). In the poem, a deacon laments the fact that carriages break down due to weakness at one place or another. The carriages were usually built locally by enterprising villagers. The deacon deduces that if he were to build a one hoss shay using the finest materials from top to bottom, it would have no weaknesses and would therefore endure forever. So the deacon decides to build the most reliable one hoss shay there ever could logically be, in accordance with the Puritan principles that critics of the era believed Oliver Wendell Holmes to be satirizing. Every part of it is equally as strong as every other part. This marvel of logical construction lasts and lasts through a parade of decades and deacons, providing perfect service all the while. But as Holmes says, logic is logic, and eventually it catches up to the shay. Exactly one hundred years to the day that the deacon finished it, the whole thing collapses in a heap of particulates, leaving the parson who was driving it sitting on a rock. (Wikipedia)
- “Sweet Mary O’Grady”: Moses sings Sweet Mary O’Grady but the famous song is called Sweet Rosie O’Grady. “Sweet Rosie O’Grady” (1896) was written by Maude Nugent, a vaudeville singer, and “down by the old mill stream where I first met you” is from Tell Taylor’s “Down by the Old Mill Stream” (1910); Moses runs the two together. See Music and Composers and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “Why did a doctor have to go on a doctor’s holiday?”: A pun from a busman: a busman’s holiday is a day off spent doing what one does at work.
- “the junk that was going to Japan”: Through the 1930s the United States sold Japan great amounts of scrap iron and steel, which went into the war in China, until Roosevelt embargoed scrap exports in October 1940. Protesters warned that the junk would come back as bombs.
    - The U.S. sent significant goods and aid to Japan primarily during the post-WWII Occupation (1945-1952) through massive aid packages for reconstruction, and earlier, U.S. trade with Japan began after Commodore Matthew Perry forced open ports in 1853, leading to regular shipments of goods and commodities, with Japan importing more U.S. products than exporting to the U.S. until the mid-1960s.
- “a case where an invulnerable force met with an invulnerable obstacle”: The old paradox asks what happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object.
- “These heathen Chinee”: “The Heathen Chinee” was the popular name of Bret Harte’s poem “Plain Language from Truthful James” (1870). Harte meant to mock the white cardsharps who cheat a Chinese player, but the phrase became an anti-Chinese slur, sung and shouted during the agitation that led to the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. See Society, Class, and Race.
    - “A Chinaman’s chance” meant no chance at all. Chinese workers were given the most dangerous work on the railroads and in the mines, and in People v. Hall (1854)

the California Supreme Court ruled that a Chinese witness could not testify against a white man. See Society, Class, and Race.

- “There was going to be a hot time in the old town tonight”: “There’ll Be a Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight” (1896), by Theodore Metz and Joe Hayden, became the marching song of Theodore Roosevelt’s Rough Riders in 1898. See Music and Composers.
- “They have staged a return and have brought their relatives with them”: Turkey vultures, called buzzards in America, leave the northern states for the winter and return each spring; Hinckley, Ohio, has celebrated their return every March since 1957.
- “Be a good Boy Scout, Doc”: The Boy Scouts of America, founded in 1910, pledged a good turn daily.
- “The generations of buzzards do go on”: “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever” (Ecclesiastes 1:4, KJV). See Ecclesiastes.
- “cutting the jugular vein”: In arterial embalming, fluid is pumped in through an artery, usually the carotid, while the blood is drained out through the jugular vein. See Death and Mortality.
- “an old Ford with black canvas curtains flapping”: The Ford Model T (1908-1927) was built by the millions; its open touring cars kept out the rain with side curtains of black canvas.
- “a bird would fly out of the bus-driver’s beard”: Compare Edward Lear’s limerick (1846): “There was an Old Man with a beard, / Who said, ‘It is just as I feared! / Two Owls and a Hen, / Four Larks and a Wren, / Have all built their nests in my beard!’” See Moses Hunnecker.
- “It was like being stalled on a ferris wheel at the top of the sky”: George Ferris built the first Ferris wheel for the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.
- “Jackie found the door”: See Jacqueline White. Before streptomycin came into use after 1944, tuberculosis was the leading killer of young adults, and its patients were sent away to sanatoriums for months or years.

Vocabulary

Bean-shooter

A peashooter or slingshot.

Carapaced

Covered with a hard shell, like a beetle or a turtle.

Casket

A small, often ornate box for jewels or valuables. In American usage, also a coffin, so Young’s “casket containing no jewel” carries both meanings.

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Cretin

A person stunted in body and mind by a lack of iodine from birth; later an insult.

Grandiose

Grand in an exaggerated, self-important way.

Grizzled

Streaked with grey.

Harangue

To lecture loudly and at length.

Invulnerable

Unable to be wounded or harmed.

Jugular

The great vein of the neck.

Luna moth

A large pale green moth of North America with long tails on its hind wings.

Maudlin

Tearfully sentimental, as a drunk can be.

Melodiously

Tunefully.

Monopoly

Sole possession or control of something.

Seesaw

To move up and down or back and forth.

Shay

A light, one-horse carriage; a chaise.

Testimonial

A formal statement given as evidence or proof of something.

Thatched

Covered with straw or reeds, like a roof; of hair, thick and shaggy.

Transfusion

The transfer of blood into a person’s veins.

Chapter 68

Content note: *This chapter tells of a Black man hanged in Kentucky on a false charge of sleeping with a white woman, and of the hangman's wife, who hanged herself; the hangman sees "a bevy of little bodies hanging" from the same tree and nearly beats his children with a branch from it.*

Summary

Night has fallen when the bus comes to rest in a desolate Indiana village before the Tavern, "built in 1827 by God's servants who were believers in the lamb." Moses bounds inside to the mother who thinks he is her bridegroom, and Madge and Homer walk off toward the river. Waiting in a rocking chair to sign in, Vera dreams herself old in an instant and remembers Miss MacIntosh's galoshes thrown up by the tide. At the desk the deaf, tattooed landlord, who says he has been on four ships that went down, talks with Mr. Weed, the Christian hangman, on his way home from a hanging. Mr. Weed tells of his first wife, Marie, who hanged herself in the orchard when she feared she had conceived again; of his children, who play at hanging and hang their dolls and a blind dog from the same peach tree; of murders he has heard of; and of a Black man in Kentucky, hanged for sleeping with a white woman, as he surely never did, and cut down alive. Mr. Weed finds in his pocket the black poker chip from an unsolved murder, and the two men climb the stairs while no clock strikes.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Moses Hunnecker · Mr. Weed · Marie Weed · Julia Weed · The Tavern Landlord · Madge Capehorn · Homer Capehorn

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Fate and Chance · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Illusion and Reality · Memory and the Past · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Cards, Games, and Chance · Clocks and Watches · Dogs · Eyes and Blindness · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Music and Instruments · Shadows · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Sea and Water · The Umbrella · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Existentialism · Phenomenology

Allusions: American Religious Movements · Angels and Archangels · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Lynching and Racial Violence · Milton · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- The opening passage reflects on how coming into a village at night changes one's perception permanently, with shadows that never lift and reality that must be accepted no matter what it is. Vera emphasizes that reality, whether joyful or bleak, is real and must be confronted.
- The detailed description of the Tavern and the surrounding town conveys a sense of decay, emptiness, and abandonment. The Tavern, despite its sign proclaiming it was built by "God's servants," appears as just another commercial establishment, run-down and shadowy. This contrasts with Vera's later realization of the Tavern's deeper, more mysterious interior life.
- Moses's complex relationship with his old mother, who is sick and deluded, is one of duty and denial. Moses obeys "traffic rules" even in the "bridal chamber" with his mother, refusing to engage fully with her fantasies or to take her place.
- Vera reveals a deep inner fear of her own "defective character," which loves imperfections, distortions, and the dead more than the living reality. This passage underscores a theme of alienation and longing for something unattainable or lost.
- The arrival and conversation with the professional hangman introduces Mr. Weed. Mr. Weed's reflections on his job, the nature of crime, punishment, and the human conscience provide a grim but humane perspective on life and death.
- Mr. Weed's narrative about his first wife who hanged herself, his children who play at hanging themselves, and his deep internal conflict reveals the toll his work takes on his personal life and psyche. His dreams of cooking live pigs, his vegetarianism, and his haunted conscience highlight the paradox of his profession.
- Mr. Weed observes that criminals act like sleepwalkers, that some murders are subtle, and that many crimes remain undiscovered. His story about the man who killed his wife because of jealousy over cats is a striking example.
- The black poker chip, found near a severed woman's head, proves meaningless, though Mr. Weed carried it unknowingly for years.
- The dialogue between Mr. Weed and the landlord, including the landlord's impatience and Mr. Weed's acceptance of his monotonous life, humanizes both characters and closes the chapter with a mix of resignation and quiet dignity.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "For there was only one definition of reality, that it was real." What does Vera include in reality, and whom?

- “The bald woman was the woman I loved.” Why does Vera say it here, in a strange hotel lobby?
- “There seems to be no perfect hanging but only a perfect knot.” What is the difference for Mr. Weed?

Characters

- Mr. Weed “was a vegetarian, he protested,” and “Off the line of his duty, he would never kill anything.” How does he keep his work and his conscience apart?
- The landlord says, “I tie lovers’ knots.” What do his knots and the hangman’s have in common?
- Mr. Weed “had stopped to put on his galoshes” and was “a split second too late” to cut Marie down. Why does Miss MacIntosh’s drowning come into the same chapter as galoshes?

Connections

- The Black man in Kentucky was hanged “for sleeping with a white woman as he surely never did,” and it was “the tale of what never happened and yet happened, happened every day in America.” What is Young saying about lynching?
- “Only innocent children would think of blindfolding the blind.” What do Mr. Weed’s children understand about him?
- “Who wants Death at a wedding?” the landlord asks. Where else in the novel do death and marriage meet?

Reflection

- Mr. Weed believes “most men did not know what they were doing when they committed a crime or why.” Does that excuse anyone?
- “The insignificant object was the important one.” Is that true of the black poker chip?
- Vera says she “had loved only the dead.” Can loving the dead keep us from the living?

Research: Characters

Vera

- Vera is introspective, haunted by memories and dreams, struggling with the boundary between reality and illusion.
- Vera reflects on personal loss, especially of Miss MacIntosh, and experiences fear of her own imperfect character and fate.

Moses

- A figure representing avoidance and detachment, Moses goes home to a mother who believes he is her bridegroom, but he maintains distance, obeying “traffic rules” metaphorically to avoid emotional entanglement.
- The bus driver feels obligated to care for his mother, who he says thinks he is “a baby crying in her arms.” He made a promise to never leave her. This sense of responsibility, whether real or imagined, weighs heavily on him and contributes to his anxieties.
- The bus driver’s mother exists in a dreamlike state, much like the characters Vera encounters throughout her journey which blurs the lines between reality and fantasy.
- The bus driver’s mother is sometimes depicted as young and beautiful, with breasts filled with milk. This suggests a longing for an idealized past, a time of innocence and maternal comfort. She is associated with the potential, yet ultimately unfulfilled, union.
- The bus driver’s relationship with his mother can be interpreted as a symbol of his internal conflict between his desire for freedom and his sense of obligation. He dreams of escaping his mundane life as a bus driver. However, his commitment to his mother, whether self-imposed or externally enforced, keeps him tethered to his present circumstances.
- The bus driver says that he will not cut his hair as long as “the Democrats were running us,” and that he has made a promise to his mother to never cut his hair. It seems as though the bus driver’s long hair is a symbol of his commitment to his mother and his abstinence from the more modern world.

Mr. Weed (The Christian Hangman)

- Central to the chapter, Mr. Weed is a professional executioner who views his work as a mission to provide a painless death.
- He is a deeply complex character: a good father, haunted by personal tragedy (his wife Marie’s suicide), and tormented by memories and dreams.
- He discusses his profession with a mix of bitterness, humor, and philosophical insight, revealing his tolerance and humanity despite his grim role.
- Mr. Weed recounts various cases of crime, murder, and the inefficiency or cruelty of some executions, highlighting the moral ambiguities of justice.
- He is associated with symbolic objects (a Jew’s harp, a Parker fountain pen, and a black poker chip) each with narrative significance.

Parker Fountain Pen

- The pen symbolizes death. Mr. Weed says the pen was given to him by the condemned man’s grateful relatives. Additionally, the hangman is described as signing the hotel register with the pen.

Black Poker Chip

- The black poker chip is found near the head of a murdered woman wearing rose-colored sunglasses, but it's a clue that can never be connected to the crime.
- Even though it seems like it should be important, it ultimately has no bearing on solving the murder. The black poker chip plays a great part in the case but is a clue which led nowhere, nowhere at all, like a business man's address book which was found in the hollow of a nearby oak tree. It was simply confusing.
- Mr. Weed later finds a black poker chip in his coat pocket, but he claims he never gambles and has no idea how it got there. This adds another layer of mystery and confusion.
- The Hangman finds the poker chip in his oldest suit, the suit he said that he wears to hangings and to church.
- The black poker chip represents the often confusing and ultimately meaningless details that can arise in investigations, and it highlights the limitations of human understanding in the face of complex and tragic events.

Jew's Harp

- The hangman is described as always playing his Jew's harp, particularly when taking the shortcut home through the orchard. This suggests the Jew's harp is part of his routine, a habit he performs after a hanging.
- The Jew's harp, often associated with folk music and simple pleasures, contrasts sharply with the hangman's profession. This incongruity highlights the hangman's attempts to reconcile his role as an executioner with his self-perception as a good, peace-loving man.
- Despite his constant playing, the Jew's harp ultimately fails to console the hangman from the troubles and darkness within his life, particularly the disturbing events involving his children. The music seemingly cannot penetrate the deeper issues plaguing him.
- The hangman makes a point of saying, "A Jew's harp is not Jewish." He is a man whose profession is death, yet he sees himself as a humanitarian who brings a painless end to suffering.
- Mr. Weed's profession as a hangman directly symbolizes capital punishment and the administration of justice. He embodies the often-unseen figure who carries out the state's ultimate punishment.
- Despite the grim nature of his work, Mr. Weed is portrayed as an ordinary, even respectable, individual, a family man who attends church. This highlights the moral ambiguity and societal complicity in the death penalty, suggesting that even those who carry out such acts can be integrated into mainstream society.
- Mr. Weed's constant connection to death and crime, as well as his troubled dreams, symbolize the burden of the past and the lingering presence of violence and injustice in

American history.

- The juxtaposition of Mr. Weed's morbid occupation with his mundane, everyday life (his family, his farm) reflects a common theme in American literature and art: the grotesque and the mundane coexisting, often uneasily, in the same space.
- Mr. Weed's interest in the innocence of children and his fear of corrupting them could symbolize a lost sense of American innocence, the idea that the nation has been tainted by violence and injustice.
- Mr. Weed's wide-brimmed Western hat and his matter-of-fact attitude may evoke the spirit of the American frontier, where violence and justice were often intertwined.
- Just as Mr. Weed is the man who makes it all painless, the rest of the people are silent accepters of death.
- Mr. Weed's story of the Black man in Kentucky, hanged for sleeping with a white woman "as he surely never did," names the racial terror of lynching outright: it was "the tale of what never happened and yet happened, happened every day in America." See Lynching and Racial Violence.

Marie Weed, his first wife who hanged herself

- Marie Weed, the first wife of the hangman, is a character defined by her tragic end and the haunting impact she has on her husband's life.
- Marie dies by suicide, hanging herself from a peach tree in their orchard. This act is driven by her fear of another pregnancy.
- Her death profoundly affects her husband, the hangman, turning him into a tormented figure. He is haunted by the memory of cutting her down "a split second too late," and he sees her children playing at hanging themselves. The grief and guilt transform him into a man who, despite his profession, is deeply averse to violence.
- Marie's character is primarily revealed through the hangman's recollections and descriptions, creating a sense of mystery and incompleteness. Vera pieces together her image through the hangman's stories of his past. She is characterized by her absence and the powerful effect she has on those left behind.
- Marie hanged herself from a tree laden with peach blossoms, and she stays in the hangman's memory.
- The hangman's stories of Marie may be connected to Vera's quest for meaning in the lives of marginalized people. The hangman himself is a marginalized character who is haunted by the past, similar to Vera and other characters she encounters.
- Marie, while not directly present in the narrative, is a crucial figure in understanding the hangman and the themes of death, guilt, and the search for meaning.

Julia Weed, his second wife

- Julia Weed is the second wife of the hangman. Her relationship with him is marked by a sense of his past deeds and the shadow they cast on their present life.

- Julia's position as the second wife is complicated by the circumstances of the first wife's death, which was a suicide. She is sometimes found wearing the clothes of his first wife, Marie.
- Julia is described as having "the mind of a child." Her understanding of the hangman's work and the events surrounding his first wife's death seem limited.
- She is seen as someone who does not "think things through." This suggests a lack of depth or introspection, contributing to the perception of her as somewhat naive or unaware of the darker aspects of her situation.
- She is connected to a history of sorrow and death, not only through her husband's profession but also through the tragic end of his first wife. This association highlights the theme of the past's inescapable influence on the present.
- There's a contrast between her apparent innocence and the knowledge she possesses, or lacks, about her husband's profession and the events of the past. This tension adds to the complexity of her character.
- The narrative suggests that Julia, in her innocence and limited awareness, is a victim of circumstances, a woman drawn into a situation she may not fully comprehend.
- Julia Weed is portrayed as a simple, somewhat naive woman caught in the web of her husband's dark profession and the tragic history of his past.

The Landlord

- The Tavern's landlord is pragmatic, skeptical, and somewhat cynical.
- He interacts with Mr. Weed with a mixture of humor and impatience, grounding the scene in everyday reality.
- His references to "turkeys and chickens" and dismissive attitude toward Mr. Weed's stories add a humanizing, mundane contrast to the heavy themes.
- In Chapter 69, the "Remember the Marne" tattoo suggests he is a veteran who experienced the horrors of World War I.
- His world-weariness and the suggestion that his hotel "sinks every night" reflect the disillusionment and cynicism that followed World War I.
- In later chapters, his background in intelligence implies knowledge of hidden truths and clandestine operations.
- He listens to the troubles of all kinds of people, suggesting that he represents the common man and those who have been forgotten by society.
- In Chapter 71, the mix of old and new at the hotel, where "The lieutenant governor of Indiana combed here and sleep here three springs agone" and Tabitha wears "the castaways of a small dancer who rid the elephants," alludes to a changing and increasingly diverse America.
- He is a complex figure whose symbolism reflects the disillusionment, hardships, and changing social landscape of America in the first half of the 20th century.

Research: Themes

Reality and Perception

See: Illusion and Reality

- Vera reflects on the nature of reality, emphasizing that whatever is experienced or perceived is “real,” whether it is a dream, a memory, or a physical object.
- Reality is not confined to conventional or positive experiences but includes shadows, decay, and the unreal or rejected (e.g., abandoned objects, shadows on the hills).
- This theme is introduced early on, where the village at night is described as a place where shadows never fade, suggesting persistent darkness or hidden truths.

Death and the Inevitability of Fate

See: Death and Mortality · Fate and Chance

- The chapter dwells heavily on death, especially through the experiences and reflections of the Christian hangman, who symbolizes the finality of mortality.
- Mr. Weed’s profession is portrayed with a paradoxical humanity; he is portrayed as a missionary of painless death, emphasizing efficiency and compassion within a grim role.
- Death is also symbolized as a “marital knot” or a binding connection that cannot be undone, suggesting an eternal union with mortality.

Memory, Loss, and the Past

See: Memory and the Past · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Vera recalls memories of lost loved ones, such as Miss MacIntosh, whose disappearance haunts Vera.
- Memories blur with dreams and reality, suggesting a struggle to reconcile the past with the present.
- Mr. Weed’s personal history, including the hanging of his first wife and his children’s strange behaviors, deepens the motif of loss and haunting memories.

Human Imperfection and Guilt

See: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice

- Characters are deeply flawed and haunted by guilt, failures, and secrets (e.g., Mr. Weed’s reflections on the imperfect hanging, criminals who act unknowingly, and the failure to prevent tragedies).
- Mr. Weed discusses the subtlety of crime and how even well-planned acts can betray the perpetrator by small, unnoticed details.

- The narrative suggests a tension between the desire for justice and the complexity of human nature.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Shadows and Darkness

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light · Shadows

- Represent the unknown, death, and the persistent presence of the past.

The Tavern

- A microcosm of decay, secrets, and transience; symbolizes a crossroads between life and death.

The Hanging/Marital Knot

See: Weddings and Funerals

- Symbolizes the irreversible bond with death and the complexity of human relationships.

The Black Poker Chip

See: Cards, Games, and Chance

- A meaningless yet persistent clue symbolizing the confusing and elusive nature of truth and justice.

The Jew’s Harp

See: Music and Instruments

- Symbolizes Mr. Weed’s attempt at harmony and control amidst chaos.

Winter Weeds in Spring

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Symbolize resilience and survival in a decaying environment.

The Blindfolded Dog

See: Dogs · Eyes and Blindness

- Innocence and cruelty intertwined, reflecting on blindness to suffering.
- The village is described as dilapidated and eerie, with details like rusted machinery, broken wheels, and a sign “Gentle Incline —Bride Ahead—” which is a false reading

for “Bridge Ahead,” evoking a sense of decay and death.

- The Tavern, built in 1827 by “God’s servants,” is a gloomy, sprawling hotel with mildewed brick, claw-like vines, and a haunting presence. Its interior surpasses Vera’s imagination, filled with human-faced wasps and thin walls that seem to hear everything.
- The atmosphere is filled with silence, shadows, and a slow, suffocating sense of inevitability, preparing the reader for the philosophical and existential meditations that follow.

Research: Resources

- “there was only one definition of reality, that it was real”: The line emphasizes a tautological but deeply existential assertion: reality is defined by its own existence as experienced or known, regardless of its form. “even the unreal things were real,” points to an inclusive, perhaps subjective or phenomenological, understanding of reality where things dismissed or marginalized by society (ignored, rejected, unloved) are nonetheless part of the fabric of reality. This echoes themes of illusion versus reality, and the permeability between them, which run throughout the novel. Philosophically, this passage represents a theme often associated with existentialism and phenomenology: that reality is defined by experience and perception rather than by fixed, external definitions. It also touches on the fluidity of reality, blurring lines between dream and waking life, appearance and essence, presence and absence. The passage conveys that reality is not limited to the tangible or socially accepted but includes dreams, illusions, forgotten or rejected beings, and all forms of existence or perception. It challenges rigid dichotomies and invites a broader, more inclusive understanding of what is real. See Existentialism and Phenomenology.
- “real as Mr. Spitzer’s brother who might be the musician or the gambler”: See Peron Spitzer and Joachim Spitzer.
- “Josh’s Place, a wreath of fuzzy blue neon lights”: Georges Claude showed the first neon sign in Paris in 1910, and neon came to American roadsides from 1923, when a Los Angeles car dealer bought two signs.
- “obviously what was meant was Bridge Ahead”: Young saw the sign: “By the way, I saw that in a small town” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Moses Hunnecker.
- “Between two scrofulous white pillars”: Scrofulous (adjective) is an historical term for tuberculosis affecting the lymph nodes (especially in the neck, causing swelling) or, figuratively, describing something or someone morally corrupt, degenerate, or having a sickly, unhealthy appearance. It’s often used metaphorically to imply decay, corruption, or poor quality.
- “The Tavern, built in 1827 by God’s servants who were believers in the lamb”: The town is New Harmony, Indiana, the setting of Angel in the Forest (1945). “Very astute readers of people who have been there know that it is the same town to which Vera

arrives. I left out all utopian references. It’s the same town exactly” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). The bus “stops before an old hotel where there is a tattooed landlord. And my heroine meets her first encounter with rural reality as a hangman who tells of his excellent fruit orchards. These characters appear in both books” (Marguerite Young, talk on the reissue of Angel in the Forest, 1966). George Rapp’s Harmony Society founded the town in 1814 and sold it to Robert Owen in 1825. See The Tavern Landlord and Mr. Weed. The Lamb is the Christ of Revelation: “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain” (Revelation 5:12, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse and Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.

- “stayed off the soft shoulder, the narrow neck, the crumbling breast of the hill”: The road signs in the marriage bed came from “a comedian’s joke.” When a reviewer predicted the book’s jokes would end up on the nightclub circuit, Young said, “how little does he dream that a lot of it came from that in the first place?” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Moses Hunnecker.
- “a hotel on Twelfth Street for white-sheeted Hindu sailors”: Sailors from India, known as lascars, crewed British merchant ships in large numbers from the eighteenth century onward and were a familiar sight in Atlantic port cities, often lodging in boarding houses set aside for them between voyages.
- “I should have inquired at the Seamen’s Institute”: The Seamen’s Church Institute of New York, founded in 1834, opened its great building at 25 South Street in 1913, with the Titanic Memorial Lighthouse on its roof. See The Sea and Water.
- “Oh, have you seen my love, Miss MacIntosh, my darling”: “Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?” (Song of Solomon 3:3, KJV). See The Bible.
- “This, Mr. Spitzer would say, is Exhibit A in the strange case of the disappearing woman”: Mr. Spitzer’s phrase echoes Stevenson’s Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde (1886).
- “her little Pilgrim’s Progress is swollen with salt water”: John Bunyan’s The Pilgrim’s Progress (1678), Miss MacIntosh’s book.
- “if there was no corpus delicti”: Corpus delicti, “the body of the crime,” means the proof that a crime was committed, not the corpse itself, though without a body courts were long unwilling to find a murder. See Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.
- “I would see her shining through every cloud”: Compare Milton’s Comus (1634): “Was I deceived, or did a sable cloud / Turn forth her silver lining on the night?,” the source of every cloud’s silver lining. See Milton.
- “like parallel lines which are said to meet in infinity”: In projective geometry, begun by Girard Desargues in 1639, parallel lines meet at a point at infinity.
- “Pandora’s”: In Hesiod’s Works and Days, Pandora opens a jar and lets loose every evil on mankind, leaving only hope inside; Erasmus turned the jar into a box in 1508. See Greek Mythology.
- “Parker fountain pen”: Parker fountain pen may refer to the Parker Pen Company, an American manufacturer of luxury writing pens, founded in 1888. Its Duofold of 1921

made Parker’s name.

- “Hair, hair, that was the great deception, hair, a woman’s crowning glory, hair which keeps growing in the grave”: “But if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering” (1 Corinthians 11:15, KJV). Hair does not grow in the grave; the skin draws back as it dries, so that hair and nails seem longer. See The Bible and Hair, Wig, and Baldness.
- “I had no children except a foetus who had turned to stone”: A lithopedion, or stone child, is a fetus that dies outside the womb and calcifies, sometimes carried for decades. The most famous was found in Madame Colombe Chatri of Sens in 1582, twenty-eight years after her pregnancy. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “Who is the father? asked Doctor O’Leary”: Dr. Justice O’Leary, the old doctor of Chapter 67. See Justice O’Leary.
- “A torn black umbrella was blowing like a crow against the surf”: Miss MacIntosh’s umbrella on the beach. See the Chapter 65 resources and The Umbrella.
- “signing in, was the Christian hangman, Mr. Weed”: “There was a Christian hangman, exactly like this, upon whom I based this story” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). Young had heard a local hangman discussed at “a dinner party in a rural district” and “had read many books on hangmen and their psychology” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965), and “every single criminal case he speaks of is based upon a real case” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). See Mr. Weed.
    - Compare G. Phil Hanna (died 1948) of Epworth, Illinois, across the Wabash from New Harmony, a farmer called the humane hangman. He is said to have taken up the work after seeing a botched hanging at McLeansboro, Illinois, in 1896, so that hangings would be done without pain; he took no pay and assisted at the hanging of Rainey Bethea in 1936. See Mr. Weed.
- “I hope you find your second wife and your children by your first wife well”: See The Tavern Landlord and Julia Weed.
- “his heels had been nipped by an old hound pursuing him through oceanic storms”: Compare Francis Thompson’s “The Hound of Heaven” (1890), on a soul pursued by God: “I fled Him, down the nights and down the days.” See Dogs.
- “sure as if I were the Jolly Roger”: The Jolly Roger is the iconic pirate flag, typically a skull and crossbones on a black background, used to intimidate ships into surrendering during the “Golden Age of Piracy,” symbolizing death and defiance, though real pirate flags varied and sometimes were just black; the name might come from “Jolie Rouge” (pretty red) or a pirate named Bartholomew Roberts. It served as a fearsome warning, but its specific skull-and-bones design was popularized by pirates like Edward England and became a cultural symbol of rebellion and pirate lore.
- “Four times I have been on ships that went down”: Compare Violet Jessop, a stewardess for the White Star Line, who survived the Olympic’s collision in 1911, the

Titanic in 1912, and the sinking of the Britannic in 1916, and was called Miss Unsinkable. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and The Sea and Water.

- “I was on the Titanic”: The RMS Titanic was a British passenger liner, operated by the White Star Line, which sank in the North Atlantic Ocean on 15 April 1912 after striking an iceberg during her maiden voyage from Southampton, UK, to New York City. (Wikipedia) About 1,500 people died.
- “I was on the Lusitania”: The RMS Lusitania, a British ocean liner operated by the Cunard Steamship Company sunk by a German U-boat in World War I. The U-20 torpedoed her off Ireland on May 7, 1915, and 1,198 people died, 128 of them Americans.
- “I was on the White Star Castle”: No ship called the White Star Castle existed. The landlord blends the White Star Line with the Union-Castle Line, whose ships all bore castle names.
    - The White Star Castle may refer to the RMS Majestic which was a White Star ocean liner working on the North Atlantic run, originally launched in 1914. She served the Royal Navy as the training ship HMS Caledonia before catching fire in 1939 and sinking. She was subsequently raised and scrapped in 1943.
- “I was on the Prince Edward which was hounded by the wreck of the White Star”: No record has been found of a Prince Edward struck by a drifting wreck; the landlord’s tale grows with the telling.
    - Prince Edward may refer to the fourth HMS Black Prince, after Edward, the Black Prince, the eldest son of King Edward III of England, launched in 1904 and was a Duke of Edinburgh-class cruiser sunk with all hands during the Battle of Jutland in 1916.
- “until Gabriel blows his horn”: The Bible does not name Gabriel as the trumpeter of Judgment Day: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, KJV). The tradition of Gabriel’s horn came down through African American spirituals such as “Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel.” See Angels and Archangels and The Bible.
- “Bends, hitches, splices”: The history of knots is ancient, predating tools like the wheel, with evidence of rope-making and knots from 15,000-17,000 years ago for hunting, fishing, and shelter, evolving into essential technology for sailing, construction, record-keeping (like the Inca Khipu), and art (Chinese knots), and later formalized in mathematics (Knot Theory) and modern uses from surgery to climbing. Knots developed independently across cultures out of necessity, becoming fundamental to civilization’s advancement and symbolic meaning. The landlord is contrasting his own experience and understanding of “knots” with that of the hangman. While the hangman knows literal knots used in hangings, the landlord speaks metaphorically of “lovers’ knots”: the bonds of marriage that are meant to be unbreakable until the end of time, “until Gabriel blows his horn” (symbolizing Judgment Day), or even beyond, suggesting that even death should not part true lovers. The landlord, who runs a hotel that has endured floods and fire, is well-versed in various types of practical knots (overhand,

figure-of-eight, running bowline, and more) that have specific uses in sailing and daily life. He questions the hangman's ability to understand the "marital knot," implying that the hangman's knowledge is limited and that he has not even mastered the basics of tying his own bow-tie properly, a task he suggests is better suited to a wife. The landlord's metaphorical description emphasizes the strength and permanence of the marital bond, contrasting it with the hangman's grim profession and the fleeting nature of life and death. The whimsical reference to dolphins sporting over his head as his ship went down and the sinking hotel that "sinks every night" adds a layer of imagery connecting the fragility of human constructs and relationships to the natural world and its constant changes: oceans, ships, drifting continents. This passage reflects the novel's recurring themes of impermanence, human bonds, and the interplay between reality and metaphor. It also highlights the characters' different perspectives on life, love, and death: the landlord's practical yet poetic view versus the hangman's somber, fatalistic outlook.

- "even be he the Ghostly Reaper coming with his scythe": The Grim Reaper, Death with his scythe, harvesting souls as a farmer mows wheat. See Death and Mortality.
- "the long drop": The long drop, which breaks the neck instead of strangling, was introduced in England by the hangman William Marwood in 1872, and drops were later set from tables by the weight of the condemned.
- "a handful of dust": "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Genesis 3:19, KJV). Compare T. S. Eliot: "I will show you fear in a handful of dust" (The Waste Land, 1922). See Genesis.
- "The Christian Science Monitor": The Christian Science Monitor commonly known as The Monitor, is a nonprofit news organization that publishes daily articles in electronic format as well as a weekly print edition. It was founded in 1908 as a daily newspaper by Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of the Church of Christ, Scientist. (Wikipedia) Mary Baker Eddy was the founder of Christian Science. See American Religious Movements and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "Marie, she was an Oliver": Mr. Weed said his first wife's name was Marie and her maiden name was Oliver and that they were known for hanging themselves. There are three famous Olivers this may refer to:
    - Andrew Oliver was a merchant and public official in the Province of Massachusetts Bay. Born into a wealthy and politically powerful merchant family, he is best known as the Massachusetts official responsible for implementing the provisions of the Stamp Act, for which he was hanged in effigy. He never actually carried out those duties, and was later commissioned as the province's lieutenant governor. (Wikipedia)
    - Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector and ruler of the English Commonwealth after the defeat and beheading of King Charles I during the English Civil War, died on 3 September 1658 of natural causes and was given a public funeral at Westminster Abbey equal to those of the monarchs who came before him. When King Charles II was recalled from exile, his new parliament, in January 1661, ordered the

disinterment of the elder Cromwell's body from Westminster Abbey, for a posthumous execution. He was left hanging until the afternoon before being cut down and beheaded. (Wikipedia)

    - Oliver Moore was lynched in North Carolina in 1930. Oliver Moore was accused of assaulting two young white girls, Ethel, age 5, and Lucile Morgan, age 7, daughters of Mr. and Mrs. E. F. Morgan, who lived on the county line between Wilson and Edgecombe Counties, on the night of 18 July 1930. Moore evaded capture for nearly a month but was finally caught and arrested on 15 August 1930 and jailed in Tarboro, NC, in the county jail. At around midnight on 18 August 1930, a mob of masked men broke Moore out of jail and took to a wooded area on the Wilson-Edgecombe County line just inside Wilson County not far from the scene of the alleged assault, hung him from a tree with a rope around his chest, and shot him repeatedly until he was dead. By the next morning when it appears this photo was taken, thousands of people from all around the area had gathered to view the lynching aftermath and Moore's body hanging riddled with bullets from the tree. See Lynching and Racial Violence.

- "Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink": Coleridge wrote "Water, water, every where, / Nor any drop to drink" (The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, 1798); the line is nearly always misquoted, as here. The mad rich man, sailing with his guilt, is a Mariner of his own. See Romantic Poets.
    - "Water, water everywhere, and not a drop to drink" is a line from the poem by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.
- "a dead man's hat": Mr. Weed mirrors Mr. Bonebreaker, who also wears dead people's clothes: a dead waiter's coat and "a dead man's shoes." See the Chapter 65 resources. See Mr. Titus Bonebreaker.
- "she feared she had conceived again": The Comstock Act of 1873, named for the anti-vice crusader Anthony Comstock, made it a crime to mail contraceptives or information about them. This was challenged by Margaret Sanger in 1914. The Supreme Court protected contraception for married couples in Griswold v. Connecticut (1965) and for the unmarried in Eisenstadt v. Baird (1972). See Women, Gender, and Marriage and Suicide in History and Literature.
    - Suicide is a leading cause of death during pregnancy and the postpartum period, often linked to underlying mental health conditions. Mental health conditions, including postpartum depression and psychosis, can lead to increased risk of maternal suicide. While not directly a cause of suicide, the inability to control the number of children a woman has can be a major stressor that contributes to or worsens mental health conditions, which in turn can increase the risk of suicide.
- "Something fell and rolled along the ground, and yet the bough broke not": The hangman's riddle turns the nursery rhyme "Rock-a-bye, baby," printed in Mother Goose's Melody (about 1765): "When the bough breaks, the cradle will fall." Marie feared she had conceived again. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.

- “A Jew’s harp is not Jewish”: The Jew’s harp, a twanging mouth instrument known in Asia for more than two thousand years, has nothing to do with Jews; the English name dates from the sixteenth century, and no one knows its origin. See Music and Instruments.
- “when he saw a bevy of little bodies hanging from the peach tree”: See Marie Weed.
- “if you give a man enough rope, he hangs himself”: This proverb means if you give people the opportunity to do something wrong or detrimental to themselves, they will usually do it; one does not need to interfere to bring about someone’s downfall.
- “There were a great many missing women, apparently”: For the US current statistics show there are more females missing under the age of 21 than males. Over the age of 21 there are more males missing than females. Half of all missing persons are minorities.
- “They were playing blind man’s buff behind the hill”: In blind man’s buff, a blindfolded player gropes to catch the others, as the children had blindfolded the blind dog. See Dogs and Eyes and Blindness.
- “He was a vegetarian, he protested”: Christian vegetarianism is the practice of abstaining from meat for faith-based reasons, focusing on themes like stewardship of creation, compassion, health, and honoring God, though the Bible permits meat-eating, with varied interpretations on animal rights and the ideal diet (some pointing to Genesis’s plant-based start, others to Jesus eating fish). While not a universal command, it’s seen as a way to live out Christian values. The Bible Christian Church, which forbade meat, came to Philadelphia from England in 1817; the Seventh-day Adventists later urged a meatless diet, as Mr. Bonebreaker kept. See the Chapter 65 resources. See American Religious Movements.
- “we are being displaced by the electric chair”: The methods for execution in the US are lethal injection, electrocution, firing squad, and the gas chamber. An offender can choose an alternate method such as hanging. 1996 was the last time a person was executed by hanging in the US. The first man put to death in the electric chair was William Kemmler, at Auburn, New York, in 1890, and Nevada first used a gas chamber in 1924.
- “I am almost the last leaf left hanging on the bough”: Compare Oliver Wendell Holmes’s “The Last Leaf” (1831): “And if I should live to be / The last leaf upon the tree.”
- “race-horse tout”: A race-horse tout offers racing tips for a share of any resulting winnings.
- “a race-track in Bermuda”: Bermuda’s main horse racing venue is the Bermuda National Equestrian Center (NEC) in Devonshire, formerly Vesey Street Racetrack, hosting popular harness pony racing (driving) and show jumping from September to May, with races often held under lights or Sunday afternoons. The island’s unique, small, oval track provides challenging races for ponies pulling carts.

- “Dark Lady was winning”: The racehorse’s name recalls the “Dark Lady” of Shakespeare’s Sonnets 127 to 152, the mysterious woman of the poet’s desire. See Shakespeare.
- “as a young man in Kentucky”: Rainey Bethea, a young Black man, was hanged in Owensboro, Kentucky, on August 14, 1936, for the rape of Lischia Edwards, a seventy-year-old white woman; he was charged with rape and not murder, which under Kentucky law allowed a public hanging. About 20,000 people came, many because the sheriff, Florence Thompson, a widow who had succeeded her husband, was to spring the trap; in the end a former policeman, Arthur Hash, did it. It was the last public execution in the United States. See the Equal Justice Initiative’s report Lynching in America (2015). See Lynching and Racial Violence.
- “The Negro was hanged for sleeping with a white woman”: This is a story told by the Christian hangman Mr. Weed about a botched lynching of a Black man in Kentucky. According to the tale, the man was hanged for the accusation of sleeping with a white woman, an accusation that, as the hangman himself says, was false: “as he surely never did.” The hangman describes how the man was cut down from the noose a split second too soon, meaning he was still technically alive and was later seen pushing a baby buggy, frightening the local white community. The hangman reflects on the “inefficiency” of the hanging, suggesting that his role was to make death as swift and painless as possible, but here the man suffered unnecessarily by surviving the hanging. This passage echoes real historical accounts of lynching in the United States, particularly in the South, where Black men were often falsely accused of crimes, especially of violating racial codes like alleged relations with white women. Lynchings were extrajudicial killings by mobs, commonly by hanging, sometimes with brutal torture. There are documented cases where victims were cut down prematurely or survived the initial hanging, leading to further suffering before death or even escape, heightening the terror of such acts. The passage metaphorically highlights the cruelty and injustice of these acts, along with the hangman’s conflicted role: he sees himself as a Christian bringing mercy through a swift death, yet is part of a brutal system that perpetuates racial violence and injustice. The “unofficially alive” status of the man symbolizes the liminal, tortured state of lynching victims: condemned by society, yet clinging to life in a world that refuses them justice or dignity. This passage serves as a fictional reflection on historical racial violence in America, underscoring the themes of injustice, suffering, and moral ambiguity surrounding lynching and the societal roles that participated in or failed to prevent such atrocities. See Lynching and Racial Violence.
    - Young said the rope was real: “that rope was hanging, still hanging, in a little southern town where the last black man had been lynched, where I lived for a while. And then there had been a black man who did walk away and push the baby carriage up hill. Now, he died, but I used that image” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983).
    - In Southern Horrors: Lynch Law in All Its Phases (1892), Ida B. Wells showed that the charge of rape or of relations with a white woman was the usual pretext for

lynching Black men, and was usually false. See Lynching and Racial Violence and Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- “Who would want to be unofficially alive?”: In 1946 Louisiana’s portable electric chair failed to kill Willie Francis, a Black teenager of seventeen; the Supreme Court allowed the state to try again (Louisiana ex rel. Francis v. Resweber, 1947), and he was executed that May. See Lynching and Racial Violence.
- “most men did not know what they were doing when they committed a crime or why”: In the US over 50% of inmates out of the 2.2 million people incarcerated are believed to be suffering from some kind of mental illness.
- “The Bluebeards, he was speaking of them”: In Charles Perrault’s “Bluebeard” (1697), a wife finds the bodies of the wives before her in a locked room. Henri Landru, the “French Bluebeard,” was guillotined in 1922 for murdering ten women. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “buried her under a cement pavement in the basement”: Compare Dr. Hawley Harvey Crippen, an American in London, who buried his wife Cora’s remains under the cellar floor in 1910 and told their friends she had gone back to America and died in California. He was caught by wireless at sea and hanged that November.
- “It is the death of our Christian civilization”: Those who speak of the death of Christian civilization often point to the rise of secularism, “dechurching,” and declining Christian influence in the West, viewing it as the end of Christendom, a historical era where Christianity dominated public life, leading to new worldviews like postchristianity; this perspective highlights major societal shifts, but Christianity remains a significant global faith, though its role in Western culture is changing dramatically. Decolonizing Christianity is a movement challenging Eurocentric, white-dominated theology and practices, aiming to dismantle systems of oppression (like racism, capitalism, patriarchy) that became intertwined with the faith during colonialism, and instead centering marginalized voices, indigenous knowledge, and a pursuit of justice, often through practices like reading the Bible from the margins and reclaiming faith from a non-white, non-Western perspective. It involves critically examining Christianity’s historical complicity in colonial violence, repenting for injustices, and fostering a faith rooted in solidarity with the oppressed for true liberation, moving beyond “white” or nationalist versions of Christianity.
- “Away down in Mississippi, they are using a portable electric chair”: Mississippi’s portable electric chair, carried by truck from county to county so that the condemned died in the county of conviction, was used from 1940 until a gas chamber replaced it in 1954. Willie McGee, a Black man convicted of rape on doubtful evidence, died in it in 1951. See Lynching and Racial Violence.
- “The Barbados Negroes were those who were burned”: The Barbados Slave Code of 1661, officially titled as An Act for the better ordering and governing of Negroes, was a law passed by the Parliament of Barbados to provide a legal basis for slavery in the English colony of Barbados. It marked the beginning of the legal codification of slavery. Mr. Weed claimed that the Barbados Negroes were executed using an electric chair in

a truck that went from village to village. No direct references could be found for this however there were rebellions against slavery which the government ended by publicly executing all those involved. The term “Barbados Negroes” refers to the Black population of Barbados, who are predominantly of West African descent and were brought to the island as enslaved people. The term is now outdated, and the modern and more accurate term for the population is Afro-Barbadians or Black Barbadians. The legacy of slavery and resistance is a central part of the history of these people and the island itself, with key events including the Bussa rebellion in 1816. From the 17th century onwards, enslaved Africans were brought to Barbados to work on sugar plantations, with the English establishing a permanent settlement in 1627. Enslaved people continuously resisted their bondage through various acts, including rebellion, sabotage, and other forms of protest. Slavery was abolished in 1834, but this did not immediately resolve the social and economic challenges faced by the formerly enslaved population. The May 1675 Barbados rebellion plot was a planned uprising by enslaved people that was discovered before it began. An enslaved woman named Fortuna or Anna alerted a planter, Gyles Hall, to the conspiracy. In response, Governor Sir Jonathan Atkins acted swiftly, leading to the arrest of many conspirators, with at least 17 initially executed by beheading or burning. The plot, which involved enslaved people from the Akan ethnic group and aimed to establish a slave government led by a man named Cuffee, was discovered only eight days before its scheduled execution.

- “a German music box with a horn and a Yale pennant”: Young said every case the hangman tells is based on a real one; this one has not been identified.
    - The woman whose jail cell was furnished with “satin hangings and a German music box with a horn and a Yale pennant” may refer to Ilse Koch, the notorious Nazi war criminal known as “The Witch of Buchenwald.” Ilse Koch was the wife of Karl Koch, the commandant of the Buchenwald concentration camp. She was known for her exceptional sadism and cruelty towards prisoners. After World War II, she was arrested by American authorities and stood trial for war crimes. Ilse Koch did not personally have a Yale pennant or a Yale tattoo; rather, it was a piece of tattooed human skin featuring a Yale-related design that was allegedly found at the Buchenwald concentration camp and attributed to her collection. Koch was infamous for reportedly selecting prisoners with unique or artistic tattoos to be murdered so their skin could be harvested for decorative household objects, such as lampshades, book bindings, and gloves. Testimonies and post-liberation reports described a piece of tanned skin among the camp’s “pathology specimens” that featured a Yale University pennant or similar collegiate crest. It belonged to an unknown prisoner who had likely been a student or traveler before the war. Despite widespread media coverage of these “human skin” artifacts, prosecutors in her 1947 and 1951 trials were unable to conclusively prove that Koch herself ordered the creation of these items or possessed them. General Lucius D. Clay later reduced her initial life sentence partly due to a lack of physical evidence linking her directly to the “lampshades.” She was eventually sentenced to life imprisonment and died by suicide in prison in 1967.

- “He had never hanged a woman”: Mary Surratt, hanged in 1865 for her part in the plot to kill Lincoln, was the first woman executed by the federal government. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “the mandrakes screaming when they are pulled up by the roots”: This folklore is based on the mandrake plant which is a hallucinogenic and narcotic. It is said that it grows from the blood of a hanged man and the tuber can resemble a human form. Forensic medicine does record erection and the discharge of semen in some deaths by hanging, and the folklore of the gallows mandrake grew from it. Juliet fears “shrieks like mandrakes’ torn out of the earth” (Romeo and Juliet 4.3), and in Genesis Rachel trades for Leah’s mandrakes to bear a child (Genesis 30:14-16). See Shakespeare, Genesis, and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “The man who found it was a Jehovah’s Witness”: The Bible Students took the name Jehovah’s Witnesses in 1931. See American Religious Movements.
- “Who wants Death at a wedding?”: See The Tavern Landlord.
- “No clock struck”: See Clocks and Watches.

Vocabulary

Acrid

Sharp and bitter to taste or smell.

Astigmatism

A defect of the eye that blurs vision.

Belligerently

In a hostile, quarrelsome way.

Bluebeard

A man who murders his wives, after Perrault’s tale.

Bulrush

A tall rush of marshes.

Celluloid

An early plastic.

Chassis

The frame of a car, on which the body is mounted.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Commute

To reduce a sentence to a lesser one.

Corpus delicti

The proof that a crime was committed.

Cretin

A person stunted in body and mind by a lack of iodine from birth; later an insult.

Dementia

Madness; a decline of the mind.

Discretion

Good judgment; tact in keeping a secret.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Facade

The front of a building; a false front.

Foetus

An unborn child.

Galoshes

Rubber overshoes.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Helm

The wheel or tiller that steers a ship.

Hobnailed

Studded with short nails on the sole.

Incandescence

The giving off of light by something heated until it glows.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Lecherous

Lustful.

Lode

A vein of metal ore in rock.

Mandrake

A plant with a forked root once thought to scream when pulled up.

Monitor

One who watches over and warns.

Morosely

Gloomily, sullenly.

Mother lode

The main vein of ore in a mine; a rich source.

Obtuseness

Slowness to understand.

Perfunctory

Done as a duty, without care or interest.

Progeny

Offspring.

Robust

Strong and healthy.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Scrofulous

Diseased with scrofula; shabby and corrupt.

Spasmodic

Occurring in fits and starts.

Spittoon

A bowl for spitting into.

Stovepipe

A tall silk hat; also the metal pipe that carries smoke from a stove.

Tout

One who sells racing tips.

Wayfarer

A traveler, especially on foot.

Chapter 69

Content note: *This chapter deals with executions by hanging and tells of a “mad butcher” who sold human beings as meat.*

Summary

Vera’s room is marked Fire Escape: a corn-husk mattress, a “Forget me not” picture of a church steeple, and a slop jar beside someone else’s blonde hair combings. On the stairs the tattooed landlord, once a magician, a ventriloquist, a sailor, a soldier in the Intelligence, and a hunter of wild animals for Hagenbeck’s, now married to the former circus fat lady who owns the hotel, tells her that the hangman’s talk came from his shadow and that Mr. Weed is in truth a prosperous dairy farmer paid for his work. Her neighbors include Tillie, a very young girl who is also an old woman keeping turkey buzzards, or canaries, in chains, and a legless newspaper man who rides a sled with rusted sleigh bells. All night, through the thin wall, old Dr. Justice O’Leary rages at Sarah, a silent woman who may be his little sister, dead at the age of one, or the love who ran off with a travelling salesman. He lists every disease he knows and speaks of his strangest case, a woman always pregnant with an imaginary baby. At last Vera screams at Sarah to go.

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · The Tavern Landlord · Mr. Weed · Justice O’Leary · Sarah O’Leary

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Decay and Ruin · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Madness and Sanity · Memory and the Past · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Clocks and Watches · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Fire · The House

Allusions: Alice in Wonderland · Ecclesiastes · Genesis · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible · The Book of Job

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a vivid description of the protagonist’s room marked “Fire Escape,” featuring a narrow bed stuffed with corn husks, a picture of a silver church steeple with the words “Forget me not,” and unsettling details such as a slop jar with sediment and blonde hair combings. Only her eyes are reflected in the warped mirror, and a rocking chair creaks.

- The landlord is depicted as a colorful, loquacious man with tattoos, a rich past, and contradictory traits: strong yet faded in color, worldly yet tied to this dilapidated hotel. His monologues reveal a layered personality and provide backstory on Mr. Weed and other characters like Moses and “Tillie,” a young girl who knits baby hoods. The landlord’s tales weave together local myths, histories, and the odd coexistence of the living and dead in the hotel.
- The landlord’s comments about Mr. Weed and his “shadow” who speaks for him reveal a symbolic duality. Mr. Weed himself is cautious and reserved, while his shadow is outspoken and more intriguing. This duality might represent the tension between public persona and hidden truths, or between the living and the spectral. Mr. Weed’s reputed success in his enterprises and his role in the local community add complexity to his character.
- The most emotionally intense passages are the doctor’s anguished soliloquies and interactions with “Sarah,” a ghostly, haunting figure who disrupts his life. The doctor mourns the loss and disgrace Sarah represents; he curses her (“God damn it, Sarah!”), sees her as a “baby” and “senile,” with cold breath and sores, and agonizes over his professional failures.
- The room is marked “Fire Escape,” and the hotel is “a good enough port for a man in a storm.”

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “Whose hair, I wondered as I undressed in the red-streaked dark—whose hair?” Why does a stranger’s hair matter to Vera?
- The landlord speaks of Tillie, young and old, “always of one person —for as if in ocean depths, the two were one.” How can one woman be both?
- The landlord says it was “the hangman’s shadow, who got loose after every hanging and said the things the hangman never would have said.” Which is the real Mr. Weed?

Characters

- “God had never been in the hotel business.” What does the landlord know that God does not?
- “I am the only one who remembers you, Sarah,” the doctor says, and then, “I have forgotten you.” Which is true?
- “Many a woman was brought to child-bed against her will.” What does the old doctor reveal about the women of the town?

Connections

- Over Vera’s bed are the words “Forget me not,” and the doctor tells Sarah “that is why your eyes are blue forget-me-nots.” What links them?
- The doctor cries, “My God! Why hast thou deserted me?” What does he change from the words on the cross?
- The doctor’s strangest case is “a woman who was always pregnant with an imaginary baby.” How does she echo Vera’s stone child in Chapter 68?

Reflection

- “Who could endure the sight of his love when his love was old?” Who in the novel has?
- He tells Sarah to go so that “she would seem beautiful, beautiful because distant and forgotten.” Is love easier from a distance?
- “Go, Sarah!” Vera screams. Why does she join the doctor’s quarrel?

Research: Characters

Vera

- A reflective observer who notices the eerie attributes of the room and the unfolding drama next door.

The Landlord

- A loquacious, colorful figure with a tattooed, lion-like chest, who shares stories of Mr. Weed, the hotel’s history, and his own varied past as a sailor, performer, and soldier. He is knowledgeable but somewhat cynical, providing a bridge between reality and the supernatural elements.
- His wife, a former circus fat lady, owned the hotel. He tells of being a candy merchant at ten, a magician, a ventriloquist, a sailor, a soldier in the Intelligence, and a hunter of wild animals for Hagenbeck’s, and of having killed, “very reluctantly, against his will,” “a very little black man who had no tongue but had swallowed a diamond.”

Mr. Weed and His Shadow

- Mentioned as mysterious figures, Mr. Weed is a man of few words, while his shadow is more outspoken and unsettling. The landlord distinguishes between the two, adding layers to the mythos of the hotel.
- The landlord says Mr. Weed is in truth “a prosperous farmer and the soul of respectability” with a model dairy farm, and that “The reason he tied the knot was that he got paid to tie it.”

Dr. Justice O’Leary

- An aging, embittered physician who is haunted by “Sarah,” a ghost or symbolic figure representing death, disgrace, and the burden of his past. He is portrayed as mad, desperate, and filled with sorrow and rage.

Sarah O’Leary

- A ghostly, troubling figure who haunts Dr. O’Leary’s room and mind. She is described variously as a dead woman, a baby, and a spiteful presence.

Other Figures

- The bus driver, Imadaisy (Imadaisy appears only here; asked who she was, the landlord answers, “Nobody.” The name reads as “I’m a daisy,” old American slang for someone first-rate.), and various clients of the doctor add depth to the setting’s community. Tillie is a young girl who lives in the hotel where the narrator, Vera, is staying. The landlord describes her as “a very young girl” who will knit a baby hood for Vera. He mentions her casually while showing Vera the corridors of the hotel, specifically pointing to the door opposite Vera’s room. But the landlord insists that she and the old woman who keeps canaries as big as turkey buzzards are one person: “as if in ocean depths, the two were one.”

Research: Themes

Death and Haunting

See: Death and Mortality

- The omnipresence of death is felt through the spectral figure of Sarah, Mr. Weed’s shadow, and the decaying hotel environment.
- Dr. O’Leary’s confrontation with Sarah is a meditation on mortality, loss, disgrace, and the persistence of the past.

Memory and Forgetting

See: Memory and the Past

- Dr. O’Leary claims to be the only one who remembers Sarah, highlighting the tension between remembrance and societal forgetting.
- The landlord’s stories and Mr. Weed’s shadow serves as conduits for local history and legend, preserving memory in a decaying place.

Decay and Corruption

See: Decay and Ruin

- Physical decay (the mattress, the slop jar, Sarah's sores) mirrors moral and psychological decay, especially in the doctor's life and the hotel's atmosphere.

Isolation and Madness

See: Isolation and Connection · Madness and Sanity

- The doctor's madness and isolation are emphasized through his anguished monologues and the strange, disruptive presence of Sarah.
- The landlord and Vera observe these events as somewhat detached witnesses, enhancing the sense of alienation.

The Supernatural and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The narrative blurs lines between reality and the supernatural with ghostly figures, haunted rooms, and symbolic presences.
- The landlord's tall tales and Mr. Weed's shadow complicate the story's realism.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Fire Escape Room

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · The House · Fire

- Symbolizes escape but also confinement, a place between safety and danger.

Slop Jar

- Filled with sediment and blonde hair, represents decay and the remnants of life.

Silver Church Steeple Picture

- A hopeful or nostalgic image contrasting with the room's decay, with the phrase "Forget me not" symbolizing memory and longing.

Sarah

- Embodies death, disgrace, lost innocence, and the inescapability of the past.

Mr. Weed's Watch

See: Clocks and Watches

- A "world within a world," symbolizing time, fate, or the inevitability of death.

Turkey Buzzards/Canaries

See: Birds

- Represent death and the grotesque in the everyday world.

Research: Resources

- “was marked Fire Escape”: Fire escapes emerged in the U.S. from the 1800s, driven by deadly urban fires, initially as simple ladders and later evolving into complex external stair systems, with Anna Connelly’s 1887 patent for a bridge-like design becoming foundational; they became common after laws following disasters like the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire but faded in new construction after the 1960s as modern sprinklers, alarms, and improved firefighting equipment made them less essential, though they remain iconic features in older cityscapes.
- “the mattress stuffed with corn husks”: Corn husks were used from the Colonial era to the 19th century.
- “Forget me not”: The forget-me-not is the flower of remembrance. In the German legend a knight, gathering the flowers for his lady by a river, was dragged down by his armor and threw them to her as he drowned, crying “Forget me not.” See Death and Mortality.
- “There was a slop jar with big handles like ears”: Slop jars were used along with a pitcher and basin in hotels until the 1950s.
- “as loquacious as the hangman”: Loquacious means talkative or tending to talk a great deal.
- “as many colors as Joseph’s coat”: Joseph’s coat of many colors is from the Book of Genesis. It was a special, richly decorated robe given to him by his father Jacob, symbolizing his favoritism, which fueled his brothers’ jealousy, leading them to sell Joseph into slavery and present the bloody coat to Jacob as proof he was dead. The garment, likely a regal tunic with long sleeves, signified Joseph’s special status and set him apart, though it also provoked envy, highlighting themes of favoritism, betrayal, and God’s guiding purpose through hardship. “Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children… and he made him a coat of many colours” (Genesis 37:3, KJV). See Genesis.
- “the landlord’s wife who had been a circus fat lady”: The “fat lady” in the U.S. circus was a prominent sideshow attraction from the 19th to mid-20th centuries, embodying spectacle, curiosity, and sometimes exploitation, with famous figures like Lottie Whitlock, billed as the original “Fat Lady,” and later stars like Alice from Dallas and Celesta Geyer (Dolly Dimples) who gained fame and fortune before some dramatically lost weight, highlighting societal views on size and health. These performers, part of the “freak show” tradition, used their size to build successful careers, often achieving celebrity status within the circus world, though facing exploitation and objectification. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- “He had seen lamer ducks than the hangman”: A lame duck is an official (especially the president) in the final period of office, after the election of a successor; an ineffectual or unsuccessful person or thing.
- “Barnum’s seven wonders of the universe”: Phineas Taylor Barnum was an American showman, businessman, and politician, remembered for promoting celebrated hoaxes and founding the Barnum & Bailey Circus with James Anthony Bailey. Barnum went on to create America’s first aquarium and to expand the wax figure department of his museum. His Seven Grand Salons demonstrated the Seven Wonders of the World which claimed 850,000 curiosities. (Wikipedia) His circus was billed as the Greatest Show on Earth.
- “old people with hardening of the arteries”: Hardening of the arteries, or atherosclerosis, is a widespread issue in the U.S., a slow-developing disease where plaque (fat, cholesterol) narrows arteries, significantly contributing to heart attacks and strokes, the leading causes of death, affecting roughly half of Americans aged 45-84, often silently until serious events occur, with risk factors including high blood pressure, smoking, high cholesterol, and diabetes.
- “If you hear sleigh bells ringing”: More than four thousand American soldiers came home from World War I as amputees. The rusted sleigh bells Vera dreaded in Chapter 68, jingling all night in the corridors, are his. See the Chapter 68 resources.
- “He was coming home on a furlough during the Last War”: The landlord’s Last War is World War I: he remembers the Marne and the Lusitania, steps on the face of a “Hun,” and goes hunting for Hagenbeck’s after it ends.
- “Maybe I was surprised by the hangman’s confessions”: The passage explores themes of death, violence, and respectability, highlighting the banality and repetitiveness of horror, and the unsettling coexistence of brutality and normalcy in the hangman’s life. The gruesome crimes serve as a backdrop to the hangman’s enigmatic identity and the eerie atmosphere of the setting.
- “the mad butcher who sold human beings as hams”: Compare Fritz Haarmann, the “Butcher of Hanover,” executed in 1925 for murdering young men and long suspected of selling their flesh as black-market meat.
- “a model dairy farm”: The modernization of model dairy farms started in 1879 and continued to World War II.
- “a very little black man who had no tongue but had swallowed a diamond”: At the Kimberley diamond mines in South Africa, from 1885 Black miners were locked in closed compounds, searched naked, and held and dosed with purgatives before they left, to recover any diamonds they had swallowed. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “I was in the Intelligence during the Last War”: In World War I the United States built its first real intelligence services: the Army’s Military Intelligence Division (1917), its Corps of Intelligence Police, and MI-8, Herbert Yardley’s codebreakers.
- “I can say parlez vous to little Frenchies”: “Frenchies” is an informal and sometimes derogatory term used describing French people. American soldiers in France sang

“Mademoiselle from Armentières,” with its refrain “Hinky dinky, parlez-vous.”

- “Remember the Marne”: The Marne was the river of two great battles of World War I. In 1914 the French and British stopped the German advance on Paris there, and in 1918 American troops held the line at the Second Battle of the Marne. “Remember the Lusitania” was a recruiting cry of 1915.
  - Remember the Marne may refer to Remember the Maine! To hell with Spain! after the USS Maine. It was a United States Navy ship that sank in Havana Harbor on February 15, 1898, contributing to the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in April 1898. Although the USS Maine explosion was not a direct cause, it served as a catalyst that accelerated the events leading up to the war.
- “His sacred pictures were on his back”: Sailors’ lore held that a crucifixion tattooed across the back would stay the hand of an officer ordering a flogging.
- “a supposedly dead Hun”: “Hun” was the Allied name for German soldiers in World War I, revived in World War II, linking them to the barbaric, nomadic Huns of antiquity known for cruelty under Attila, especially after Kaiser Wilhelm II’s 1900 speech encouraging similar savagery in China; Allied propaganda effectively used this to portray Nazis as barbaric, though terms like “Fritz” or “Jerry” (British) and “Heinie” (American) were also common for German soldiers.
- “Hagenbeck’s out of Berlin”: Hagenbeck’s out of Berlin may refer to The Tierpark Hagenbeck zoo in Stellingen, Hamburg, Germany. The collection began in 1863 with animals that belonged to Carl Hagenbeck Sr., a fishmonger who became an amateur animal collector. The park itself was founded by Carl Hagenbeck Jr. in 1907. It is known for being the first zoo to use open enclosures surrounded by moats, rather than barred cages, to better approximate animals’ natural environments. Among his collections, however, were also human beings whom he exhibited in “human zoos.” The private zoo is still run by the Hagenbeck family. Hagenbeck’s was based in Hamburg, not Berlin. From 1874 it exhibited Sámi, Nubians, Inuit, and other peoples in its “ethnological shows.” See Society, Class, and Race.
- “had seen elephants copulating”: The belief is not from the Bible but from Pliny, who wrote that elephants mate in secret, out of modesty (Natural History, Book 8), and from the medieval bestiaries that followed him.
- “Sarah, you are dead, this town’s little sister”: See Sarah O’Leary.
- “a canker in the rose immortal”: “And loathsome canker lives in sweetest bud” (Shakespeare, Sonnet 35). Compare Blake’s “The Sick Rose” (1794), destroyed by “The invisible worm.” See Shakespeare and Romantic Poets.
- “We must put away our childish loves”: “When I was a child, I spake as a child… but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11, KJV). See The Bible.
- “He was as mad as a March hare”: “Mad as a March hare” is an idiom meaning extremely silly, eccentric, or crazy, originating from the frenzied, unpredictable behavior of European hares during their spring breeding season (March), which includes frantic

chases, high leaps, and “boxing” matches where females swat males away to discourage unwanted advances. This phrase was popularized by Lewis Carroll’s Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland, featuring the eccentric March Hare at the Mad Hatter’s tea party, though the behavior itself is a real, albeit misunderstood, part of hare mating rituals, not actual madness. See Alice in Wonderland.

- “Dr. Justice O’Leary, for so he called himself”: In Chapter 67, Moses believed old Doc dead at the wheel of his ghost buggy. See the Chapter 67 resources and Justice O’Leary.
- “He had blown his breath into the mouths of dead men”: “And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth… and the flesh of the child waxed warm” (2 Kings 4:34, KJV), Elisha raising the Shunammite woman’s son. See The Bible.
- “he had seen something steal out of the room”: Compare Dr. Duncan MacDougall of Haverhill, Massachusetts, who in 1907 weighed six dying patients and claimed that the soul weighed about twenty-one grams.
- “The outside of the cup was shining”: “For ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess” (Matthew 23:25, KJV). See The Bible.
- “a wormwood”: Culturally wormwood has been used in the Christian Bible to connote something incredibly bitter. In the Book of Revelation it is used as the name of the star. In Hamlet, he uses the word wormwood to describe the situation he believes is going on with his family. “And the name of the star is called Wormwood” (Revelation 8:11, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse and Shakespeare.
- “Let this cup pass from him”: From Matthew 26:39 where Jesus is asking God if he has to go through with this. This moment is part of a larger, surreal and symbolic interaction filled with themes of death, memory, disgrace, and the passage of time, as the doctor grapples with his own mortality and the ghostly reminders of a troubled past. “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me” (Matthew 26:39, KJV). See The Bible.
- “Better a stone cherub than a baby now”: Compare Vera’s stone child, “a marble statue in your womb,” in the Chapter 68 resources.
- “For God knew he was no abortionist”: By 1900 abortion was a crime in every state. In 1930 abortion was the recorded cause of death of nearly 2,700 American women, almost one in five maternal deaths. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “as God is not the great physician”: “They that are whole have no need of the physician, but they that are sick” (Mark 2:17, KJV); revival hymns hailed Jesus as “The Great Physician.” See The Bible.
- “Why hast thou deserted me?”: From Psalm 22, according to the Gospels, Jesus spoke these words during the Crucifixion, after he had suffered on the cross for three hours. It is a cry of abandonment and despair, reflecting Dr. O’Leary’s inner turmoil as he confronts death, loss, and the haunting past. The King James reads, “My God, my

God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:46). The doctor makes it "deserted." See The Bible.

- "Could anyone get blood out of a turnip": The phrase refers to the idiom, "You can't squeeze blood from a turnip," meaning you can't get something from someone or something that doesn't have it to give, like trying to get money from someone with no money, or forcing an impossible result. It's similar to "You can't get blood from a stone" and signifies the futility of demanding something unavailable.
- "Jerusalem, Jerusalem": "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets" (Matthew 23:37, KJV). See The Bible.
- "Mayo, Mayo!": Mayo Clinic originated with the medical practice of William Worrall Mayo, M.D. who immigrated to the United States in 1846. He had two sons. The Mayo brothers were financially successful and professionally prominent. The Mayo Clinic is still in the US and has opened branches in several countries. The clinic grew from St. Marys Hospital in Rochester, Minnesota, which Mother Alfred Moes and her Sisters of St. Francis built after the tornado of 1883 and opened in 1889, with the Mayos as its doctors. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "a woman who was always pregnant with an imaginary baby": The doctor says his strangest case is a woman who believes she is always pregnant with an imaginary baby and suffers from many miscarriages. This woman seems to refer to Esther Longtree who will be prominent towards the last chapters of the novel. See Esther Longtree.
- "that penny he stole off a dead man's eyes": Coins were laid on the eyes of the dead to keep them closed, and in Greek custom a coin was left for Charon, the ferryman of the dead. See Death and Mortality.
- "his house was his Englishman's castle": "The house of every one is to him as his castle and fortress" (Sir Edward Coke, Semayne's Case, 1604).
- "naked, we come into this world, and naked, we go out of it": The line comes from the Bible, found in both Ecclesiastes 5:15 and Job 1:21. The phrase reflects the inevitability of human vulnerability at birth and death, stripping away all pretenses or material concerns, which is a poignant theme running through the novel's exploration of mortality, identity, and human frailty. "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither" (Job 1:21, KJV). See The Book of Job and Ecclesiastes.
- "Oh, my Lady Gonorrhea!": Gonorrhea was first documented in ancient Greece by Galen, who used the term from the Greek words gonos (semen) and rhoia (flow) to describe what he mistakenly called an "involuntary ejaculation of semen." The name "the clap" emerged in the 1500s, originating from the French "les clapiers," a term for brothels where the disease was common. While medieval and early modern records describe symptoms, the specific bacterium, Neisseria gonorrhoeae, wasn't identified until 1879 by Albert Neisser, though the connection to women's health was sometimes misunderstood.

Vocabulary

Abortionist

One who performs abortions.

Biceps

The large muscle at the front of the upper arm.

Canker

A blight or ulcer that eats away at a plant or the body; anything that corrupts from within.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Copulate

To mate.

Decrepitly

In a worn-out, feeble way.

Furlough

Leave from military duty.

Gonorrhea

A venereal disease.

Impostor

One who pretends to be someone else.

Loquacious

Talkative.

Melodiously

Tunefully.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Polka

A lively couple dance from Bohemia.

Porous

Full of tiny holes that let water through.

Quail

A small, plump ground bird hunted as game.

Reticence

Reserve; a habit of keeping silent.

Riotous

Wild and unrestrained.

Senile

Weakened in mind by old age.

Silage

Green fodder stored to ferment for winter feed.

Stalactite

An icicle-shaped formation of minerals hanging from the roof of a cave.

Transient

Passing quickly; not lasting. As a noun, a hotel guest who stays only a short time.

Unctuously

With a smooth, oily, false earnestness.

Venereal

Passed on by sexual contact.

Ventriloquist

One who throws the voice so it seems to come from elsewhere.

Wormwood

A bitter herb; bitterness itself.

Wrack

Wreck or ruin, as in “wrack and ruin.”

Chapter 70

Summary

In the silence after the doctor’s quarrel, Vera half dreams of Mrs. Hogden, a woman she never saw, whose name slides from Hogden to Logden, Fogden, Dogden, and Bogden. During Vera’s absence Mrs. Hogden arrived at Catherine’s house in four coats, hung with temple bells and packages, carrying an empty bird cage and a basket of wormy apples. She had sold her Dutch windmill on Long Island to become the arithmetic teacher Catherine says she never hired. Lisa Lunde, the would-be physicist who replaced Vera as Catherine’s companion, carries messages between the two women and interprets neither to the other. Lodged in the deserted playroom, Mrs. Hogden explores the house, plays chess alone with an atomizer for the missing bishop, drinks, and at last takes to bed as a rival invalid, dreaming the household’s dreams out loud. Mr. Spitzer offers to restore her windmill and more, and she rides away in the mist. In the empty playroom Vera finds, on the little blackboard, a message in red chalk ending, “and therefore, dear heart, all a’s are c’s. You know me.”

Characters present

Mrs. Hogden · Vera Cartwheel · Catherine Cartwheel · Lisa Lunde

Concepts present

Themes: Decay and Ruin · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Madness and Sanity · Order, Chaos, and Discipline · Society, Class, and Race · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds

Philosophy: Existentialism · Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres

Allusions: Angels and Archangels · Astronomy · Don Quixote · Judaism · Napoleon and Wellington · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- Vera describes the mysterious and unsettling arrival of Mrs. Hogden, a corporeal yet ghostly figure who invades Vera’s dreams and memories, contrasting sharply with Miss MacIntosh, the former nursemaid. Mrs. Hogden is portrayed as a confusing and contradictory figure (fat, over-dressed, and intrusive) acting almost like an apparition haunting the household and Vera’s psyche. This passage sets the tone of ambiguity and surrealism, highlighting the blurred lines between reality and dream, presence and absence.

- Mrs. Hogden arrives unexpectedly, burdened with numerous packages and personal belongings, having sold her Dutch windmill home to take up a position supposedly offered by Vera's mother. Despite her chaotic appearance and peculiar behavior, she is convinced of her rightful place in the household, promising to teach arithmetic and "reflect my mother's every mood." The tension between Mrs. Hogden's assured intrusion and the household's skepticism is introduced here, particularly through Lisa Lunde's suspicion and Catherine's disbelief and rejection.
- A key passage details the growing argument between Mrs. Hogden and Vera's mother, who denies ever inviting her. Despite this, Mrs. Hogden knows intimate details of Catherine's life, suggesting a mysterious or imagined connection. Catherine's refusal to accept Mrs. Hogden, calling her a liar and impostor, contrasts with Mrs. Hogden's unwavering optimism and strange knowledge.
- Mrs. Hogden's life in the playroom (a place full of forgotten objects and memories) is described in detail. She is isolated, eccentric, and increasingly despondent yet strangely content with her condition. Her behavior of talking to herself, playing chess alone, drinking secretly, and dressing and undressing depicts a tragic figure clinging to illusions of importance and social connection.
- As Mrs. Hogden feigns or experiences illness, taking to her uncomfortable bed, Catherine's revulsion grows. Catherine refuses to tolerate a "rival invalid" and orders her removal through Mr. Spitzer, the lawyer.
- Eventually, Mrs. Hogden is expelled from the house with a generous financial settlement arranged by Mr. Spitzer. The aftermath reveals the house's return to emptiness, the closure of the playroom, and the lingering mystery of Mrs. Hogden's identity and presence. Vera contemplates Mrs. Hogden's role as both a real and dreamlike figure, a substitute for lost connections, and a symbol of the fragile boundary between memory and imagination.
- The chapter closes with the image of the little three-legged blackboard left behind by Mrs. Hogden, inscribed with a cryptic message in red chalk: "All a's are b's, it read—all b's are c's—and therefore, dear heart, all a's are c's. You know me." The syllogism is sound, but "dear heart" and "You know me" turn the logic into a personal claim of recognition from a woman nobody can place.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "She was my mind's betrayal of my mind." What does Vera mean by calling Mrs. Hogden a substitute?
- "If two and two made only four, my mother said, what else was there to talk about?" Why does Catherine want, and then refuse, simple arithmetic?
- The blackboard reads, "All a's are b's, it read—all b's are c's—and therefore, dear heart, all a's are c's. You know me." What does "You know me" add to the logic?

Characters

- Mrs. Hogden “was the least critical human being.” Is that a virtue or a madness?
- Lisa Lunde “would do nothing to interpret either character to the other.” Why does she enjoy the quarrel?
- Catherine “would not have a rival invalid in the house.” What is she protecting?

Connections

- “Her connection with Miss MacIntosh, her predecessor, is only one of a shadow-haunted place, after all.” How are the two women alike and unlike?
- Mrs. Hogden “dreamed our dreams out loud as if they were hers instead of ours.” Why does that feel like an insult to the household?
- “Home, James, my good man. Home, James.” Where is home for Mrs. Hogden?

Reflection

- “Everybody is lonely.” Does the chapter prove it?
- “She was one of those persons who, disappearing from the earth, would have been missed by nobody at all.” Who in the novel is like her?
- “Is it possible that any life can be the surface impression only, just no more than it seems to others?” What is your answer?

Research: Characters

Mrs. Hogden/Logden/Fogden/Dogden/Bogden

- Fat, corpulent, with bleached, plastered curls.
- Wears multiple coats stacked over each other, eccentric hats, and carries a variety of odd objects (empty birdcage, packages, temple bells).
- Her face is blandly expressionless except for an aggressive chin and abnormally large, unfocused eyes.
- Smells of over-ripe apples and is associated with decay and disorder.
- Wears a water-stained yellow satin nightgown, black fur slippers, and a frilled white night-cap with an aggressive chin bow.
- Optimistic despite her apparent destitution and displacement.
- Talks to herself and answers her own questions, which others interpret as madness.
- Displays a strange serenity and is described as the “least critical human being.”
- Has an air of maudlin dignity and commands a dubious respect.
- Exhibits contradictory behavior: vain but neglected, hopeful but delusional.

- Plays chess alone, often crying over imagined victories or defeats.
- Has a strong attachment to visual education and arithmetic, though she never succeeds in teaching.
- Claims to be descended from notable historical figures (Daniel Boone, William the Conqueror, Alexander Graham Bell).
- Sold a Dutch windmill home to come to Catherine's house based on a letter of employment that Catherine denies writing.
- Possibly a shoplifter or of dubious character as viewed by Lisa Lunde, but not confirmed.
- Mysterious in origin, with no known relatives or friends, disappearing without trace after leaving.

Vera Cartwheel

- Vera emerges as a deeply introspective, highly imaginative, and somewhat detached individual whose internal world often blurs with external reality.
- She explicitly states that Mrs. Hogden, a central figure in this chapter, is someone she "never saw," but rather a "trick of my imagination, this substituting of the one for the other." Vera acknowledges Mrs. Hogden as a "substitute... for the dream life I wanted" and even calls her "my mind's betrayal of my mind." Figures like Mrs. Hogden go "waddling in and out of my dreams." She can "see" Mrs. Hogden by simply "closing my eyes, by concentrating." Vera's consciousness is the lens through which the narrative unfolds, making her a subjective and unreliable narrator.
- Vera's character is also deeply shaped by her past and the figures who influenced her upbringing, particularly Miss MacIntosh and her mother. Miss MacIntosh, Vera's former nursemaid, "brought me up to understand that my mother's way of life was far from average and was not to be imitated by a good woman such as she saw me becoming, a woman like herself, simple and average and clear-eyed." This suggests that Miss MacIntosh tried to instill a sense of conventionality in Vera, despite Vera's inherent imaginative tendencies (night-dreaming, too, "she would have disapproved of, most ardently"). That Vera "escaped from my mother's house" further indicates a strained relationship with her mother, who is portrayed as eccentric and prone to "frenzied dreaming." Vera keeps comparing Mrs. Hogden to Miss MacIntosh, even after Miss MacIntosh's death.
- Despite her imaginative immersion, Vera demonstrates a keen observational and analytical mind, though often applied to her internal world. She meticulously describes Mrs. Hogden's outlandish appearance and actions, down to the "smashed hat with a wilted ostrich feather" and the "row of Javanese temple bells." She also notices the "evidence left by Mrs. Hogden" in the playroom, such as "derelict whiskey bottles, empty coat hangers, withered apple cores, broken egg shells, dead flies," distinguishing even an "artificial eyelash." Her philosophical reflections, such as her

belief in a “small, warped flower growing... outside the consciousness of God,” reveal a mind that questions universal truths and finds significance in anomalies.

- Vera also conveys a sense of loneliness and a search for meaning or connection. She explicitly states, “The life I required was the life which required, like his, a lost companion —not merely this self-centered affliction of the right hand loving the left.” Her observation that “Everybody is lonely” suggests a deep, shared human experience she identifies with. Mrs. Hogden, as an imagined companion, could be seen as Vera’s attempt to fill this void, even while acknowledging the illusion.
- Vera’s identity appears somewhat fluid and permeable. Mrs. Hogden mistakenly supposes Lisa Lunde to be the daughter of the house, and Vera herself often blurs the lines between her own experiences, her mother’s dreams, and the fabricated reality of Mrs. Hogden.

Catherine Cartwheel

- Catherine, Vera’s mother, is a profoundly eccentric, wealthy invalid whose grasp on reality is tenuous and fragmented. Her character is defined by a series of contradictions, delusions, and a self-centered, often manipulative, approach to those around her.
- Initially, Vera establishes Catherine as an unconventional figure, noting that Miss MacIntosh, Vera’s former nursemaid, raised Vera to understand that her “mother’s way of life was far from average and was not to be imitated by a good woman.” Catherine is also revealed as the “true subject of [Vera’s] dreams,” indicating her deep, almost obsessive, significance to Vera.
- Catherine’s disconnection from reality is a dominant trait. She “dreamed that she was poor,” contrasting with Lisa Lunde’s mother who “dreamed that she was rich.” Her physical and mental state is described as one of profound invalidism, often sinking into “deeper and deeper coma” and experiencing hallucinations, such as “a huge toad was eating my mother’s face” or “the balloon fish floating over my mother’s head,” and “shadowy figures stepped out of the walls. There were moths with human faces.” She herself admits to having “lost my mind several times” and declares, “I am not responsible for my actions.” Her identity is fluid; she believes she has “killed her former self and that my mother’s former self was walking through the house while my mother lay with her hair streaked out like twilight on a pillow, for my mother was dead—added, subtracted, multiplied, divided.”
- Despite her profound mental disarray, Catherine exhibits moments of surprising shrewdness and practicality, particularly concerning financial matters. She can display a “shrewd gleam in her eyes, the absolute efficiency with which she inquired into her financial concerns, past and present,” even seeking to collect “Old loans which she had forgotten making” from dead parties. Her instruction to meticulously inspect the house for missing items after Mrs. Hogden’s departure further underscores this trait.
- Catherine’s interactions with Mrs. Hogden, her newly arrived companion, highlight her manipulative and self-centered nature. Initially, she feigns “profound, glazed

astonishment," denying any knowledge of Mrs. Hogden or having sent an invitation, calling her an "impostor, a liar, a day-dreamer, a thief." Despite Mrs. Hogden possessing intimate details of Catherine's life like "the head of Alcibiades was in the drainpipe" or "a whale swimming into my mother's bedroom" which only Catherine could have divulged, Catherine still refuses to see her. She employs elaborate excuses, claiming to be "gone to Boston to see a podiatrist" or "to the North Pole." She blames Lisa Lunde for Mrs. Hogden's presence and attempts to discourage Mrs. Hogden by assigning her an uncomfortable "deserted playroom" and a "hospital cot" that was "too short and too narrow." Her ultimate directive to Mr. Spitzer to "push her off a high building or throw her into the ocean" to get rid of Mrs. Hogden reveals a cruel and extreme impulse.

- Catherine's desire for an arithmetic teacher who would teach "Two and two always making four...over and over again" suggests a yearning for simple, undeniable truths in a chaotic personal reality. However, she rejects Mrs. Hogden's attempts to teach, deeming her "mad as a loon" for repeating the lesson. She views Mrs. Hogden as a "rival invalid" and a "gross, stinking parody" of her own "distended world of shimmering, loosely woven textures," indicating a fierce protectiveness over her unique inner world.
- Catherine's memory and awareness fluctuate. After Mrs. Hogden's departure, she is "disappointed now that she had not been taught arithmetic and blamed Lisa Lunde," even considering hiring another "lonely old woman" to teach her.

Lisa Lunde

- Lisa Lunde is introduced as Vera's mother's "young companion who took my place when, carrying a large suitcase, I escaped from my mother's house." This immediately establishes her as a replacement for Vera and suggests a practical, perhaps less privileged, background. Indeed, she is described as a "would-be physicist working for her living in order to help support her mother who was poor and mad and dreamed that she was rich," highlighting her sense of responsibility and pragmatic drive, contrasting with the opulence and delusion of Vera's mother's household.
- Lisa Lunde is characterized by her analytical, skeptical, and often blunt nature. She "prided herself on seeing immediately through Mrs. Hogden's pretensions" and quickly assesses Mrs. Hogden as a "very dubious character, a shoplifter or something equally vicious." Her scientific inclination is evident in her desire to "shatter all illusions at one blow," as when she cruelly declares "Res Tacamah... is nothing but a drug bottle." She struggles with Mrs. Hogden's evasiveness, conceding "she was perhaps not a shoplifter... but she did not look like a school-teacher either—there was something so evasive about her, something that evaded definition."
- Despite her initial skepticism and clear-sightedness, Mrs. Hogden's unwavering self-assurance eventually sways Lisa Lunde, until she "began to believe that she had come because she was invited." This suggests a slight vulnerability to the pervasive illusions of the house, or perhaps a weariness from constantly battling them.

- Her role in the conflict between Vera's mother and Mrs. Hogden is notable. When Vera's mother blames her for Mrs. Hogden's presence and demands she "get rid of her," Lisa Lunde reveals a more complex, almost vindictive side. "Lisa Lunde, revengeful, began to enjoy the embarrassing situation. She ran back and forth with meaningless messages between the two, and she would do nothing to interpret either character to the other." This shows a passive-aggressive streak, where she derives satisfaction from the escalating absurdity, perhaps as a form of rebellion against her demanding employer or simply a release from her own constrained life.
- Lisa Lunde also acts as a voice of conventional sanity, remarking that talking to oneself is fine, "but when you get to answering your own questions—then you are crazy as a loon." This pragmatic, somewhat judgmental perspective contrasts sharply with the eccentricities of Mrs. Hogden and the delusions of Vera's mother.
- Lisa Lunde serves as a grounded, albeit sometimes resentful, observer and participant in the surreal events of the household. Vera's mother, however, consistently blames Lisa Lunde, even for "keeping Mrs. Hogden out of sight."

Research: Themes

Illusion and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- Mrs. Hogden blurs the line between dream and waking life, reality and hallucination.
- Her presence challenges the boundaries between sanity and madness.
- Symbol of the mind's betrayal of itself, a substitute for lost or desired figures (such as Miss MacIntosh).

Loneliness and Isolation

See: Isolation and Connection

- Mrs. Hogden is depicted as profoundly lonely, coming from a desolate life in a cold windmill.
- The Arctic tern's repeated, inexplicable visits symbolize persistent isolation.
- Despite her eccentric behavior, she is a figure of tragic solitude.

Decay and Disorder

See: Decay and Ruin · Order, Chaos, and Discipline

- Her physical smell and appearance evoke decay (rotted apples, dead flies).
- The disorder she brings contrasts with the previously orderly household.
- Symbolizes the intrusion of chaos into a controlled environment.

Madness and Sanity

See: Madness and Sanity

- Mrs. Hogden's behavior is perceived as madness, yet she retains a shrewd awareness and control.
- The narrative questions who is truly mad: the woman or those rejecting her.
- Madness is portrayed both as a social stigma and a complex psychological state.

Time and Permanence

See: Time

- Mrs. Hogden talks about time running backward and forward, dreams of a motorboat, and eternal social seasons.
- Her presence represents a temporary permanence, a fixture in a house and life otherwise transient.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

- Mrs. Hogden herself is a complex symbol. She represents a kind of spectral presence, both corporeal and ghost-like, who invades the household and disturbs the established order. She is described as a "fat, corporeal, moon-eyed" woman who is not beautiful and who waddled "in and out of my dreams." She embodies the intrusion of chaos and unwanted reality into a fragile, dreamlike world maintained by Vera's mother and the memory of Miss MacIntosh.
- Mrs. Hogden is also symbolic of decay and disorder, her physicality is often described in grotesque and unsettling terms, such as "rolling of loose, misshapen flesh," "wrinkled breasts hanging like bags of whey," and "a huge mold of greenish, bluish jelly." She contrasts sharply with the idealized past represented by Miss MacIntosh and the house itself.
- Miss MacIntosh and Mrs. Hogden, in their stark contrast, explore different facets of the novel's central themes. Miss MacIntosh, the champion of stark reality, ultimately reveals a hidden life of profound vulnerability and disillusionment, making her a complex figure of "imperfection" that Vera comes to love. Mrs. Hogden, on the other hand, is a figure of superficial optimism and self-deception, a "grotesque parody" who inadvertently reveals the emptiness and shared nature of the very illusions she seems to embody. Through these two women, Young delves into the intricate relationship between outward appearance and inner truth, the nature of human suffering, and the pervasive power of imagination in shaping individual realities. Vera's journey of understanding and acceptance, particularly regarding Miss MacIntosh, becomes a quest to reconcile the perceived and the concealed, the dream and the truth.
- The playroom is a central symbolic space. It is "closed for so many years" and filled with "useless or forgotten objects," old trunks, umbrellas, and boxes. This room

represents a liminal space where the past and present collide, and where forgotten memories and decayed hopes reside. Mrs. Hogden inhabiting this space symbolizes the intrusion of decay and madness into the sanctuary of childhood memories and order. The moonlight that “lit her up” and the “silvery walls” that “shone around her like curled water” give the playroom an eerie, otherworldly quality, blurring the line between reality and dream.

- Mrs. Hogden’s teaching of arithmetic is symbolized by the apples she brings, some of which are wormy, and later by buttons as substitutes. The apples and buttons stand for the attempt to impose order and reason in a chaotic, irrational world. The wormy apples suggest decay and imperfection beneath the surface of seemingly simple truths. Yet Mrs. Hogden’s faith that “two and two still making four” is a “triumph of reason” symbolizes a desperate clinging to logic and clarity amidst confusion.
- The radio, described as an old cracked instrument producing static, multiple voices, and unintelligible noises, symbolizes the fragmented and unreliable nature of communication and reality in the house. Mrs. Hogden argues with announcers and imagines conversations among them, reflecting her fractured mental state and the fractured reality in which she dwells.
- Mr. Res Tacamah, revealed to be a drug bottle, symbolizes the presence of medication, altered consciousness, and perhaps addiction or dependency, linking to the theme of mental instability.
- The Arctic tern that visits Mrs. Hogden annually at her Dutch windmill home symbolizes a kind of haunting persistence and the natural cycle that contrasts with human loneliness and decay. The tern’s repeated visits, and Mrs. Hogden’s perception of being singled out by it, underline themes of isolation and the inexplicability of fate or nature.
- Mrs. Hogden sitting “under a frieze of gargoyles” and the idea that “if Mrs. Hogden sat under the frieze of gargoyles long enough, she would become a gargoyle herself” symbolizes the transformation between human and stone, animate and inanimate, reality and myth. The statues and gargoyles represent permanence, desolation, and grotesque beauty, mirroring Mrs. Hogden’s own state and the house’s atmosphere.
- The ivory-handed back-scratcher which Mrs. Hogden steals, symbolizes a small but tangible connection to the past and the household, a personal token in the midst of disorder. It also symbolizes Mrs. Hogden’s claim to the house and her attempt to assert identity and control.
- Imagery of Mrs. Hogden wearing “a mask of beauty clay, cracking as it dried, only her eyes exposed, her eyes winking” and her multiple coats, diverse objects, and elaborate, sometimes disheveled wardrobe symbolize the layering of identity, the performance of self, and the blurring of appearance and reality. Her “blondish hair,” “bleached face,” and “plastered curls” depict a constructed and fragile persona.
- Mrs. Hogden playing chess alone with an atomizer substituting for a bishop symbolizes her solitary struggle to impose order and control. The chessboard and the immovable

Black King represent strategies, inevitability, and perhaps the futility of control over one's fate.

- Throughout the chapter, there is a recurring motif of dreaming: Mrs. Hogden's presence in dreams, Vera's mother dreaming, and the confusion between reality and imagination. Dreams symbolize the fragile boundary between perception and reality, memory and forgetting, sanity and madness.

Physical decay is a pervasive image

- wormy apples, rotted fish-like faces, dirty and torn clothes, dust, dead flies, and foul smells. This imagery creates a sense of entropy and decline, reflecting the mental and physical deterioration of characters and the household.
- The repeated emphasis on arithmetic, especially "two and two always making four," functions as a symbol of order, logic, and certainty. Yet it is juxtaposed against the madness and chaos that Mrs. Hogden and the household embody, highlighting the tension between reason and irrationality.
- Catherine and Mrs. Hogden, though seemingly antithetical, are deeply intertwined through their relationship with illusion and Vera's perception.
- Catherine creates illusions to escape a painful reality, while Mrs. Hogden accepts the house's illusions as her own reality, finding profound happiness within them. Catherine is the "genuine unbeliever" in reality, while Mrs. Hogden is the "least critical human being."
- Catherine is a fading, beautiful ghost, a "dead beauty," while Mrs. Hogden is an overwhelmingly corporeal, even grotesque, presence. Mrs. Hogden's physical reality is a "stinking parody" of the house's dreams.
- Mrs. Hogden acts as a "substitute" for Miss MacIntosh in Vera's mind and directly mirrors Catherine's dreams, often speaking them aloud. Catherine even mistakes Mrs. Hogden for her dead Cousin Hannah, highlighting the fluidity of identity within the house's dreamscape.
- Mrs. Hogden's character serves to "universalize" and "vulgarize" the "rare and individual and hidden" aspects of the house's dreams, making them commonplace through her uncritical embrace.
- Both characters, in their distinct ways, explore the novel's central themes of reality, illusion, memory, and identity, offering different facets of a world where the boundaries between the living and the dead, the real and the imagined, are constantly dissolving.

Research: Resources

- "there was a faceless woman, a Mrs. Hogden": Mrs. Hogden is a complex, multifaceted figure who embodies disorder, decay, misplaced optimism, and the collapse of old certainties. She is a grotesque presence in the household after Miss MacIntosh's departure, representing a stark contrast to the grounded, practical, and clear-eyed

Miss MacIntosh. Mrs. Hogden is described as corpulent, overburdened with possessions, dressed in layers of ill-fitting clothes, and surrounded by chaos, both physical and mental. She clings to illusions of social status, authority, and control, despite her evident disarray and marginalization. She is simultaneously comic and tragic, a figure who inhabits a liminal space between reality and dream, presence and absence, sanity and madness. Symbolically, Mrs. Hogden could be seen as representing aspects of American society and history, especially those tied to the decline of certain old social orders and the ambiguous transition to modernity. Mrs. Hogden's sale of her Dutch windmill, her carrying all her worldly goods in a two-door Ford, and her clinging to relics such as the beaded bag, the birdcage, and the Javanese temple bells evoke the image of a once-privileged class now reduced to decay and disarray. She could symbolize the fading of old American aristocracy or the genteel upper-middle class, who struggled to maintain dignity and status in a changing social landscape. Her presence in the house, with its priceless chairs and frozen grandeur, underscores the tension between fading grandeur and the disorder of decline. Mrs. Hogden's peripatetic arrival, her confusion about places and people (mixing up Mr. Res Tacamah, a drug bottle, with a gentleman visitor), and her life of loneliness parallel the broader social dislocations in America, including the effects of the Great Depression, the migration from rural to urban areas, and the alienation of individuals in modern capitalist society. Her sense of being unwanted yet persisting reflects the experience of many who were left behind by rapid social and economic change. As a middle-aged woman burdened by social pretensions and personal illusions, Mrs. Hogden represents the constrained roles available to women before the feminist advances of the 1960s. Her role as a supposed "teacher of arithmetic" who never fulfills this role and instead devolves into a caricature of herself suggests the limitations and frustrations imposed on women whose identities were often tied to domestic service or caretaking roles, without autonomy or recognition. Mrs. Hogden's refusal to acknowledge reality fully: her constant smiling despite ruin, her endless dressing and undressing, her imagining social events and parties in an empty house, and her inability to accept her own decline can be read as a metaphor for American society's denial of its underlying problems. This denial includes racial segregation, economic inequality, and social injustice that persisted before the civil rights movements and social reforms of the 1960s. Mrs. Hogden may symbolize the marginalized individuals who existed on the peripheries of American prosperity, those who were invisible or ignored by mainstream narratives of progress. Her ambiguous identity (Mrs. Hogden, Logden, or Fogden), her lack of family or friends, and the servants' refusal to acknowledge her expectations all point to a persona that is both part of and apart from society. Mrs. Hogden symbolically represents the decaying remnants of a bygone American social order, burdened by illusions of grandeur and authority, and caught in the liminal space between past certainties and an uncertain modern future.** She embodies the contradictions of persistence and decline, presence and invisibility, sanity and madness, reflecting the complex historical and social transformations experienced in the United States, including the decline of old

aristocratic values, the dislocations of modernity, the constrained roles of women, and the societal denial of persistent inequalities. See Mrs. Hogden.

- “my basting stitches to hold together surf and shore”: Basting stitches are long, temporary stitches used in sewing to temporarily hold fabric layers together, secure pleats, create gathers, or mark pattern lines before permanent stitching, allowing for easy removal and adjustments without damaging the fabric, often done with a machine’s longest stitch or by hand with a loose running stitch. They are crucial for fitting, easing fabric, and managing slippery materials, replacing pins to avoid bulk or shifting.
- “It was her great desire that I should be brought up as a kindly extrovert”: The line refers to Miss MacIntosh’s strong wish for Vera to grow up as an outgoing, socially engaged person who interacts kindly and openly with others. Miss MacIntosh wants Vera to be a clear-eyed, active participant in life, focusing on reality and kindness toward others rather than retreating into introspection or fantasy, which she sees as less helpful or even harmful.
    - Extroverts gain energy from social interaction, thrive in groups, are often talkative and assertive, and process thoughts externally (thinking out loud). Introverts expend energy in social situations, need solitude to recharge, prefer deep dives into fewer topics, process internally, and are often described as reserved or introspective, though not necessarily shy. Both types exist on a spectrum, with most people being ambiverts, falling somewhere in the middle.
- “according to Lisa Lunde, my mother’s young companion”: Lisa Lunde is presented as a sharp, young, aspiring physicist who works to support her poor and mentally ill mother. She occupies a role of both practical caretaker and critical observer within the household, particularly when dealing with Mrs. Hogden, whom she suspects of being a dubious character, possibly a shoplifter or deceiver. Lisa Lunde is skeptical, pragmatic, and often harsh in her judgments, especially toward Mrs. Hogden’s self-assured but chaotic presence. She acts as a foil to Mrs. Hogden’s delusional optimism and to the dreamlike, unstable atmosphere surrounding Vera’s mother, Catherine. Symbolically, Lisa Lunde could represent the emerging rational, scientifically minded, and socially aware American woman or intellectual figure in the early to mid-20th century. Lisa is a “would-be physicist,” embodying the growing presence of women entering scientific and intellectual fields in the US, especially during the early 20th century when women increasingly challenged traditional gender roles. Before 1965, women in science were rare and often marginalized, but they symbolized progress, rationality, and a break from the purely domestic roles prescribed to women in earlier eras. Lisa’s role as a breadwinner and caretaker for her mentally ill mother also reflects the increasing visibility of women as both laborers and family anchors in a changing social landscape. Lisa supports her poor and “mad” mother, who dreams of wealth despite poverty, highlighting the contradictions and struggles of many working-class American families during the early to mid-20th century. Many immigrants or second-generation Americans faced such hardships, balancing ambition and survival. Lisa’s pragmatic, no-nonsense attitude may symbolize the ethos of self-reliance and skepticism toward illusions that

characterized many striving Americans. Lisa exposes Mrs. Hogden as potentially a shoplifter and ridicules her pretensions, thus acting as a guardian of social order and truth in the face of delusion and fantasy. This can be read as a broader symbolic role of the rational, modern American citizen who resisted charlatanism and false pretenses in a rapidly modernizing society, especially during the post-Depression and post-war years when social realism and pragmatic attitudes gained prominence. Lisa's critical view of Mrs. Hogden and the fanciful world around Vera's mother points to the tension between dream and reality, illusion and fact, an important theme in American culture, especially as the country grappled with modernity, the aftermath of the Great Depression, war, and social change. Lisa embodies the scientific, empirical mindset that confronts myth and deception. Lisa's skepticism toward the older generation's illusions (including those of Vera's mother and Mrs. Hogden) may symbolize the younger generation's disillusionment with the promises of the American Dream, especially in the years before the social upheavals of the 1960s. Her practical, sometimes harsh demeanor reflects a cultural shift toward realism and away from romantic or fanciful ideals that had dominated earlier eras. Symbolically, Lisa Lunde represents the scientifically educated, pragmatic, socially aware young American woman before 1965 who challenges illusions and embodies the tensions of modernity, class struggle, and generational change in the United States. She is a figure of rationality and skepticism standing in contrast to the dreamlike, unstable figures around her, reflecting broader cultural and historical shifts in American society during the early to mid-20th century. See Lisa Lunde.

- "in a high tower at the ten cent store": A ten cent store which goes by a variety of other names in the US was first established by Frank Winfield Woolworth who had seen the success in Michigan and western New York of nickel stores, where everything cost five cents. In 1879, Woolworth opened his Great Five Cent Store in Utica, New York, and it was his later success and expansion of that format as the F. W. Woolworth Company that would create the American institution of the five and ten cent store, five and ten, five and dime, or dime store.
- "such as the old man who stole nothing but egg-beaters": Kleptomania was named in 1816, and in the nineteenth century it was diagnosed above all in middle-class women caught taking goods from the new department stores, while poor shoplifters were simply called thieves. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "The life I required was the life which required, like his, a lost companion": The line conveys a deep sense of longing for a meaningful connection beyond superficial or self-contained relationships. The passage highlights the importance of external bonds and the emotional reality of loss as shaping one's life experience. It is an expression of the human need for companionship and the pain of its absence, distinguishing authentic relational life from a merely self-referential existence.
- "Oh, she was a creature compounded of illusions": Mrs. Hogden strongly embodies Quixotic characteristics through her elaborate self-deception and unwavering optimism in the face of a stark reality. See Don Quixote.

- “Poor Lisa Lunde, the amateur physicist!”: The line serves as a wry, somewhat ironic commentary on Lisa Lunde’s position and perhaps on the nature of expertise itself. Lisa Lunde is described as a “would-be physicist” who works for her living to support her poor and mentally ill mother. Calling her an “amateur physicist” acknowledges that she is not yet fully established or recognized in her field, implying a sense of struggle or incompleteness. The narrator’s rhetorical question, “But are not all physicists amateurs?” suggests that even those who are formally experts in physics are, in a deeper sense, all amateurs because of the vast unknowns and uncertainties within the field. This comment subtly downplays the distinction between professional and amateur, hinting that no one truly masters the complexity of physics (or perhaps knowledge in general), so everyone works with partial understanding and constant questioning. Applied to Lisa Lunde, this phrase evokes sympathy (“Poor Lisa Lunde”) for her difficult situation but also gently elevates her by implying that her “amateur” status is not a mark of failure since everyone is in some way an amateur, navigating uncertainties.
    - Pioneering female physicists like Marie Curie, Lise Meitner, Irène Joliot-Curie, Maria Goeppert Mayer, and Chien-Shiung Wu made foundational discoveries in radioactivity, nuclear fission, and particle physics, often overcoming significant gender bias to contribute to breakthroughs like the first self-sustaining nuclear reaction and proving parity violation, though some, like Wu, were notably excluded from Nobel recognition for their experimental work. Marie Curie (1867-1934) was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize (Physics, 1903) and first person to win in two different sciences (Chemistry, 1911) for radioactivity research and discovering polonium and radium. Lise Meitner (1878-1968) was the co-discoverer of nuclear fission, though often overlooked, she was a central figure in understanding nuclear processes. Irène Joliot-Curie (1897-1956) was the daughter of Marie Curie, she won the Nobel Prize in Chemistry (1935) for synthesizing new radioactive elements. Maria Goeppert Mayer (1906-1972) was awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1963 for her nuclear shell model, a major achievement in nuclear physics. Chien-Shiung Wu (1912-1997) conducted the crucial “Wu Experiment” that proved parity violation in particle physics, a discovery that earned two men the Nobel Prize in 1957 while she was excluded. Leona Woods Marshall Libby (1919-1986) was the only woman on the team that achieved the first self-sustaining nuclear chain reaction (Chicago Pile-1) in 1942. Marietta Blau (1894-1970) was a pioneer in using nuclear emulsions to study particle tracks, nominated multiple times for the Nobel Prize. Katharine Burr Blodgett (1898-1979) was the first woman to earn a PhD in physics from Cambridge (1926) and a key researcher at General Electric. Many faced discrimination as women and Jews, hindering their academic and professional advancement. Women like Wu and Blau made crucial experimental contributions that challenged theoretical physics. Despite groundbreaking work, several, including Wu and Meitner, were denied Nobel recognition. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “they had both understood so well that truth is beauty and beauty is truth”: “Beauty is truth, truth beauty,—that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know” (John

Keats, “Ode on a Grecian Urn,” 1819). See Romantic Poets.

- “one of those European refugees who had come from a town filled with storks”: There are “Stork Villages” such as: Ruhstadt, Germany, Zywkowo, Poland, Pentowo, Poland, Cigoc, Croatia, Alsace France, and Trujillo, Spain. These villages may also refer to the nearly 1000 Jewish Holocaust survivors brought to Fort Ontario in Oswego, New York by President Roosevelt in 1944 as America’s only World War II refugee shelter, known as “guests” offering a temporary sanctuary from Nazi Europe before World War II ended. They lived behind barbed wire, couldn’t work, and had to promise to return to Europe after the war, though most eventually stayed in the US. See Judaism.
- “She had the almost seraphic look of an old alcoholic”: Seraphic is characteristic of a seraph, one of the seraphim, or an angelic being, regarded in traditional Christian angelology as belonging to the highest order of the ninefold celestial hierarchy, associated with light, ardor, and purity. See Angels and Archangels.
- “She had sold the Dutch windmill which was her home on upper Long Island”: The old windmills of eastern Long Island, about a dozen still standing, are the largest group in America. Hook Windmill in East Hampton, NY is a historic 1806 gristmill, one of the most complete on Long Island, that operated until 1908 and is open to visitors as the Old Hook Mill. See the windmills in the Chapter 65 resources.
- “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet”: “What’s in a name? that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet” (Romeo and Juliet 2.2). Mr. Spitzer answers the same way at the end of the chapter: “What’s in a name?” See Shakespeare.
- “an Arctic tern with a black-rimmed eye”: The Arctic tern breeds in the Arctic and winters in the Antarctic, the longest migration of any bird, so that it sees more daylight than any other creature. See Birds and Astronomy.
- “visual education being so progressive”: Visual education, teaching with pictures, lantern slides, films, and objects, was a cause of the progressive schools of the 1920s.
- “the head of Alcibiades was in the drainpipe”: See the head of Alcibiades in the Chapter 2 resources and the Chapter 40 resources.
- “droves of peaceful whales committing suicide upon a lonely beach”: Whale beachings were common natural events, often involving sick, old, or disoriented individuals, or sometimes large groups, with historical records showing strandings in places like Nantucket and New Zealand long before modern naval sonar, though documentation was less complete than today; events like a 1927 false killer whale mass stranding in Scotland demonstrate significant incidents, with causes typically attributed to disease, injury, or navigational errors, rather than solely modern human factors. See Suicide in History and Literature.
- “She was descended from three signers of the Declaration of Independence”: Lineage societies such as the Daughters of the American Revolution (1890) made descent from the founders a mark of status. In 1939 the DAR barred the Black contralto Marian Anderson from singing at its Constitution Hall, and Eleanor Roosevelt resigned from it in protest. See Society, Class, and Race and Women, Gender, and Marriage.

    - Laura Haines Belman is a descendant of three signers: Samuel Chase, William Ellery, and Oliver Wolcott.
- “She was an American citizen”: Mrs. Hogden can be symbolically interpreted as representing America itself, particularly aspects of its national character, materialism, and a certain kind of pragmatic, often self-deluding, innocence.
    - Mrs. Hogden explicitly identifies herself with the nation’s founding, stating she is “descended from three signers of the Declaration of Independence” and an “American citizen.” This directly links her to the historical origins and self-image of the United States.
    - Her physical description emphasizes her “overladen” state, wearing “at least four coats of seemingly graduated sizes,” burdened with “packages,” “cardboard boxes,” and various “diverse objects” like Javanese temple bells. This chaotic accumulation can symbolize America’s burgeoning consumer culture and materialism, as well as its “melting pot” nature, haphazardly collecting diverse cultural elements. The narrator’s observation that she is surrounded by “useless or forgotten objects” in the playroom reinforces this idea of a nation accumulating without necessarily valuing or integrating its possessions.
    - Her role as an “arithmetic teacher” who insists that “two and two always making four” and her ability to “win every argument” by not hearing it to its close can symbolize a national tendency towards simplistic solutions, a foundational but perhaps superficial understanding of truth, and a stubborn self-assurance that dismisses complexity.
    - Her “permanently adjusted to her temporary situation” mentality and her disregard for fixed schedules or routines, along with her former home being a “Dutch windmill” before her arrival, suggest a nation constantly reinventing itself or moving forward without deep ties to a consistent past, or perhaps a past that is “forgotten” or “cast-off.”
    - Despite her chaotic and often absurd behavior, she “exude[s] contentment” and is “the least critical human being,” believing herself to be the “mistress of the house” and pulling an “imaginary bellrope” to summon servants. This can symbolize a national self-perception of innocence and optimism, even in the face of underlying chaos or delusion, as well as a self-appointed authority. My mother’s perception of Mrs. Hogden as “mad as a loon” and a “parody,” yet one who embodies these American traits, further supports this.
    - Her aversion to James, the chauffeur, for shooting animals and Lisa Lunde’s retort that he went to Alaska “a quarter of a century ago,” dismissing his current reality, can be seen as a symbolic rejection of perceived “outsiders” or inconvenient truths.
    - Mrs. Hogden, with her blend of declared American heritage, material accumulation, simplistic certainty, and oblivious self-satisfaction amidst chaos, serves as a complex and often satirical symbol of the United States.
- “none of these fish-headed Phoenicians”: Fish-headed Phoenicians may refer to Dagon or Dagan who was a god worshiped in ancient Syria as the father of gods.

According to the Hebrew Bible, Dagan was also the national god of the Philistines. “And when they arose early on the morrow morning, behold, Dagon was fallen upon his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD; and the head of Dagon and both the palms of his hands were cut off” (1 Samuel 5:4, KJV). See The Bible.

- “where was Mr. Res Tacamah, the delightful gentleman”: See Mr. Res Tacamah.
- “driving a taxi cab in Nome, Alaska”: Nome, Alaska is a historic gold rush town on the Seward Peninsula, known for its Inupiat culture, gold mining history, and as the finish line for the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race. In 1925 dog-sled teams carried diphtheria antitoxin 674 miles to Nome in five and a half days, the serum run later remembered by the Iditarod (begun 1973). See James the Chauffeur.
- “the Greek javelin-thrower with the snow on his shoulders”: The statue may refer to Phayllos of Kroton, famous for his seemingly impossible 55 foot long jump. He was a respected military commander. His discus or javelin throw is supposed to have been 95 feet.
- “the shivering cherub wrapped in a bath towel”: Cherubim are in the books of Ezekiel and Revelation. They are majestic beings with four faces (man, lion, ox, eagle) representing divine power, majesty, and guardianship of God’s presence. The lion face signifies strength and kinship, the ox represents service, the man wisdom, and the eagle swiftness, with their overall form symbolizing God’s all-encompassing glory and authority. A lion’s skin evokes strength, majesty, and mythic power (recalling, for example, the Nemean lion’s skin worn by Hercules). The uncertain reference “was it a bath towel or a lion’s skin?” suggests a blurring between fragility and pretension, innocence and grandeur, reality and illusion. Applied to Mrs. Hogden, who is described as fat, oddly adorned, and carrying a confusing assortment of objects, this phrase underscores her contradictory character: she tries to present herself with an air of dignity and importance (like a lion’s skin) but is also pathetic and vulnerable (like a cherub wrapped in a bath towel). It reflects the novel’s themes of illusion, identity, and the tension between appearance and reality. The phrase metaphorically captures the complexity and ambiguity of Mrs. Hogden’s presence as part farcical, part tragic, both grand and diminished which highlights her as a figure caught between opposing qualities and uncertain roles within the household and narrative. See Angels and Archangels.
- “a graduate of the Rhode Island State Teachers’ College”: Rhode Island College was founded in 1854 as the Rhode Island State Normal School.
- “I have always wanted social security”: Social Security began with the Social Security Act of 1935, signed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, creating a federal insurance system for old-age, unemployment, and aid for dependent mothers/children, funded by payroll taxes and intended as a safety net against economic hardship, evolving to include disability, Medicare, and automatic cost-of-living adjustments over time. The first monthly benefits were paid in 1940, establishing a cornerstone of American social welfare. This statement reflects Mrs. Hogden’s desire for stability, safety, and assurance in her later years, representing a longing for a dependable and secure life.

Mrs. Hogden's character is portrayed as a disordered, eccentric woman burdened by her past and her current precarious existence. When she says she has always wanted social security, it can be understood both literally and figuratively: 1) Social security here refers to the governmental program providing financial support and benefits to the elderly or disabled. Mrs. Hogden, having sold her home (the Dutch windmill) and brought all her possessions with her, hopes that her new position in Catherine's house will provide her with a stable income and a secure livelihood for the rest of her life. 2) Beyond financial stability, the phrase encapsulates Mrs. Hogden's deeper yearning for a place where she belongs, where she is cared for, and where she can live out her days without uncertainty or fear. Her arrival at the house and her insistence on staying, despite Catherine's resistance, highlight her desperate need for security and acceptance. Mrs. Hogden's longing for social security contrasts sharply with the instability and decline experienced by Catherine and the surreal, dreamlike atmosphere surrounding the household. It also underscores Mrs. Hogden's practical, if somewhat delusional, approach to life, differing greatly from Miss MacIntosh's grounded and clear-eyed presence. Mrs. Hogden's statement can be seen as a poignant expression of her wish for material and emotional security in a world that has otherwise been unstable and unkind to her. See the Social Security Act in the Chapter 66 resources.

- "Will the Bishop of Spade be coming?": There is no such bishop; Mrs. Hogden's title blends the bishop of the chessboard with the spade of the card deck. It fits a chapter built around a chess set "from which the bishop was missing."
- "She was like a mare sticking its head in through the window": Compare Henry Fuseli's painting The Nightmare (1781), in which a wild-eyed mare thrusts its head through the curtains above a sleeping woman. The "mare" of nightmare was once a goblin that sat on the sleeper's chest, not a horse.
- "if only to ride in a swan boat": The swan boats of the Boston Public Garden, pedal boats behind great wooden swans, have carried riders since 1877.
- "going all the way from Odessa to Siberia": The phrase refers to historical movements, often forced, of people from the Black Sea port of Odessa (in modern Ukraine) to Siberia, particularly during the Russian Civil War and World War II, involving White Army remnants, ethnic Germans deported by Nazis/Soviets, or political prisoners, highlighting themes of exile, conflict, and displacement across vast distances within the Russian sphere of influence.
- "died just north of Moscow by three departments": A joke on Napoleon's Grande Armée, which reached Moscow in 1812 and perished in the retreat across the frozen waste. Mr. Hogden, the floor-walker, dies between kitchenware and bedware. See Napoleon and Wellington.
- "which she had won by solving a simple puzzle": Prize puzzles asking readers and listeners to find what was missing from a picture were a craze of the 1930s, in newspapers and on the radio.

- “It would admit both Jews and Negroes”: Catherine’s hotel “would admit both Jews and Negroes.” Jews and African Americans could not freely stay in hotels in the US until the passage of federal and state laws that banned discrimination in public accommodations, which was enforced with the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a landmark piece of legislation that explicitly prohibited racial discrimination in public places, such as hotels, and this was the first time that Jewish people were also protected from discrimination in public places. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin in public accommodations like hotels, restaurants, and theaters. In the pre-1964 era, many hotels openly discriminated against both African Americans and Jews, often barring them from the premises entirely or requiring them to stay in separate, inferior accommodations. This was particularly true in the South, where discriminatory practices were widespread, even after the Civil War. In 1877 the banker Joseph Seligman was turned away from the Grand Union Hotel at Saratoga Springs because he was a Jew, and resorts advertised themselves as “restricted.” From 1936 Black travelers carried Victor Hugo Green’s Negro Motorist Green Book to find where they could sleep. See Judaism and Society, Class, and Race.
- “this Mrs. Hogden must be my Cousin Hannah”: See Cousin Hannah, who recurs in Catherine’s dreams, in the Chapter 24 resources. See Catherine Cartwheel.
- “a descendant of Daniel Boone and William the Conquerer and Alexander Graham Bell”: Daniel Boone was an American pioneer and frontiersman whose exploits made him one of the first folk heroes of the United States. (Wikipedia)
    - William the Conqueror was the first Norman king of England. (Wikipedia)
    - Alexander Graham Bell was a Scottish-born inventor, scientist and engineer who is credited with patenting the first practical telephone. (Wikipedia)
- “the dolls exhumed from children’s graves”: The phrase refers to a macabre and symbolic assortment of objects that Vera’s father collected. These dolls, taken from children’s graves, are described as part of a collection that is both eerie and futile “useless” because they serve no practical purpose and perhaps because they embody a disturbing link to death and loss. This collection symbolizes the haunting presence of the past and the persistence of memory, even when it is unsettling or unwanted. The dolls, being exhumed from graves, evoke themes of death, childhood innocence lost, and the way memories or remnants of the past are kept alive in physical, but unsettling, objects. It reflects the novel’s broader atmosphere of decay, ghostliness, and the intertwining of life with death and dreams. The dolls are kept in the deserted playroom, which Mrs. Hogden occupies after Miss MacIntosh’s departure. This setting emphasizes the connection between the past (Vera’s childhood and family history), the present disarray, and the spectral or dreamlike quality that permeates the household. The phrase underscores the novel’s blending of reality and dream, and the weight of history and memory carried by seemingly trivial or “useless” objects. The “dolls exhumed from children’s graves” are a metaphorical and literal emblem of haunting memories and the eerie persistence of the past within the domestic space of Vera’s family. See the Chapter 31 resources.

- “The sleighs had belonged to murdered royal children”: Sleighs suggest Russia: the five children of Tsar Nicholas II were murdered with their parents at Yekaterinburg in July 1918.
    - This may refer to The Princes in the Tower refers to the mystery of the fate of the deposed King Edward V of England and his younger brother Prince Richard of Shrewsbury, Duke of York, heirs to the throne of King Edward IV of England. The brothers were the only sons of the king by his queen, Elizabeth Woodville, living at the time of their father’s death in 1483. Aged 12 and 9 years old, respectively, they were lodged in the Tower of London by their paternal uncle and England’s regent, Richard, Duke of Gloucester, in preparation for Edward V’s forthcoming coronation. Before the young king’s coronation, however, he and his brother were declared illegitimate by Parliament. Gloucester ascended the throne as Richard III. It is unclear what happened to the two princes after the last recorded sighting of them in the tower. It is generally assumed that they were murdered; a common hypothesis is that the murder was commissioned by Richard III in an attempt to secure his hold on the throne. Their deaths may have occurred sometime in 1483, but apart from their disappearance, the only evidence is circumstantial. As a result, several other theories about their fates have been proposed, including the suggestion that they were murdered by their kinsman the Duke of Buckingham, their future brother-in-law King Henry VII, or his mother Lady Margaret Beaufort, among others. It has also been suggested that one or both princes may have escaped assassination. In 1487, Lambert Simnel initially was crowned in Dublin as “King Edward,” but later claimed by others to be York’s cousin the Earl of Warwick. And again several years later, from 1491 until his capture in 1497, Perkin Warbeck claimed to be the Duke of York, having supposedly escaped to Flanders. Warbeck’s claim was supported by some contemporaries, including York’s aunt the Duchess of Burgundy. In 1674, workmen at the Tower of London excavated, from under a staircase, a wooden box containing two small human skeletons. The bones were widely accepted at the time as those of the princes, but this has not been proven and is far from certain. King Charles II had the bones buried in Westminster Abbey, where they remain. These figures symbolize innocence lost amidst political intrigue and violence, fitting the novel’s motif of intertwined histories and personal tragedies.
- “Louis Quatorze or Louise Quinze”: Louis Quatorze (Louis XIV, the “Sun King”) was France’s longest-reigning monarch (1643-1715) and an icon of absolute monarchy, known for centralizing power, glorifying France through arts and architecture (like Versailles), and establishing French cultural dominance; the term also refers to the ornate, Baroque style of his era.
    - Louis Quinze (Louis XV) refers to both the King of France (reigned 1715-1774) and the opulent French Rococo design style (Louis XV style) that flourished during his long reign, known for its curved lines, asymmetry, shell motifs, and luxurious comfort, marking a shift from the formal grandeur of Louis XIV. The style emphasized nature, intimacy, and craftsmanship, seen in intricate furniture with

cabriole legs and elaborate decor, contrasting with the heavy formality of the previous era.

- “She would squirt an atomizer into her mouth”: The atomizer later stands in for the missing bishop on the chessboard.
- “like Mr. Spitzer, who could not tell the difference between himself and his dead identical twin”: See Peron Spitzer and Joachim Spitzer.
- “a most outrageous déshabillé”: Déshabillé means the state of being only partly or scantily clothed.
- “she would sit looking through a kaleidoscope”: David Brewster invented and named the kaleidoscope in 1816.
- “famed set of chessmen which had belonged to my father”: The chess set is a symbolic detail connected to Mrs. Hogden’s character and the overall atmosphere of the novel. This chess set, once belonging to Vera’s father, is described specifically as missing the bishop piece. The missing bishop symbolizes an incomplete or disrupted order in the household and in the lives of the characters. Chess, a game of strategy and control, is here rendered imperfect, reflecting the disorder and the fractured reality that permeates Vera’s family and environment. Mrs. Hogden, who occupies the deserted playroom after Miss MacIntosh’s departure, uses this chess set in her solitary activities. She substitutes her atomizer for the missing bishop and continues to play, treating the atomizer as if it were the actual piece. This act highlights Mrs. Hogden’s ability to adapt to disorder and to impose her own illusory order on a fragmented world. It also implies her detachment from reality and her tendency to create her own meaning amid confusion. Mrs. Hogden’s playing chess alone with imaginary partners and her emotional responses to the game, crying when the Black King is checkmated, reflect her inner life and perhaps her longing for control and understanding in a chaotic existence. The missing bishop thus becomes a metaphor for absence, loss, and the incomplete nature of the house’s history and the characters’ lives. The missing bishop is not just a lost piece; it carries a sense of mystery and longing, reflecting perhaps a deeper theme of incompleteness or the search for something lost. Mrs. Hogden, who later occupies the household, even uses an atomizer as a substitute for the missing bishop when she plays chess alone, treating it as if it were the real piece and unable to distinguish between the two. This substitution emphasizes the symbolic nature of the missing bishop and the blending of reality and illusion present in the story.
- “the Black King can never move from his position”: In chess the Black King is simply the king of the black pieces; Mrs. Hogden sets up problems in which it is checkmated without being able to move.
    - The most famous historical figure called the “Black King” (or Prince) is Edward of Woodstock, the eldest son of King Edward III of England, known as the Black Prince, though the exact reason for the nickname remains debated. An English prince, famous for his military prowess during the Hundred Years’ War, who never became king himself but was heir apparent. His black armor or black shield are potential origins for the name. The chess scenario symbolizes a situation of

inevitable defeat or entrapment, reflecting Mrs. Hogden's own existential and mental state as she navigates her disordered life and surroundings. Mrs. Hogden's emotional response to this chess game (she sits and cries when the Black King is inextricably checkmated) suggests a deep identification with the helplessness and inevitability embodied by the Black King's plight. She imagines her chessmen as planets moving under her control, which contrasts with her admission that the universe itself has no intelligence; this intelligence is hers alone.

- "There is no return but the return of what is different": Compare Heraclitus: no one steps into the same river twice, for other waters are ever flowing on.
- "the unheard music of the spheres": The passage reflects a philosophical meditation on the unavoidability of change, the human compulsion to find or impose meaning, and the possibility that such meaning is not inherent but constructed. It challenges the belief in a fixed cosmic order and suggests that what we perceive as meaningful patterns may be self-deceptions, resonating with existentialist skepticism and the impermanence stressed in ancient and modern philosophies. Pythagoras taught that the planets sound a harmony too perfect for human ears. Compare Keats, in the ode Vera has already echoed: "Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard / Are sweeter." See Pythagoras and the Music of the Spheres, Romantic Poets, and Existentialism.
- "the crowds screaming on the Wilhelmstrasse when Hitler appeared": Wilhelmstrasse is a major thoroughfare in the central Mitte and Kreuzberg districts of Berlin, Germany. Until 1945, it was recognised as the center of the government. Hitler addressed the cheering crowds on Wilhelmstrasse from a window of a modern chancellery annex building erected in 1930. (Wikipedia)
- "Information, Please": Information, Please, the NBC radio quiz (1938-1951), invited listeners to send in questions to stump its panel of experts.
- "the Irish Catholic maid": These young women (ages 15 to 24) were a cornerstone of U.S. domestic service from the mid-19th to early 20th centuries, arriving as young, single immigrants seeking economic opportunity after the Irish Famine, providing vital labor in cities, and using their wages to support families back home while facing discrimination but gaining a foothold in American society, often serving as a pathway to education and other professions for their children. In 1871 Harper's Bazaar published an article named "Bridget" or "Biddy." Biddy's refusal to follow orders and her frequent bouts of insubordination compromised the tranquillity and moral calm that the nineteenth-century home and the creation of a domestic space were supposed to promise. An article in Harper's Monthly noted to its mainly male audience that the result of Biddy's presence was that 'the master of the house returns from the cares and vexations of his day's business, seeking repose in his home, but finds only disquiet'.13 It was the responsibility of Anglo-American women to devise solutions on how to put Biddy in her place, in order to preserve the sanctity of the home. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- “cut on the bias”: The phrase means to cut fabric or food at a 45-degree angle to its grain or edges, not straight across, giving it more stretch, fluidity, and a softer drape. In sewing, it uses the fabric’s diagonal “true bias” for a slinky, body-hugging fit in dresses or skirts, popularized by couturier Madeleine Vionnet.
- “Home, James, my good man”: “Home, James,” the order of the rich to the chauffeur, became a joke and a song title, “Home, James, and Don’t Spare the Horses” (1934). See James the Chauffeur.
- “She had left it on the back of a crab at the surf’s edge”: Miss MacIntosh’s wig, not Mrs. Hogden’s. See her walk into the sea in the Chapter 65 resources.
- “All a’s are b’s, it read”: The message is a syllogism, the first of Aristotle’s forms of valid reasoning (Prior Analytics), which medieval logicians named Barbara: all A is B; all B is C; therefore all A is C. Lewis Carroll filled his Symbolic Logic (1896) with such puzzles. Mrs. Hogden, who said that “Things that confused other people never confused her,” leaves Vera a proof and a riddle.

Vocabulary

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Anarchic

Without order or control; lawless.

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Apprised

Informed.

Artifice

Clever trickery, or the art of making things seem other than they are.

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Atomizer

A device that sprays liquid as a fine mist.

Balloon fish

A pufferfish, which swallows water to swell its body into a spiny ball when threatened.

Basting

Long, loose temporary stitches.

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Bemused

Puzzled and lost in thought.

Capacious

Roomy; able to hold much.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Chiffon

A sheer, lightweight fabric of silk or nylon.

Corporeal

Having a body; physical.

Cortege

A funeral procession.

Deprivation

The lack or loss of something needed.

Derangement

Disorder, especially of the mind.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Déshabillé

The state of being partly dressed.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Dubious

Doubtful.

Effigy

A sculpture or model of a person, especially one lying on a tomb.

Errant

Wandering; straying from the proper course.

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Extrovert

An outgoing person who draws energy from others.

Fallacy

A mistaken belief, or a flaw in reasoning that makes an argument unsound.

Falsetto

An artificially high voice.

Feigned

Pretended.

Fitful

Starting and stopping; irregular.

Fluted

Marked with long rounded grooves, like a column.

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Grudgingly

Unwillingly.

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Igloo

An Inuit house built of snow blocks.

Immoderate

Excessive; beyond reasonable limits.

Imploring

Begging earnestly.

Impostor

One who pretends to be someone else.

Incorrigible

Beyond correction.

Indisposed

Slightly ill; unwell.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Interloper

An intruder.

Introversion

A turning inward of the mind.

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Jab

A quick, short punch.

Kaleidoscope

A tube of mirrors and colored glass making changing patterns.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Maharajah

A great king or prince in India. From the Sanskrit for “great king.”

Maudlin

Tearfully sentimental, as a drunk can be.

Melodiously

Tunefully.

Minuet

A slow, stately dance in triple time for couples, and the music written for it.

Officious

Pushy in offering help or giving orders.

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Parasitically

Like a parasite, living off another.

Pendulous

Hanging loosely.

Petrified

Turned to stone; also, paralyzed with fear.

Podiatrist

A foot doctor.

Porte-cochere

A covered entrance where a carriage stops to let passengers out.

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Protracted

Drawn out.

Rhapsodic

Full of rapturous feeling.

Rosette

A rose-shaped decoration of ribbon or lace.

Rotund

Round and plump.

Seraphic

Angelic.

Slumberous

Sleepy; inducing sleep.

Speculative

Thoughtful and wondering; based on guesswork.

Taciturn

Habitually silent; saying little.

Ten cent store

A five-and-ten, a store selling cheap goods, such as Woolworth’s.

Tenement

A crowded, run-down apartment building.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Vapid

Dull and empty of life or interest.

Waterproof

An old word for a raincoat, as in Miss MacIntosh’s “plaid, faded waterproof.”

Chapter 71

Content note: *This chapter contains racist and antisemitic speech, including a racial slur, “the dirty Jew,” and praise of Hitler, and tells of a pregnant woman who hanged herself.*

Summary

Morning comes cold and silent after the night of voices. Vera, awake on her papery bed, wonders whether the Christian hangman has hanged himself at last and remembers Marie, cut down in the orchard with her unborn child. She dresses in her mother’s black velvet, the shroud Catherine meant to abandon, with her lace and the real pearls that, Catherine said, multiplied each time they were lost. She recalls the Italian thief her mother once entertained, sent off in a dead man’s white clothes with a promise to finance a Revolution. In Dr. O’Leary’s empty office she finds mateless women’s shoes, birth instruments, a Yale diploma, a calendar twenty years old with Mary Pickford on it, and a library of strange books. On the stairs a widow in curlers accuses her of keeping her awake, then rages against Jews, Catholics, and Black people and praises Hitler. Downstairs the landlady, a vast woman with a goiter, tells Vera in broken, wandering speech of the hotel, its dead watchdog, and Tabitha, the mute chambermaid, who looks up from washing the stones and whispers, “Good-morning.”

Characters present

Mr. Weed · Justice O’Leary · Tabitha · The Tavern Landlady · Vera Cartwheel · Catherine Cartwheel · Simeon the Doctor · The Tavern Landlord · Esther Longtree · Jacqueline White

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Decay and Ruin · Illusion and Reality · Isolation and Connection · Madness and Sanity · Memory and the Past · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Clocks and Watches · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Dogs · Pearls and Jewels · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Plato and Platonism

Allusions: American Religious Movements · Ancient Egypt · Astronomy · Dante · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Judaism · Lynching and Racial Violence · Music and Composers · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · Romantic Poets · The Bible · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with reflections on the “Christian hangman,” his routine duties, and the haunting memory of his wife Marie who hanged herself while pregnant. Mr. Weed fears what he might find in the orchard, and Marie’s children play at hanging themselves, though Mr. Weed himself does not hang himself.
- Vera reflects on wearing her mother’s necklace of real pearls, an inheritance described as indestructible and eternal, her “lost estate.” The story of the chauffeur, James, who returns thirteen pearls when twelve are lost, introduces the concept of infinity and the shadow of the past (Joachim as the “quiet, yawning twin”).
- Vera enters the doctor’s bedroom/office, described as chaotic, filled with scattered, unmatched women’s shoes, medical instruments, and broken objects. The doctor delivers imaginary babies in a barren countryside, and there is mention of a “pregnant man.”
- The interaction between the doctor and a silent crawling woman, Sarah, his “little sister,” is significant. Sarah is both tormentor and companion to the doctor, who screams at her and makes her promises.
- Vera studies the doctor’s extensive but disordered medical library, filled with eclectic and outdated books ranging from medical texts to children’s primers and political pamphlets. The doctor’s diploma from Yale hangs above the bed.
- A confrontation with a half-dressed woman in metallic curlers introduces a sharp critique of social tensions: racism, anti-Semitism, political distrust, and the breakdown of community respect. Her tirade includes references to Hitler, Roosevelt, and racial purity, reflecting the deep social divisions and anxieties of the time and place. This passage grounds the surreal elements in harsh social realities.
- The chapter ends with a description of the hotel lobby and the landlady, a large woman with a goiter, who speaks in a dialect mixing resignation and fatalism. She describes the household’s routines, the landlord, Tabitha the muted chambermaid, and the decay of the place, including the absence of the priest and the death of the old watchdog.
- The chapter ends with Tabitha kneeling to wash stones on the porch in the “pale spring air,” with her humble greeting, “Good-morning.”

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “What thief I might have been of poverty, of beautiful poverty, of deprivation, of nothing.” What does Vera want to steal?
- “Few fantasies are so externalized, I supposed, as the doctor’s mind.” What does his room show of him?

- “Yet how many of us, if we expressed our inner lives, would not express disorder?” Would yours?

Characters

- Catherine believed that the more often she lost her pearls, “the more pearls there were.” What does this tell us about her?
- The widow says, “Hitler is right, I tell you.” Why does Young give this hatred to a grieving widow who cannot sleep?
- Tabitha, “muted as a stone in the stream,” speaks at last: “Good-morning.” What does her greeting mean after this night?

Connections

- Vera wears “the black velvet which had been her abandoned shroud.” Why does she travel in her mother’s clothes?
- “There are no Negroes in this county, for the sun will not set on a Negro’s head here.” How does this answer the hangman’s Kentucky story in Chapter 68?
- “Why was Sarah laughing?” Compare Sarah in Genesis, who laughed at the promise of a child. What do the two laughs share?

Reflection

- “That which I required for my happiness would not be wealth but would be something quite plain and poor and bare.” Has Vera found it?
- “But oh, I had wished to discover order, as if it were a beautiful island in the midst of life, island I might never reach.” Is order an island?
- Vera hopes for “people who went about their accustomed business, people who did not think too much.” Does she meet them?

Research: Characters

Mr. Weed (The Christian Hangman)

- A man who has hanged many murderers, but “men only.” He “had never hanged a woman, he thanked God, in all his life.”
- His wife, Marie, hanged herself during pregnancy, which haunts him deeply.
- Mr. Weed is portrayed as a tragic figure, burdened by his past and haunted by ghostly children of the hanged.
- Vera contemplates whether Mr. Weed might hang himself but concludes he waits for dawn to protect his children from danger.

Dr. Justice O’Leary

- A once-respected doctor, now mad and living in a chaotic state.
- His office/bedroom is cluttered with mismatched women’s shoes, birth instruments, and medical books, reflecting his mental disarray.
- He delivers “imaginary babies” in a barren countryside, symbolizing futile or delusional efforts to bring life or hope.
- He suffers from senility and hallucinations, including the presence of his dead sister Sarah and the chambermaid Tabitha.
- Despite madness, he retains some medical knowledge and authority.
- There are rumors of a “pregnant man” patient, blending reality and fantasy.

Tabitha

- The chambermaid, also mentally unstable (“too crazy to be on relief”).
- She cares for the doctor at night, hoping to get a baby by him.
- She represents the marginalized and the caretakers in the chaotic environment.

Tavern Landlady

- A large, fat woman with a goiter, representing a figure rooted in reality amidst chaos.
- She speaks of the hotel’s management, the old watch dogs, the landlord, and the lack of interference in the hotel’s strange happenings.
- Her speech is laced with local dialect and vivid imagery, adding texture to the scene.
- Symbolically, the Tavern Landlady can be interpreted as representing the fading old America or traditional American society.
- As a former circus fat lady, she recalls a form of popular entertainment and spectacle that had its heyday in the earlier part of the 20th century and before.
- The Landlady’s association with the old watch dog, who was a devout Catholic attending church even during harsh weather, who received the Eucharist from the priest and died in the landlord’s arms, indicates a decline of traditional religious and communal values. This suggests a metaphor for the waning influence of organized religion and community cohesion in mid-20th century America.
- The landlady is resigned to the decay of the hotel and its inhabitants, but she has a quiet intelligence.

Vera Cartwheel

- An observer and participant, reflecting on the surreal and tragic elements of the setting.

- Vera, the narrator, emerges as a deeply contemplative and psychologically complex figure, marked by a blend of wakefulness, memory, and a searching, somewhat haunted awareness.
- Vera is awake in the cold, grey morning, unable or unwilling to sleep despite the silence and stillness around her. Her state is described as “stiff with wakefulness, with ceaseless memory” and “wide awake, alert, watchful,” showing a restless mind that is both physically and mentally active rather than at rest. This wakefulness seems not merely physical but also symbolic, representing a state of consciousness probing the mysteries and uncertainties of her surroundings and her own psyche.
- Throughout the chapter, Vera’s thoughts drift into rich, imaginative flights and reflections. She muses on the Christian hangman and his tragic personal history, pondering whether he might hang himself or wait for dawn because of his children playing at hanging themselves. Vera also reflects on her mother’s pearls.
- Vera is portrayed as a traveler or outsider in this strange, desolate Indiana hotel and its surroundings. She is “some time past the ambiguity of dawn,” wearing travel-stained clothes and carrying her mother’s lace and pearls, symbols of a “lost estate” and an unrealized past. Her presence in the hotel is that of someone searching for something: wild flowers of spring, beauty, or perhaps a deeper meaning amid the decay and disorder around her. This sense of quest is tinged with uncertainty and disillusionment, as the landscape and people she encounters are far removed from her expectations or hopes.
- Vera is a keen observer of the strange and unsettling characters she encounters, especially the doctor, Dr. O’Leary, and the hangman. She notes the doctor’s madness and the surreal disorder of his office and life, filled with instruments, scattered shoes of various types and eras, and imaginary patients. Vera reflects on the blending of reality and fantasy, the doctor’s second childhood, and the presence of “imaginary babies” and a “pregnant man.”
- Vera listens to the angry widow who confronts her, accusing her of being a “tramp girl” who kept her awake all night, and to Tabitha, the muted chambermaid who quietly carries out her duties. Despite these confrontations and the vivid descriptions of the inhabitants’ misery and anger, Vera seems somewhat detached as an intruder or observer rather than a participant. She tries to explain herself logically but acknowledges the complexity and strangeness of the place and its people.
- Vera’s narrative voice often becomes poetic and philosophical. She notes how the hotel room expands during sleeplessness into a vast landscape of memory and future, blending space and time.

Catherine Cartwheel

- Catherine is a figure deeply immersed in a subjective, dream-like reality, detached from the conventional world. Her character is defined by her peculiar philosophies, eccentric habits, and a luxurious but illusory existence that profoundly shapes Vera’s own journey and desires.

- Catherine is often referred to by Vera as “my sleeping mother,” suggesting a state of perpetual dreaming or detachment from waking life. Her physical presence is limited; she “had not walked for many years because of the birthmark staining her cheek and because of her fear of the wavering floor, the sea sweeping in, and her dead past.” This immobility further anchors her to her internal world, within her great, “sea-blackened house with gold towers and cornices,” which, despite its grandeur, is described as being “gone,” implying its existence is more in memory or illusion than current reality.
- Her unique philosophical outlook is evident in her beliefs about her “real pearls,” which, she claimed, “could not be lost or stolen or sold. Whatever the human, unhuman situation might be, those real pearls could not really be lost, and I should wear them, for they were her lost estate.” She believed that losing pearls paradoxically led to their multiplication, creating “infinities of pearls,” a concept she explained as “just simple arithmetic, simple addition.” She also held a profound view of existence, stating that it was “probably not... eternity, something everlasting, this being so temporary a world, the world already gone. Only the shadow... ever does come here.”
- Catherine’s eccentricity is vividly illustrated through her interaction with a thief who broke into her house one winter night. Far from being alarmed, she “smilingly greeted him, extending her ivory-colored hand, asking him how far he had come, and was the world truly dead, and had offered him drugged sherry.” She engaged him in a languorous conversation, “sympathizing with her that she was rich, just as she had sympathized with him that he was poor.” In a grand, yet impractical, gesture, she offered to “finance a Revolution” with a blank check, contingent on the thief naming “an exact sum needed and an exact date,” which, caught in her “shimmering enchantment,” he could not do. Her generosity extended to outfitting the thief in an aristocratic gentleman’s costume, including a “high silk opera hat,” “long white motor coat,” and “white flowers behind his ears,” symbolizing the “coming Revolution” and making him “the melting snowman upon the first day of spring.”
- Vera carries the tangible and intangible legacy of her mother. She wears Catherine’s “black velvet which had been her abandoned shroud,” her “lace collar and the lace cuffs,” and the “necklace of pearls.” However, Vera’s own desire for “something quite plain and poor and bare” and her search for “order, as if it were a beautiful island in the midst of life” suggest a yearning for a reality distinct from her mother’s opulent, yet ultimately vanished, dream-world.

The Italian Thief

- The Italian thief appears in Vera’s memories of her mother Catherine’s stories. He breaks into her mother’s sea-blackened house one winter night, expecting it to be empty, but is surprised to find her there. Instead of robbing her, he is charmed by her and ends up talking with her until morning.
- The thief is easily taken aback by Catherine’s presence and charm. Instead of sticking to his original plan, he is willing to engage in conversation and accept her hospitality.

- He sympathizes with Vera’s mother being rich, just as she sympathizes with him being poor.
- He does not name an exact sum or date for the Revolution, and he allows Catherine to outfit him in ridiculous clothes.
- The thief is ultimately unsuccessful in his original goal of robbing Catherine, and he leaves with nothing of value, only a bizarre costume.
- He is a figure in Catherine’s dreamlike world, who is transformed from a thief into a “pale, aristocratic gentleman” destined to be “the melting snowman upon the first day of spring.” This suggests that he represents the potential for transformation and the blurring of reality and illusion.
- The thief, described as wearing an extravagant costume, “a high silk opera hat with a furry rim, a long white motor coat, glass medallions, ribbons, white trousers, white shoes, white flowers behind his ears” is outfitted by Catherine as a “pale, aristocratic gentleman” and is connected symbolically with the coming Revolution and the melting snowman of spring, implying a transition or transformation fraught with sorrow.
- Catherine’s “Italian thief” is served with luxury and kindness, almost unreal in the snowy, desolate setting, and she offers to finance his Revolution if he can name an exact sum and date, which he cannot.
- While the text does not explicitly state that the Italian thief represents Italy in World War II, the symbolic elements strongly suggest an allegorical reading. Italy, during and after World War II, was a nation undergoing profound social and political turmoil and revolution, transitioning from fascism toward a new order. The thief’s aristocratic garb and his association with both crime and revolution could metaphorically reflect Italy’s complex role both as a participant in conflict and as a nation facing internal upheaval and rebirth.

The Woman in Curlers

- The woman in metallic curlers emerges as a striking, intense figure who confronts Vera with anger and a sense of moral indignation. Her appearance and demeanor are vividly described: she is “half dressed,” with her face marked by a contrasting complexion, one cheek lit by a “high red light,” the other ashen which emphasizes her disturbed, volatile state. She approaches Vera blocking her path, “her mouth opening, closing,” and her face “contorted with a cold rage.”
- This woman accuses Vera of being one of “those tramp girls,” implicating her in keeping a “decent woman awake all night.” Her repeated insistence on Vera’s shamefulness reveals her rigid moral stance and perhaps a fear or resentment of those she perceives as disrupting social order or propriety within the hotel. Her anger is not merely personal but tied to a broader anxiety about the chaos and unrest around her, symbolized by “couples screaming,” “hitch-hikers,” “ice-skaters,” and “marathon dancers” who disturb her peace and the sanctity of “marriage bonds.”

- The woman reveals her own vulnerable position: she is a widow, isolated and grieving, with a husband who “died before he ever came to bed,” heightening her sense of loneliness and despair. Her bitter outburst against “the other doctor, Simeon...the dirty Jew,” and her invocation of Hitler and racial and religious prejudices reveal her bigoted attitudes and the pervasive social tensions in the community. This further complicates her character, showing how her personal suffering is entangled with broader social fears, xenophobia, and political resentments that color her worldview.
- Despite her harshness toward Vera and others, the woman’s fury and bitterness also suggest a deep-seated fear of abandonment and loss of control. Her rage can be seen as defensive, a way to assert agency in a situation where she feels powerless. The fact that she knows Vera and quickly labels her indicates a community that is closely knit but fraught with judgment and suspicion.
- The woman in curlers is portrayed as a complex character embodying anger, fear, loneliness, and prejudice.
- The woman in metallic curlers who confronts Vera on the stairs of the hotel is depicted with a face “contorted with a cold rage,” half-dressed and aggressively barring Vera’s path. She accuses Vera of being one of the “tramp girls” who keep a decent woman awake all night, and she voices vehemently racist and anti-Semitic views, blaming Jews, communists, and Roosevelt for various social ills, and asserting white supremacist beliefs, including a denial of African Americans (“There are no Negroes in this county... We don’t want mulattoes”). She even endorses Hitler’s ideology, saying “Hitler is right,” and rants about conspiracies involving Jews and communism.
- Symbolically, this woman can be interpreted as representing a segment of mid-20th century American society characterized by reactionary, xenophobic, and racist attitudes that were prevalent especially in certain rural or less urbanized areas before the Civil Rights Movement culminated in legislative changes by 1964. Her vehement defense of “traditional” social orders, expressed through racial purity, anti-communism, and religious intolerance, echoes the nativist, segregationist, and anti-Semitic sentiments that persisted in parts of the United States, particularly in the South and Midwest, during the early-to-mid 1900s. This character embodies the cultural anxieties and social resistance to change that would be challenged by the movements for civil rights, integration, and social reform leading up to and following 1964.
- Her role as a gatekeeper figure barring Vera who might symbolize change, outsider perspectives, or marginalized identities underscores the entrenched social barriers and hostility faced by those who threatened the status quo. The woman’s aggressive posture and speech serve as a stark personification of intolerance and oppression in the historical context before the transformative legislation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- The woman in curlers symbolically represents the reactionary, racist, and xenophobic elements in American society prior to 1964, embodying the cultural resistance to social progress and equality that defined much of U.S. social history before the Civil Rights era reforms.

Simeon the Doctor

- He is described through the lens of local prejudice and suspicion, particularly voiced by a woman in the hotel who vehemently refuses to go to him for medical care. This woman expresses strong antisemitic views, calling Simeon “the dirty Jew” and accusing Jews of taking everything and running the world. She recounts that “Hitler ran him out of Germany” and refuses to let Simeon “paw all over her.”

Tavern Landlord

- A figure of quiet authority but also resigned to the hotel’s state.

Esther Longtree and Jacqueline White · Jacqueline White

- The landlady says the last waitress at the restaurant was “taken of the tuberculosis with her baby in her arms”; this seems to be Jacqueline. Esther Longtree took her place.

Research: Themes

Death and Hanging

See: Death and Mortality

- Mr. Weed’s profession, the death of his wife, and the children of the hanged symbolize the inescapability of death and guilt.
- The motif of hanging recurs with symbolic weight: both execution and suicide.

Madness and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality · Madness and Sanity

- Dr. O’Leary’s madness blurs the lines between reality and hallucination.
- The presence of imaginary babies and patients reflects the struggle to grasp meaning in a chaotic world.
- Vera questions her own perception, wondering if she too is dreaming.

Birth, Creation, and Decay

See: Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth · Decay and Ruin

- The doctor’s instruments and imagery of birth contrast with the barrenness of the landscape and the decay in the hotel.
- The pregnant man rumor symbolizes disruption of natural order, reflecting anxieties about identity and transformation.

Memory and the Past

See: Memory and the Past

- Vera is haunted by memories, family heirlooms (mother’s pearls), and dreams.
- The hotel and doctor’s office contain relics of the past (books, calendars, diplomas) that evoke lost order and fading time.

Social and Cultural Tensions

See: Society, Class, and Race

- The hotel reflects a microcosm of social prejudice and conflict.
- The widow’s rant reveals anti-Semitism, racism, and political resentment, referencing Hitler, Roosevelt, and local attitudes.

Isolation and Community

See: Isolation and Connection

- Characters are isolated (mad doctor, hangman, Tabitha) yet bound within the hotel’s strange community.
- Vera is an outsider trying to understand but remains detached.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Shoes

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- The doctor’s office is littered with mateless women’s shoes from all eras, symbolizing lost or fragmented lives, unfulfilled journeys, and the absence of order.

Pearls

See: Pearls and Jewels

- Vera’s mother’s real pearls symbolize inheritance, lost estate, and the eternal amidst transience.

The Dogs’ Graveyard

See: Weddings and Funerals · Dogs

- Represents death, loyalty, and the neglect of forgotten beings, mirroring the hotel’s decay.

The Calendar and Books

See: Clocks and Watches

- Symbols of time, knowledge, and the passage from order to chaos.
- The calendar stuck 20 years ago symbolizes frozen time and lost opportunity.

The Green Baize Curtain

- Separates reality (hotel lobby) from hidden truths (bedroom behind).
- Symbolizes the thin veil between public and private, seen and hidden.

Research: Resources

- “had it been the Christian hangman’s fault or fancy that his wife had stolen out of the house”: See Mr. Weed and Marie Weed.
- “in no state of the union was it legal to hang a woman far gone in pregnancy”: The old common law, from England, forbade executing a pregnant woman until after the birth; a condemned woman could “plead the belly.” See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “the child strangled by the umbilical cord”: Vera pictured Marie hanging and her unborn baby hanging by its umbilical cord. Pregnant Black women were among the many victims of lynching during the era of racial terror in the United States. While the exact number is not known, the case of Mary Turner is one of the most widely documented instances of this particularly brutal violence. In May 1918, a white farmer named Hampton Smith was killed by one of his Black employees, Sidney Johnson, in Brooks County, Georgia. An enraged white mob began a week-long rampage, killing several Black people, including Mary Turner’s husband, Hayes Turner. After her husband was lynched, a grieving Mary Turner, who was eight months pregnant, publicly denounced the murder and threatened to have the mob members arrested. Her statement enraged the mob, which turned its fury on her. On May 19, 1918, a mob of hundreds of people captured Turner and dragged her to Folsom Bridge over the Little River. There, they tied her ankles, hung her upside down from a tree, and set her on fire. While she was still alive, a man cut open her abdomen with a knife, causing her unborn baby to fall to the ground. A mob member then stomped the baby to death. Turner’s body was then riddled with hundreds of bullets. No one was ever held accountable for the murders of Mary Turner and her unborn child. The grotesque nature of her lynching revealed the level of dehumanization and impunity with which Black women were treated during this period. Her case was widely publicized by the NAACP and became a symbol in the anti-lynching movement. The lynching of Black women is a less-documented aspect of racial terror, but historians have uncovered evidence that it was not uncommon. The violence against Black women, especially pregnant women like Mary Turner, served as a tool of white supremacy to terrorize the Black community and suppress any form of dissent. The sexualized and gendered violence inflicted upon women’s bodies was also used to communicate power and control. Many instances of women being lynched

were underreported or not documented at all. The details of Mary Turner's lynching only became widely known because of the investigation by Walter F. White of the NAACP and the subsequent national anti-lynching campaign. The murder of Mary Turner remains a potent and horrific symbol of the racial and gender-based violence that was inflicted upon Black women during the era of racial terror. See Lynching and Racial Violence and Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- "the necklace of pearls that had been my mother's": The pearls are repeatedly connected to Vera's mother and her legacy. They represent the "lost estate" of her mother, something precious yet intangible that Vera inherits and wears, symbolizing the remnants of the past and the enduring connection to her mother's life and identity. The pearls are described as "real pearls which... would bring no more than cultivated pearls" in the market, suggesting a contrast between their material and symbolic value. The pearls also symbolize continuity amid loss and the passing of time. Vera's mother believed that the pearls could not be lost or stolen, and that their number paradoxically increased with loss, implying an infinite or eternal quality beyond physical reality. This suggests a theme of immortality or persistence beyond death, where loss in one sense begets gain in another "the more pearls there were" despite losses in life. The novel often blurs the line between dream and reality, and pearls, like many other images, are part of this interplay. Pearls are associated with the ephemeral and the eternal, with illusions and truths mingling. They appear alongside motifs of opium dreams, ghosts, and phantoms, symbolizing the fragile and shifting nature of existence and memory. The pearls are linked to the theme of identity, as something that persists yet changes, much like Vera's mother herself, who is simultaneously present and absent, real and dreamlike. The pearls become a metaphor for what remains of a person's essence when all else has faded or been lost. The imagery of pearls dripping or cascading like tears, linked to the mother's lifeless but radiant hands, suggests mourning and the cycle of life and death. Pearls are connected to sorrow ("the pity, pity, pity of nothing, of something"), highlighting their role as symbols of grief and the preciousness of what is gone. See Pearls and Jewels and Catherine Cartwheel.
- "her chauffeur, James, the ideal, the faithful": See James the Chauffeur.
- "It was Joachim": See Joachim Spitzer.
- "All the clocks in the house having been stopped at a different time": Compare Miss Havisham in Dickens's Great Expectations (1861), who stopped every clock in her house at the minute she was jilted. See Clocks and Watches.
- "she had promised to finance a Revolution": "Revolution" serves as a metaphor for a transformative change or upheaval Catherine imagines or aspires to finance. It aligns with the novel's broader themes of disillusionment, social change, and the tension between dreams and reality. The Revolution here can be interpreted as a symbol of radical change (personal, social, or political) that Catherine contemplates amidst her dreamlike, drug-induced state and the decaying world around her. The promise to finance a Revolution is less about a concrete political movement and more about Catherine's fantasy or symbolic gesture of power, influence, and change in a world she perceives as lost or slipping away. See The History of Opium.

- “After all, he was an Italian thief”: By specifying that the thief was Italian, Catherine invokes a common ethnic stereotype: at that time and in many literary works, Italians were often portrayed as charming, passionate, and sometimes criminal or roguish figures. The label “Italian thief” carries connotations of romanticism, cunning, and a certain exotic, theatrical flair. In the story, this adds a layer of color and character to the thief, distinguishing him from a generic burglar and situating the encounter within a broader cultural imagination. Catherine’s world is heavily dreamlike and infused with fantasy, illusions, and theatricality. The thief’s Italian identity fits this atmosphere, lending a sense of drama and exoticism to the otherwise quiet, snow-blanketed house. It underscores the surreal quality of the encounter: where a criminal becomes a guest, sipping sherry and talking about revolutions, dressed in the finery Catherine provided. By choosing to highlight the thief’s nationality and by outfitting him as a “pale, aristocratic gentleman” with a silk opera hat, white motor coat, and white flowers behind his ears, Catherine asserts a kind of control and agency over the narrative. She transforms the thief from a mere criminal into a figure of aristocratic elegance and revolutionary potential, playing with identities and expectations. The Italian thief is not just a criminal but a symbol of possibility, subversion, and transformation. Catherine is herself a figure caught between reality and dream, between past grandeur and present decay. The Italian thief episode reflects her tendency to blur lines between fact and fantasy, to rewrite narratives with theatrical embellishments. By stressing “Italian,” she situates the episode in a world of cultural richness and romantic possibility, contrasting with the harsh realities outside her doors. Catherine’s emphasis on “he was an Italian thief” is a deliberate narrative choice to evoke a particular image and mood: that of a charming, exotic, somewhat romanticized figure who becomes part of her dreamlike, theatrical domain. It reflects her complex psychological state and her inclination to infuse her recollections with drama, fantasy, and symbolic meaning, transforming a criminal intrusion into an almost magical encounter.
    - Prejudice against Italian immigrants ran deep: in 1891 a New Orleans mob lynched eleven Italian Americans, the largest mass lynching in American history, and in 1927 Massachusetts executed the anarchists Sacco and Vanzetti after a trial many believed unjust. See Lynching and Racial Violence and Society, Class, and Race.
- “he should be the melting snowman upon the first day of spring”: The thief’s being dressed up and changed but melting with the spring sounds familiar to the Frosty the Snowman song written by Walter “Jack” Rollins and Steve Nelson, and first recorded by Gene Autry and the Cass County Boys in 1950 and later recorded by Jimmy Durante. A book and short film were also released that year based on the song. A group of children find a hat and place it on Frosty’s head. Frosty laughs and plays with the children until the hot sun threatens to melt him. Frosty says goodbye to the children, reassuring them he’ll be back someday. Although it is generally regarded as a Christmas song, the original lyrics make no mention of the holiday. The song supposedly takes place in White Plains, New York, or Armonk, New York. Armonk has a parade dedicated to Frosty annually.

- “this was a dogs’ graveyard”: America’s oldest pet cemetery, at Hartsdale, New York, opened in 1896. See Dogs.
- “the Wabash country”: The Wabash runs across Indiana to the Ohio. Paul Dresser’s “On the Banks of the Wabash, Far Away” (1897) became the state song in 1913. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest and Music and Composers.
- “There were women’s shoes scattered over the floor”: The scattered women’s shoes, all mateless, are highly symbolic. Shoes generally suggest journeys, paths, or the presence and absence of people, and the fact that these shoes are mateless highlights a sense of incompleteness, loss, or fragmentation. Each shoe appears to come from a different era and place (white canvas tennis shoes, green opera pumps, old women’s laced shoes, buckskin shoes with buttons, gold Grecian sandals) suggesting a collage of many lives, times, and experiences, all disconnected and isolated in this one room. This could symbolize the scattered, fragmented nature of the doctor’s mind or the fragmented realities of the women who come to him: real or imaginary. The shoes’ variety and solitary nature imply absence: where are the wearers? The doctor deals with pregnancies and deliveries, but many of his “patients” are imaginary or unreal, and the mateless shoes evoke the idea of incomplete or failed births, lost children, or the ghostly presence of women who are not fully there. The shoes are remnants or traces, much like the doctor’s practice itself: delivering “imaginary babies” in a “barren countryside where nothing grew.” This barren setting and the doctor’s madness emphasize infertility, loss, and the failure of creation or procreation. The doctor’s clothes hanging alone, despite his complaint of having only one suit, add to the sense of mystery and absence. He has left behind his physical presence, yet his garments remain, like a ghost or a symbol of an absent self. The idea of the doctor “naked as death” going about delivering imaginary babies deepens the theme of the blurring between life and death, reality and hallucination.
- “forceps, and something which looked like a tuning fork”: Obstetric forceps were invented in the 1600s by the Chamberlen family of London, who kept them a family secret for more than a century. René Laennec invented the stethoscope in 1816. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- “there was also, as I heard later, a pregnant man”: Couvade syndrome, also called sympathetic pregnancy, is a condition in which an expectant father experiences some of the same symptoms and behavior as their pregnant partner.
- “Sarah, Sarah!”: The name Sarah means “princess” or “noblewoman” in Hebrew, derived from the Hebrew word sar meaning “prince” or “ruler,” with Sarah being the feminine form, signifying a “lady of high rank” or “princess of a multitude.” It’s a significant Biblical name, given to Abraham’s wife and matriarch of the Jewish people, whose original name was Sarai (meaning “my princess”) before God changed it to Sarah. The name has deep roots in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, maintaining timeless popularity across cultures. “As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall her name be” (Genesis 17:15, KJV). See Sarah O’Leary and Genesis.

- “Why was Sarah laughing?”: “Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” (Genesis 18:12, KJV): the old woman who laughed at the promise of a child. See Genesis and Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- “a crêpe de Chine nightgown”: Crepe de Chine nightgowns evolved from ancient Chinese silk luxury, gaining global fame in the early 20th century for their delicate, pebbled texture and drape, becoming symbols of elegance in the 1920s-30s with Art Deco styles and Hollywood glamor, eventually transitioning from pure silk to modern synthetic blends, remaining a favorite for comfortable, stylish sleepwear.
- “There were pictures of embryos to show that one can hardly tell, at a certain stage, the difference between a rat, a bird, and a man”: Ernst Haeckel’s famous plates of embryos (1874) set fish, birds, and men side by side to show their likeness, though he made them more alike than they are.
    - Many embryos (including humans), since they all evolved from a common ancestor, look strikingly alike during the middle of the phylotypic period.
- “an old steel engraving of Dante wooing Beatrice”: Dante’s “wooing” of Beatrice was not a traditional courtship but an idealized love he expressed through poetry, famously documented in his book Vita Nuova. He fell in love with her at a very young age, and although he encountered her only a couple of times, she became his lifelong muse, representing a spiritual and intellectual ideal. The term “courtly love” was applied to their relationship, a concept involving an idealized and often unattainable love that inspires poetry and virtue. Henry Holiday’s painting Dante and Beatrice (1883), of Dante meeting her on a Florentine bridge, was reproduced in countless engravings. See Dante.
- “the Yale School of Medicine had given the doctor his diploma”: The Yale School of Medicine was established in 1810 and opened in 1813, making it the sixth-oldest medical school in the United States. Key developments include becoming the Medical School of Yale College in 1884, adopting the name Yale University in 1887, and establishing the “Yale System” of education in the early 1900s, which emphasizes independent study. The school is also associated with the founding of the New Haven Hospital, which merged with another hospital to form the Grace-New Haven Community Hospital.
- “Mary Pickford, with her long yellow curls”: Mary Pickford or Gladys Marie Smith, was a Canadian-American stage and screen actress and producer with a career that spanned five decades. A pioneer in the US film industry, she co-founded Pickford-Fairbanks Studios and United Artists, and was one of the 36 founders of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. She was called America’s Sweetheart and The Girl with the Curls. (Wikipedia) See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “there was a bean-shooter on his desk”: A “beanshooter” can refer to a simple toy gun or slingshot. In Chapter 67 the children shot at old Doc with their bean-shooters. See the Chapter 67 resources.

- “Western Union telegraph pads”: Western Union was founded in 1851 as the New York and Mississippi Valley Printing Telegraph Company in Rochester, New York. The company changed its name to the Western Union Telegraph Company in 1856 after merging with several other telegraph companies. The company dominated the American telegraphy industry from the 1860s to the 1980s. (Wikipedia)
- “boxes of corn plaster”: A corn plaster is a medicated bandage, often with salicylic acid or hydrocolloid, designed to relieve pain and remove painful foot corns by softening the hard skin, cushioning the area, and protecting it from friction. While effective for many, these plasters should be avoided by diabetics or those with circulatory issues, and careful application is needed to protect surrounding healthy skin.
- “India rubber erasers”: An “India rubber eraser” is a traditional type of eraser, named for the natural rubber (caoutchouc) it’s made from, used to remove pencil and sometimes ink marks, often featuring a dual-sided design with red for pencil and blue for ink.
- “There was a magazine rack”: These magazines were the reading material for real, expectant mothers in a time when pregnancy was a significant, often anxious waiting period. The narrator Vera notes that these magazines were once symbols of hope or dread, indicating that the women looked to them for comfort or guidance. Now, the magazines are relics in the doctor’s chaotic room, indicating the collapse of that earlier, more hopeful era into one dominated by madness, illusion, and a suspension of time. The dream patients who now thumb through them are part of this eerie limbo, caught between past realities and present fantasies. The magazines represent the intersection of past reality and present illusion, the ordinary and the cosmic, and the fragile hopes of women awaiting childbirth amidst the doctor’s deteriorating mental state and the novel’s broader themes of time, memory, and decay.
- “a star rushing toward this world, bound to collide with it”: When Halley’s Comet returned in 1910, newspapers warned that the earth would pass through its poisonous tail, and swindlers sold “comet pills.” See Astronomy.
- “A recipe for hominy croquettes”: Hominy croquettes are savory, deep-fried bites made from cooked hominy mixed with binders like milk, eggs, and flour (or a béchamel sauce), seasoned with butter, salt, and sometimes other flavors like horseradish or herbs, then coated in breadcrumbs and fried until crispy. They’re a comforting, old-fashioned dish where the soft, starchy hominy provides a unique texture against a creamy interior and crunchy exterior.
- “What shall I do if my husband leaves me?”: Advice columns for women, such as Dorothy Dix’s, begun in 1896 and read by millions, answered such letters for half a century. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “There were wild mares who, on the coast of Lusitania, were impregnated by the wind only”: Wild mares of Lusitania may refer to The Lusitano, a Portuguese horse breed. The fame of the horses from Lusitania goes back to the Roman Age, which attributed its speed to the influence of the West wind, who was considered capable of fertilizing

the mares. Pliny tells it in his Natural History, Book 8, and Virgil in the Georgics, Book 3.

- “Queen Wilhelmina of Holland was an excellent housekeeper”: Queen Wilhelmina of Holland may refer to Wilhelmina Helena Pauline Maria who was the Queen of the Netherlands from 1890 until her abdication in 1948. She reigned for nearly 58 years, longer than any other Dutch monarch. (Wikipedia) See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “the doctor’s more coherent medical library”: The books symbolize the doctor’s fractured mind and the blurred boundaries between reality, illusion, and madness pervasive in the novel. They reflect Vera’s exploration of a world where order is elusive, and knowledge is scattered, much like the chaotic mental landscapes of the characters she encounters.
- “The Gazelle Peninsula”: The Gazelle Peninsula is a large peninsula in northeastern East New Britain. It lies on New Britain, an island of the Bismarck Archipelago that now belongs to Papua New Guinea.
- “The Transvaal from the Inside”: The Transvaal from the Inside may refer to The Transvaal from Within: A Private Record of Public Affairs (1899) by J. P. Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick is known for the children’s book, Jock of the Bushveld. The book refers to the Jameson Raid which was a botched raid against the South African Republic, the Transvaal, carried out by British colonial administrator Leander Starr Jameson. The raid was intended to trigger an uprising by the primarily British expatriate workers in the Transvaal but failed to do so.
- “The Goiter Belt”: The Goiter Belt refers to a chronic low iodine deficiency in the upper Midwest discovered in men during World War I. Iodized salt was introduced to combat this in the US. Michigan began selling iodized salt in 1924. The landlady below, with “A goiter like a melon,” is a native of the goiter belt.
- “The Diseases of the King Penguins”: The King Penguin is the second largest species of penguin, smaller, but somewhat similar in appearance to the emperor penguin.
- “Bronchitis”: Bronchitis is inflammation of the large and medium-sized airways in the lungs that causes coughing.
- “The Causes of Ejaculatory Praecox Among the Great American Elks”: The Causes of Ejaculatory Praecox Among the Great American Elks did not have a reference but ejaculatio praecox means premature ejaculation. The title twits the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, the fraternal lodge founded in 1868.
- “The Diseases of Coal Miners”: The Diseases of Coal Miners may refer to the lung disease pneumoconiosis that miners are at risk of developing because of their exposure to airborne respirable dust.
- “Bipolar Medicine”: The phrase “bipolar disorder” came into use only in the 1950s and later; in an old doctor’s library the title more likely means medicine of the two poles, Arctic and Antarctic, beside The Diseases of the King Penguins.
    - Bipolar Medicine may refer to Bipolar disorder which is a mood disorder characterized by periods of depression and periods of abnormally-elevated

happiness that last from days to weeks each. If the elevated mood is severe or associated with psychosis, it is called mania; if it is less severe, it is called hypomania.

- “The Three Bears”: The Three Bears is a 19th-century British fairy tale of which three versions exist. The original version of the tale tells of a not-so-polite old woman who enters the forest home of three bachelor bears while they are away. She sits in their chairs, eats some of their porridge, sits down on one of their chairs and breaks it, and sleeps in one of their beds. When the bears return and discover her, she wakes up, jumps out of the window, and is never seen again. The second version replaced the old woman with a little girl named Goldilocks, and the third and by far best-known version replaced the original bear trio with Papa Bear, Mama Bear, and Baby Bear. What was originally a frightening oral tale became a cozy family story with only a hint of menace. (Wikipedia) Robert Southey published the first printed version in 1837. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “The Cow Who Jumped over the Moon”: The Cow Who Jumped over the Moon is the English nursery rhyme “Hey Diddle Diddle.” There are numerous theories about the origin of the rhyme. James Orchard Halliwell suggested that it was a corruption of ancient Greek, probably advanced as a result of a deliberate hoax. It was connected with Hathor worship. It refers to various constellations (Taurus, Canis Minor, etc.). It describes the Flight from Egypt (the Exodus) or the founding myth of the Israelites. It depicts Elizabeth, Lady Katherine Grey, and her relationships with the earls of Hertford and Leicester. It deals with anti-clerical feeling over injunctions by Catholic priests for harder work. It describes Catherine of Aragon or Catherine I of Russia, the wife of Peter the Great or Canton de Fidèle, a supposed governor of Calais and the game of cat, an old English bat-and-ball game. This profusion of unsupported explanations was satirized by J. R. R. Tolkien in his fictional explanations of “The Man in the Moon Stayed Up Too Late.” Most scholarly commentators consider these to be unproven and state that the verse is probably meant to be simply nonsense. (Wikipedia) See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Ancient Egypt.
- “Little Tom Thumb”: Little Tom Thumb is a character of English folklore. Tom Thumb may have been a real person born around 1519, as there is a grave purporting to be his. It is set into the floor adjacent to the font of the main chapel in Holy Trinity Church at Tattershall, Lincolnshire, UK. On the tombstone it reads that T. Thumb was 101 years old. He died in 1620 and the grave measures just sixteen inches in length. (Wikipedia) See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “Walks in Rome”: Walks in Rome, by Augustus J. C. Hare, first published in 1871, was the favorite guide of English and American travelers. Walks in Rome was published by George Allen, 1897, London.
- “Lallah Rookh”: Lallah Rookh is an Oriental romance by Irish poet Thomas Moore, published in 1817. Scholars have stated Moore, a friend of the executed Irish rebel Robert Emmet, depicts in the poem a version of the French Revolution and the Irish Rebellion of 1798. He condemns the French Revolution but justifies the Irish Rebellion. See Romantic Poets.

- “Tom Swift in the Land of Giants”: Tom Swift in the Land of Giants may refer to a book in the various Tom Swift book series. All books are credited to the pseudonym Victor Appleton while the character was created by Edward Stratemeyer for his book packaging house, the Stratemeyer Syndicate. Tom Swift is the main character of six series of American juvenile science fiction and adventure novels that emphasize science, invention, and technology. The books contain heavy racism, depicting Africans as brutish, uncivilized animals, and the white protagonist as their paternal savior. The Tom Swift books have been credited with assisting the success of American science fiction and with establishing stories focusing on brilliant scientists and inventors as a basic cultural myth. The series uses many adverbs and the phrase Tom Swiftly or Tom Swifty was coined to describe a book that uses many adverbs. Tom Swift’s fictional inventions have apparently inspired several actual inventions. A number of scientists, inventors, and science fiction writers have also credited Tom Swift with inspiring them. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “Keats’ Ode to the Grecian Urn”: Keats’ Ode to the Grecian Urn was published in 1819. Ode on a Grecian Urn discusses art and art’s audience. The flyleaf’s “died of tuberculosis” is true of Keats, who died of it in Rome in 1821, at twenty-five. See the ode in the Chapter 70 resources. See Romantic Poets.
- “What’s Wrong with Democracy?”: What’s Wrong with Democracy? Critiques of democracy existed across a wide range of historical periods and came from diverse intellectual and social movements. These arguments addressed everything from the flaws of ancient Greek democracy to the systemic exclusions within American democracy before the Civil Rights era. Philosophers like Plato warned that in a democracy, the masses, driven by ignorance and emotion, could become susceptible to self-serving demagogues. This “rule by the mob” could lead to rash, unjust decisions, such as the execution of Socrates in ancient Athens. Later, thinkers like Thomas Hobbes argued that democracy leads to chaos and civil war, advocating for a strong, singular sovereign to prevent societal collapse. Some classical and 19th-century thinkers, including Plato, Thomas Carlyle, and John Ruskin, argued that society should be led by a knowledgeable elite rather than the common people. This perspective asserted that only a select few possessed the wisdom and virtue necessary to govern effectively, and that the majority of people were ill-equipped for the complexities of statecraft. As democracy expanded during the Industrial Revolution, critics like Carlyle, John Ruskin, and William Lecky argued that it produced anarchy and chaos within modern industrial society. They believed that democratic capitalism prioritized profit and individual self-interest over social stability and the public good. Commentators like Matthew Arnold expressed concern that democracy led to a flattening of culture and a decline in intellectual standards. He feared that the “average” tastes of the masses would displace high culture and that society would suffer from a lack of moral and intellectual leadership. Before the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, critics pointed out the hypocrisy of American democracy, which systematically excluded many of its own citizens. This was particularly evident in the Jim Crow South, where discriminatory laws like poll taxes and literacy tests disenfranchised millions of African Americans and poor whites. The history of American

democracy has been marked by periods of deep instability and division. Scholars point to the 1890s and the aftermath of the Compromise of 1877, which ended Reconstruction, as periods of “backsliding” where racial conflict produced significant damage to democratic ideals. This history was built on the foundation of racial exclusion, as some historians note that democratic norms only took hold among white people after racial equality was removed from the agenda. Especially during the Gilded Age (1865-1915), the rise of powerful, and often corrupt, political machines led many Americans to question the health of their democracy. Critiques focused on the manipulation of the voting process, the influence of money in politics, and the resulting feeling that elections were no longer fair or truly representative of the people. The failure of some interwar and post-WWII democratic governments, such as France’s Fourth Republic, was often cited as a failure of democracy itself. Frequent changes in government and a fractured party system led many to conclude that democracy was inherently unstable and inefficient. The Civil Rights Act marks a significant turning point in the realization of American democratic ideals. See Plato and Platonism.

- “Southern Germany”: Baedeker’s Southern Germany, the red-bound travel guide, went through many editions from the 1870s. Southern Germany’s history involves Celtic and Roman roots, Germanic tribal settlement (Bavarians, Alemanni), and powerful medieval duchies like Bavaria and Swabia, central to the Holy Roman Empire, later becoming key players against Prussia in unification, retaining strong Catholic traditions and distinct Upper German dialects, culturally linked to Austria and Switzerland.
- “The Salvation Army Exposed”: The Salvation Army Exposed may refer to a book by Jack London, The People of the Abyss. His story contains his first-hand account of several weeks spent living in the Whitechapel district of the East End of London in 1902. London attempted to understand the working-class of this deprived area of the city, sleeping in workhouses or on the streets, and staying as a lodger with a poor family.
- “White Nights”: White Nights is a short story by Fyodor Dostoevsky, originally published in 1848. The narrator is a young man living in Saint Petersburg who suffers from loneliness. He gets to know and falls in love with a young woman, but the love remains unrequited as the woman misses her lover, with whom she is finally reunited.
- “Inside Ibsen”: Inside Ibsen may refer to Henrik Johan Ibsen who was a Norwegian playwright and theater director. He is considered one of the founders of modernism in theater and referred to as the father of realism and one of the most influential playwrights of his time. The social questions which concerned Ibsen belonged unequivocally to the 19th century. From a modern perspective, the aspects of his writing that appeal most are the psychological issues which he explored. (Wikipedia)
- “The President’s Daughter”: There are two books by this name. One published by Nan Britton in 1927 is a memoir, detailing her affair with President Warren G. Harding. The second is Clotel; or, The President’s Daughter (1853) by William Wells Brown, about the enslaved daughters of Thomas Jefferson, the first novel published by an African American. See Society, Class, and Race and Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- “Poor Richard’s Almanack”: The Poor Richard’s Almanac was a yearly almanac published by Benjamin Franklin, who adopted the pseudonym of Poor Richard or Richard Saunders for this purpose. The publication appeared continually from 1732 to 1758. It sold exceptionally well for a pamphlet published in the Thirteen Colonies in the US. The print runs reached 10,000 per year. “Early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise” (Poor Richard, 1735).
- “There were numerous charts and maps of medical diagnosis cast by astrolabe”: Medical astrology assigned each part of the body to a sign of the zodiac, pictured in the “Zodiac Man” of old almanacs. An astrolabe is an ancient astronomical instrument, a handheld star chart and analog computer used by astronomers, navigators, and astrologers to tell time, determine latitude, find celestial positions, and even survey, serving functions similar to modern GPS but relying on stars and the horizon. Essentially a metal disc with intricate rotating parts and markings for constellations, it helps users calculate the time of day, predict sunrise/sunset, and locate celestial bodies by matching observations to the device’s model of the sky. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica.
- “A stiff brochure, fly-specked with age, written by the doctor when he was young, described senility”: Senility is an outdated term for age-related mental decline, often used to describe memory loss and confusion, but it’s not a normal part of aging and is now generally replaced by terms like dementia, which refers to specific diseases (like Alzheimer’s) causing significant cognitive impairment. While some mild cognitive changes can occur with age, severe issues like dementia are caused by brain cell damage from conditions, not just aging itself, and require medical evaluation for proper diagnosis and management. See Justice O’Leary.
- “it was Tabitha, as everybody knew, crazy Tabitha”: “Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works” (Acts 9:36, KJV). When she died, Peter said, “Tabitha, arise,” and she opened her eyes. See Tabitha and The Bible.
- “who was too crazy to be on relief”: “Relief” was public aid to the poor; the federal relief programs of the New Deal began in 1933. See Tabitha.
- “the hitch-hikers”: Hitchhiking was a vital, romanticized mode of transport during the Depression and WWII for the jobless and soldiers, evolving from necessity to counterculture symbol.
- “the ice-skaters”: Sonja Henie, the Norwegian Olympic champion, made figure skating an American craze in the 1930s with her films and touring ice revues.
    - Ice-skaters was defined by the rise of influential figures like Tenley Albright, Carol Heiss, and Dick Button, who established the U.S. as a dominant force in international figure skating. The era, often considered a “Golden Age” of American skating, saw rapid advancements in technical skill, including the popularization of the double Axel and triple jumps. Non-competitive ice skating was primarily characterized by recreational club skating and the rise of professional ice shows, which allowed talented skaters to perform without competing in official ISU events.

- “the marathon dancers”: Dance Marathons (and walkathons) were a national craze, providing cheap entertainment and survival for the desperate during the Depression, featuring endurance contests often lasting months, with participants dancing or walking for nearly non-stop hours for prizes Horace McCoy’s novel They Shoot Horses, Don’t They? (1935) is set at one.
- “The other doctor, Simeon”: Simeon is derived from Simeon, son of Jacob and Leah, patriarch of the Tribe of Simeon. The text of Genesis 29:33 argues that the name refers to Leah’s belief that God had heard that she was hated by Jacob, in the sense of not being as favored as Rachel. “Because the LORD hath heard that I was hated, he hath therefore given me this son also: and she called his name Simeon” (Genesis 29:33, KJV). Thousands of refugee doctors fled Nazi Europe for the United States, and many were kept from practice by state licensing rules and by antisemitism. See Simeon the Doctor and Judaism.
- “Was I a Communist?”: Communism is a far-left philosophical, social, political, and economic ideology and movement whose goal is the establishment of a communist society, namely a socioeconomic order based on the idea of common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, allocating products to everyone in the society. (Wikipedia)
- “Did I believe in sharing the wealth?”: Huey Long’s Share Our Wealth movement (1934) promised to cap great fortunes and give every family a homestead and a yearly income.
- “Hitler ran him out of Germany”: Adolf Hitler was an Austrian-born German politician who was the dictator of Germany from 1933 until his death in 1945. He rose to power as the leader of the Nazi Party. During his dictatorship, he initiated World War II in Europe by invading Poland on 1 September 1939. He was closely involved in military operations throughout the war and was central to the perpetration of the Holocaust, the genocide of about six million Jews and millions of other victims. (Wikipedia) See Judaism.
- “The Catholics don’t practice birth control because they want to overcome us”: In the encyclical Casti Connubii (1930), Pope Pius XI forbade Catholics to use contraception. See the Comstock Act in the Chapter 68 resources. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “They want an American Pope”: Vatican conspiracy theories are conspiracy theories that concern the Pope or the Roman Catholic Church. A majority of the theories allege that the Church and its representatives are secretly controlling secular society with a Satanic agenda for global domination. In the 1920s the Ku Klux Klan in Indiana enrolled perhaps a quarter of a million members, preaching against Catholics, Jews, and Black Americans and holding the state government until its leader, D. C. Stephenson, was convicted in 1925 of the rape and murder of Madge Oberholtzer. See Society, Class, and Race, Lynching and Racial Violence, and Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- “There are no Negroes in this county, for the sun will not set on a Negro’s head here”: Such places were called sundown towns: Black people had to be gone by nightfall or risk violence. Indiana had scores of them. See the Kentucky lynching in the Chapter 68 resources. See Lynching and Racial Violence and Society, Class, and Race.
    - White supremacy or white supremacism is the belief that white people are superior to those of other races and thus should dominate them. The belief favors the maintenance and defense of any power and privilege held by white people. White supremacy has roots in the now-discredited doctrine of scientific racism and was a key justification for European colonialism. It underlies a spectrum of contemporary movements including white nationalism, white separatism, neo-Nazism, and the Christian Identity movement. (Wikipedia)
- “We don’t want mulattoes”: Indiana forbade marriage between white and Black people from its first years until 1965; the Supreme Court struck down the last such laws in Loving v. Virginia (1967). See Society, Class, and Race and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “There’s a nigger in the woodpile somewhere”: In the English language, negro, is a term historically used to denote persons considered to be of Black African heritage. The word negro means the color black in both Spanish and in Portuguese, where English took it from. The term can be construed as offensive, inoffensive, or completely neutral, largely depending on the region or country where it is used. It has various equivalents in other languages of Europe. In the English language, the word nigger typically is an ethnic slur used against black people, especially African Americans. Because it is considered extremely offensive, even if only mentioned and not used as a slur, it is often referred to by the euphemism, the N-word. It became a racist insult by the 20th century. Accordingly, it began to disappear from general popular culture. Its inclusion in classic works of literature has sparked controversy and ongoing debate. The phrase, meaning a hidden catch, dates from the 1840s and is said to come from fugitive slaves hidden in woodpiles on their way north. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “It’s all the fault of that Roosevelt in the White House”: “Roosevelt in the White House” refers to Franklin D. Roosevelt, the thirty-second president of the United States and author of the New Deal in response to the Great Depression. See the Chapter 67 resources.
- “A green baize curtain”: A green baize curtain is typically a heavy, felt-like woolen fabric, traditionally hung in large, old houses to deaden noise and block drafts between servants’ quarters and family areas, symbolizing the dividing line of domestic service.
- “those three tiny monkeys”: The three wise monkeys are a Japanese pictorial maxim, embodying the proverbial principle “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil.” There are various meanings ascribed to the monkeys and the proverb including associations with being of good mind, speech and action. The phrase is often used to refer to those who deal with impropriety by turning a blind eye.
- “an advertisement by a local preacher of all mortal household goods and furniture for sale”: Compare the Millerites of 1844, who sold their goods to await the end of the

world. See the Chapter 65 resources. See American Religious Movements.

- “A goiter like a melon”: Goiter, a swelling of the thyroid, was common in the iodine-poor soils of the Great Lakes region until iodized salt arrived in the 1920s. See The Tavern Landlady.
- “Her husbane and she were owners of the hotell”: The Tavern Landlady is speaking with a strong Indiana or rural Midwestern accent, such as: “clombed the stars” for “climbed the stairs,” “bedses” for “beds,” “husbane” for “husband,” “weller and weller” for “better and better,” “axed” for “asked,” and “agone” for “gone.” Her speech reflects a rustic, colloquial manner typical of rural Indiana, with grammatical irregularities and a folksy tone that evoke a local, uneducated speaker from that region.
- “was given the euchre Christ and the cue by the priest”: The landlady’s “euchre Christ” is the Eucharist, and the priest’s “cue” may be the last rites, given to a watchdog.
- “were Methodists like her”: Methodist history in the U.S. began with English immigrants and lay preachers in the 1760s, growing rapidly through circuit riders like Francis Asbury, leading to the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784 under John Wesley’s guidance to establish independence after the Revolution. It became America’s largest denomination by the 19th century, spreading across frontiers, fostering revivals, birthing Black denominations like AME. See American Religious Movements.
- “without the dogsology”: Dogsology may refer to doxology which is a short hymn of praises to God in various forms of Christian worship, often added to the end of canticles, psalms, and hymns. The tradition derives from a similar practice in the Jewish synagogue, where some version of the Kaddish serves to terminate each section of the service.
- “The lieutenant governor of Indiana combed here”: The position of Lieutenant Governor emerged as Indiana became a state, with early officials setting precedents. Ashbel P. Willard served as Lt. Governor (1853-1857) before being elected Governor in 1856, showing a direct path to the top office. Like the governorship, the Lt. Governor’s office saw shifts between Democratic and Republican figures throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Lt. Governor presides over the Senate and assumes the governorship if the elected governor is unable to serve. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “the poor girl kissed the health officer before she died of tuberculosis”: See Jacqueline White.
- “Esther Longtree got it all cleaned out”: See Esther Longtree.
- “But Tabidia was muted”: The name appears to echo the Latin *tabidus*, “wasting away” or “consumptive.” The same passage mentions a waitress taken by tuberculosis, the disease once called consumption.

Vocabulary

Anteroom

A small room leading into a larger one.

Astrolabe

An old instrument for reckoning the positions of the stars.

Baize

A coarse green woolen cloth.

Bean-shooter

A peashooter or slingshot.

Bemused

Puzzled and lost in thought.

Celluloid

An early plastic.

Cornice

A decorative molding that runs along the top of a wall or building.

Crêpe de Chine

A fine, crinkled silk.

Denouement

The final outcome of the main complication in a story.

Deprivation

The lack or loss of something needed.

Derangement

Disorder, especially of the mind.

Dismembered

With the limbs cut off; torn apart.

Doxology

A short hymn of praise to God.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Embryo

An unborn creature in its earliest stage.

Euchre

A card game for four players, for which the joker was first added to the deck.

Fly-specked

Spotted with the tiny marks left by flies.

Foetus

An unborn child.

Forceps

A pincer-like instrument for grasping, used in delivering babies.

Forebodings

Feelings that something bad is about to happen.

Galoshes

Rubber overshoes.

Goiter

A swelling of the thyroid gland in the neck.

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Languorous

Oppressive stillness or tiredness, inactivity of a pleasurable kind. Young spells it “langorous.”

Makeshift

Serving as a rough, temporary substitute.

Mandrake

A plant with a forked root once thought to scream when pulled up.

Mulatto

An old and now offensive term for a person of mixed Black and white ancestry.

Omnivorous

Eating everything; taking in everything.

Palings

Pointed wooden stakes, or a fence made of them.

Ponderous

Heavy; slow and labored.

Porte-cochere

A covered entrance where a carriage stops to let passengers out.

Procreation

The begetting of offspring.

Protracted

Drawn out.

Punctilious

Exact in matters of etiquette and detail.

Senile

Weakened in mind by old age.

Spittoon

A bowl for spitting into.

Stethoscope

An instrument for listening to the heart and lungs.

Stickpin

An ornamental pin worn in a necktie.

Thoroughfare

A main road.

Tureen

A deep covered dish for serving soup.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Chapter 72

Content note: *The Esther Longtree chapters (72 to 81) deal with stillbirth and pregnancy loss, rape, infanticide, racist violence including lynching, and cruelty to children. This chapter centers on pregnancy and stillbirth.*

Summary

On an early spring morning Vera walks past the undertaker’s and the beauty parlor, which share one door, and a mule in a crocheted hood, into the Greasy Spoon, its walls painted with hollyhocks and Niagara. There she meets Esther Longtree, the passive policeman’s only daughter, a big, cross-eyed waitress with a growing bald spot and a deformed foot, who believes she is always pregnant, now with “the little shadow boxer.” Setting out seven cups for her stillborn, Esther tells of the children she has lost and hidden under leaves and snow, as many as the autumn leaves, and of their fathers, the salesmen passing through. She tells of wild mares pregnant by the wind on an island off Virginia; of old Dr. O’Leary, who calls her the immortal medical case; of her parents, who think her an old maid; of the lovebirds she keeps to hide the cries she hears at night; and of the layettes she has buried. At last she asks who killed cock robin and answers that all people killed him, never she.

Characters present

Esther Longtree · Justice O’Leary · The Little Shadow Boxer

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Isolation and Connection · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Society, Class, and Race · The Search for Meaning · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Fireflies · Hair, Wig, and Baldness · Horses and Carriages · Music and Instruments · Pearls and Jewels · Shadows

Allusions: American Religious Movements · Astronomy · Ecclesiastes · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Gambling and Playing Cards · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Judaism · Music and Composers · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Shakespeare · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens with a vivid description of an early spring morning in a foggy, desolate town. The undertaker’s hearse, old ghostly automobiles, a grey wagon with a

bony mule, and the “Greasy Spoon” restaurant set the scene.

- Esther is introduced as a robust, vibrant woman whose vitality contrasts with her bleak surroundings. She is perpetually pregnant, known for her “everlasting pregnancy” which is at once a burden and a source of hope. She has ponderous red lips, flowing black hair, a swollen belly, and morning and evening sickness.
- A central passage concerns Esther’s countless stillborn children, “as many as the autumn leaves,” and the sterile, puny salesmen who fathered them. Esther’s maternal love extends even to these lost children, and her loneliness is compounded by the lack of recognition or mourning from others. The stillborn are described haunting her, whispering and crying.
- Old Dr. O’Leary’s character provides a counterpoint as a doctor who is senile and confused but insists Esther is a unique “immortal medical case.” He predicts she will never die in childbirth and attributes much to atmospheric, cosmic influences.
- Esther reflects on her parents’ ignorance and misunderstanding, their teasing, and their failure to comprehend her life and condition. Her parents see her as a failure and an old maid, yet she has lived a secret, wild life full of pregnancies and losses unknown to them.
- There are various men (salesmen, horn-blowers, detectives, and others) who have passed through her life, many being sterile fathers of her stillborn children.
- Despite the repeated losses, Esther maintains hope for a living child. She has prepared layettes, toys, and clothes, knitting a little black suit for the child she expects to survive. Her pregnancy is described as “luminescent,” and she embraces her condition with a mixture of strength, sorrow, and resilience. This passage is crucial for understanding her perseverance and the symbolic weight of her pregnancy.
- The chapter delves into Esther’s psychological and emotional life, her conversations with the stillborn, the lovebirds she raises, and the voices she hears. She is portrayed as deeply connected to the unseen world of the lost children and haunted by their presence. She knits without thread, plays the piano, and cares for her lovebirds.
- Near the end, Esther poses the question “Who killed cock robin?” She concludes that nobody alone is to blame; the child was killed by “the death that was in him from the time of his birth” and by the forces of nature like the wind, night, day, atmospheric pressure.
- The last passage reveals Esther’s acceptance of her condition and her defiant hope. She knows she has been “always pregnant,” never the murderer of her children, and she prepares for the winnowing test of childbirth.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “This was not the restaurant. This was the womb. This was the grave.” How can one room be all three?
- “I am a white piano,” Esther insists. What does the image say about how she has been used?
- “The stillborn were the most successful.” What does Esther mean by success?

Characters

- Old Doctor says, “The ebb of reason, he said, is accompanied by the tide of imagination.” Is that a diagnosis of Esther or of himself?
- “The parents could rid themselves of the child, but the child could never get rid of the parents.” How does this fit Esther, and Vera?
- The drummer sells Fuller brushes, “always staring beyond the woman to see if he could see that which he sought for as for earthly paradise.” Why does Esther’s heart go out to him?

Connections

- The mule stands at “the dead-end of creation, being that being from which no mortal issue comes.” What does the mule have to do with Esther?
- Old Doctor says the world will go on in imagination and “the wild white mothers be fecundated by the wind.” Where did Vera read of such mares in Chapter 71?
- “Who killed cock robin?” Esther answers, “All people killed him.” Is she right?

Reflection

- “It is not true that people are either a success or a failure in life. They could be both.” Do you agree?
- “Her searchings for the truth were noiseless. Only the lie roared.” What lie roars in this chapter?
- “There is something about all of us, he said, that is unrealized.” What is unrealized in you?

Research: Characters

Esther Longtree

- Esther is heavily pregnant, with a “bald spot shaped like a large coin” and “long black hair flowing free.”
- She is described as “plum-colored but square,” with “ponderous red lips” and “lustrous, dull but shining” eyes.
- Her body is both a source of strength and burden; she experiences morning and evening sickness, swollen breasts, and a deformed foot.
- Esther is simultaneously robust and vulnerable, embodying vitality and suffering.
- She is known as the “passive policeman’s only daughter,” indicating a background of isolation and misunderstanding.
- She broods over her “everlasting pregnancy,” symbolizing continuous loss and hope.
- Despite her hardships, Esther is compassionate, loving, and hopeful, often talking to herself and her unborn child.
- Esther’s pregnancy is metaphoric and literal, reflecting repeated stillbirths and lost children.
- She refers to the “little shadow boxer” inside her, a foetus representing hope, fear, and the unknown.
- The pregnancy signifies the struggle between creation and destruction, life and death, hope and despair.
- Salesmen and transient men pass through her life, often fathering her stillborn children.
- Her parents misunderstand her, seeing her as a failure or beast of burden.
- She holds a secret inner life that no one fully comprehends, except the “stillborn and the white birds.”
- Esther experiences loneliness, resilience, and a profound sense of mystery about her condition.
- She wrestles with feelings of failure and hope, often laughing, crying, and brooding.
- She fears being discovered by her mother but also finds solace in her secret world, including her lovebirds.

Doctor O’Leary

- Dr. O’Leary is portrayed as an aging, somewhat senile physician who embodies both a figure of traditional medical authority and a symbol of the limitations of human knowledge and mortality.
- Dr. O’Leary is described as “drunkenly leaning on his cane,” with “old eyes frozen” and suffering from “hardening of the artery of the brain” a condition that makes him senile

and confused. His physical frailty contrasts sharply with the vitality and mysterious condition of Esther Longtree, the central character in this chapter. He is aware of his own decline and admits that he has “retired from practice” because of his confusion and failing faculties.

- Despite his failing health and failing mind, Dr. O’Leary offers Esther “everlasting hope,” encouraging her that she “will never die in child birth” and that her labor will be “easy” and “like passing a seed.” He calls her “the immortal medical case,” suggesting that her condition, her “everlasting pregnancy” and her strange, continuous fertility is an anomaly beyond his medical understanding. He believes that although she is “over-hopeful and bloated with no form within the form,” her problem will end with her, and her disappointments will “pass away and not be seen again upon the earth.” Yet, he cannot fully explain her condition, reflecting his own limitations as a doctor.
- Dr. O’Leary once believed in a simple, anatomical understanding of the human body but now sees “the false eyes, the false cartilage, the false heart,” and “false generations,” causing him confusion and leading to his withdrawal from active practice.
- Dr. O’Leary’s comments on atmospheric pressure, the whirling stars, and the cold ether suggest a more cosmic or metaphysical dimension to Esther’s pregnancy and to human life and death generally. He attributes some medical phenomena to “the unusual atmospheric pressure” and “the thin ether,” implying that natural forces beyond human control or understanding influence human fate.
- Dr. O’Leary is a tragic yet compassionate figure as an old doctor who has seen many failures and losses but still offers hope and comfort.

The little shadow boxer

- The “little shadow boxer” is the unborn child Esther carries, “the little shadow boxer who in the waters of her womb had grown and grown and had warded off every blow.” She feels “the little shadow foot that ran and ran” and its accelerated heartbeat under her heart. Shadow boxing is fighting an opponent who is not there, and the child stays hidden, “crouched where I place my hand,” with folded arms and knees drawn up.
- Old Dr. O’Leary gives Esther “everlasting hope” for its birth, though she has lost many stillborn children. Her “lonely pregnancy” is “ominous and opalescent and unforgiving,” and she carries “two hearts, mine and his,” knitting clothes and collecting toys for the child. Yet the doctor warns that the glaciers are creeping down from the Arctic and “only the dead gave birth.”

Sad father sub-plot

- The sad father subplot is embodied in the figure of a stout, fat drummer who visits Esther Longtree. This man, once happily married with a business and a good home, has suffered a profound personal tragedy: the death of his wife’s sister’s little girl from scarlet fever. This loss devastates him so deeply that he abandons his business and family to wander the roads as a Fuller brush salesman, haunted by the memory of the

child he lost. He stops at Esther’s restaurant, “his eyes tearful,” carrying a bag of candy for the little girl he cannot forget.

Research: Themes

Life and Death

See: Death and Mortality

- The juxtaposition of the beauty parlor and undertaker’s hearse symbolizes the thin line between life and death.
- Esther’s story is a meditation on the persistence of life despite repeated encounters with death (stillbirths).
- The motif of stillborn children recurs, emphasizing loss and the fragility of existence.

Hope and Despair

- Despite her repeated losses, Esther holds onto hope for a living child, representing the human spirit’s endurance.
- The “little shadow boxer” is a symbol of this hope amidst despair.
- Old Dr. O’Leary’s encouragement reinforces this theme of hope against all odds.

Isolation and Misunderstanding

See: Isolation and Connection · The Search for Meaning

- Esther is isolated physically and emotionally, misunderstood by family and society.
- The metaphor of being “engulfed” and her parents’ ignorance highlight the loneliness of her experience.

Nature and the Cosmos

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- Imagery involving stars, moons, winds, and atmospheric pressure ties Esther’s personal story to universal forces.
- The narrative suggests a cosmic scale to human suffering and creation, blurring lines between the earthly and celestial.

Mystery and the Unseen

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The unborn child, the stillborn babies, and the hidden layers of Esther’s life symbolize the mysteries of existence and creation.
- References to shadows, ghosts, and invisible presences underscore this motif.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The “little shadow boxer”

See: Shadows

- Represents the unborn child, hope, and the tension of life not fully realized.

Bald spot

See: Hair, Wig, and Baldness

- Symbolizes the wear and loss Esther has endured.

Fireflies, moths, and butterflies

See: Butterflies and Moths · Fireflies

- Represent fleeting life, transformation, and the ethereal nature of existence.

The “white piano”

See: Music and Instruments

- A metaphor for Esther herself as a complex, beautiful, misunderstood person, and played upon by life’s “dreaming fingers.”

The grey mule and manure wagon

See: Horses and Carriages

- Symbolize burden, endurance, and the dead-end nature of Esther’s existence.

The pearl-like raindrops that never fall

See: Pearls and Jewels

- Reflect suspended time and unfulfilled potential.
- Esther Longtree may symbolize the sexual revolution in the United States by considering her character’s embodiment of themes such as fertility, sexuality, societal repression, and the struggle for female autonomy.
- Esther is depicted as “everlastingly pregnant,” carrying multiple stillborn children, representing an ongoing, unresolved fertility and reproductive issue. She is physically swollen, with symptoms of pregnancy (morning sickness, evening sickness, swollen breasts) but no viable birth occurs. This paradox of constant pregnancy without fulfillment can symbolize the tension in the 1960s between traditional expectations of women centered on motherhood and the emerging desire for sexual freedom and reproductive control. Esther’s “everlasting pregnancy” may reflect the societal burden

placed on women to reproduce and the frustration when that role is unfulfilled or controlled by external forces like sterile fathers or societal norms.

- Esther is described as robustly alive and free in some ways like her hair that flows loose “at whatever cost to sanitation,” and she tosses it regularly as if to preserve her freedom. This image evokes a woman resisting social constraints, symbolic of the sexual liberation movement where women began to assert control over their own bodies and sexuality. Yet, she is also trapped in a “womb” that is both a restaurant and a grave, a liminal space between life and death, fertility and barrenness, reflecting the societal repression of female sexuality and the stigma around pregnancy out of wedlock or outside accepted norms.
- The numerous stillborn children Esther carries (hidden under leaves, buds, snow, rivers) represent unrealized potential, lost possibilities, and the silencing of female sexual and reproductive expression. The fact that the fathers are “sterile” or “impotent” men, often traveling salesmen or transient figures, can symbolize the failure of patriarchal structures to support or recognize women’s full sexual agency. The stillborns haunt Esther, much like the repressed desires and consequences of sexual control haunt society during the sexual revolution.
- Esther is simultaneously described as “brilliant but dumb,” “ugly outside... but beautiful inside,” “experienced and sought after” yet also an “old maid” misunderstood by her own parents. This duality reflects the conflicted social status of women during this time who were beginning to break free from traditional roles but still faced judgment, misunderstanding, and marginalization. Esther’s education and cultural refinement contrast with her physical and social marginalization, symbolizing the new woman’s struggle to reconcile intellect, sexuality, and societal acceptance.
- Esther’s “immortal medical case” status, with the old doctor predicting she will “be pregnant until the stars had fallen,” suggests the ongoing, unresolved nature of women’s sexual liberation. The “everlasting pregnancy” can metaphorically represent the period of social transformation as an era pregnant with possibilities but fraught with struggle, loss, and hope. Her hopefulness despite repeated disappointments mirrors the spirit of the sexual revolution, which challenged existing norms and sought new forms of expression and liberation.
- Her affinity with natural and mythical elements (wild mares pregnant by the wind, the great skull, the starry heavens, the moon, and the stars) links Esther to a broader symbolic framework of fertility, creation, and cosmic forces. This elevates her personal reproductive tragedy to a universal level, reflecting the countercultural embrace of naturalism, mysticism, and a redefinition of human sexuality as part of a cosmic order or liberation from mechanistic, repressive traditions.
- Esther Longtree symbolizes the complexities and contradictions of the sexual revolution in America: the tension between fertility and barrenness, freedom and repression, hope and despair, tradition and change. Her character embodies the social anxieties about female sexuality, the quest for autonomy, and the redefinition of womanhood during a period of profound cultural upheaval.

- Her story encapsulates the bodily, social, and legal struggles over reproduction, economic survival, and patriarchal oppression that shaped the conditions the women's rights movement sought to change through activism.

Research: Resources

- "kewpie dolls which I had first thought were children": Rose O'Neill drew her Kewpies for the Ladies' Home Journal in 1909, and the dolls were a craze from 1912; she grew rich on them and drew posters for women's suffrage. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "being that being from which no mortal issue comes": The mule, foaled of a male donkey and a mare, is almost always sterile. The mule embodies a threshold or boundary between life and death, fertility and barrenness, creative potential and its cessation. In the broader context of the novel, which often interweaves themes of decay, loss, and the boundaries between reality and dreams, this image can be interpreted as a symbol of stagnation or an end point in the cycle of life. It also resonates with the novel's attention to characters who are trapped in states of limbo or arrested development, such as the doctor delivering imaginary babies or the hangman haunted by the children of the hanged. The passage conveys a mood of desolation and quiet warning about reaching a place where creation and renewal cease, urging the narrator (and the reader) to recognize the significance of this boundary in the unfolding narrative and in life itself. See Horses and Carriages.
- "the walls were painted crazily with hollyhocks": Symbolically, the hollyhocks can be interpreted as representing both vitality and decay. Hollyhocks are traditionally tall, hardy flowers that stand upright and bloom, often symbolizing ambition, fecundity, and the cycle of life and death. However, in the novel, their depiction as dripping paint on cracked walls suggests fragility, impermanence, and the blurring between life and death, reality and illusion. This duality mirrors Esther Longtree's own condition: she is physically swollen with a seemingly endless pregnancy, embodying fertility and hope, yet she suffers continual loss and stillbirths, embodying sorrow and loss. The hollyhocks' reach toward the cracked ceiling might symbolize striving for life or transcendence despite the decay and desolation surrounding them, just as Esther, despite her tragic circumstances, maintains hope and resilience. The hollyhocks thus underscore themes of fertility, loss, and the tension between life and death that permeate Esther's narrative and the novel's broader atmosphere of haunting liminality.
- "Niagara booming over jagged rocks": Niagara refers primarily to the iconic Niagara Falls, a group of three massive waterfalls on the U.S.-Canada border, renowned for their power, beauty, and hydroelectric generation, featuring attractions like the Maid of the Mist and Cave of the Winds. It also refers to the surrounding region, including cities in New York and Ontario, the Niagara River, historical sites like Old Fort Niagara, and the Niagara Escarpment, a significant geological formation. See Niagara Falls in the Chapter 65 resources.

- “who could have been more robustly alive than she, Esther Longtree”: Esther Longtree emerges as a deeply tragic and complex figure who embodies themes of fertility, loss, unrecognized suffering, and resilience. Physically, she is described as large, swollen, with a deformed foot, a growing bald spot, and marked by signs of repeated pregnancies. Her body is a site of contradiction: robust and vital in some ways, yet burdened by an “everlasting pregnancy” that brings her both strength and sorrow. She is portrayed with vivid imagery (her “ponderous red lips,” “long black hair flowing free,” and swollen breasts like “milky breakers”) highlighting her physicality and her connection to life and creation, even as she suffers repeated stillbirths. Esther’s story is one of repeated loss and unfulfilled motherhood. She has borne many stillborn children, hidden their remains in various natural places, and carries the constant sorrow and haunting memory of these lost lives. Despite this, she harbors a fierce hope and determination to have a living child, the “little shadow boxer” moving inside her, symbolizing persistent life against overwhelming odds. Her repeated pregnancies symbolize both a curse and a source of identity and purpose; she is “always pregnant,” yet always losing the child before birth. This paradoxical state underscores a profound loneliness and alienation from the conventional experiences of womanhood and motherhood. Her relationships with men are fraught and ambiguous. Although she has had many “fathers” of her children (often passing salesmen and transient men) these men are sterile or absent, contributing to her losses and isolation. They remember her and sometimes send tokens or inquiries years later, but their involvement is superficial and transient. Esther’s parents also misunderstand and fail to support her, regarding her as an “old maid” and a failure, unaware of her hidden suffering and the complexity of her condition. Esther also exhibits moments of bright vitality and spirited defiance. She tosses her hair freely “at whatever cost to sanitation,” laughs uproariously despite her pain, and engages in small acts of rebellion such as knitting without thread or playing with lovebirds. These actions underscore her refusal to be wholly defeated by her circumstances, highlighting her strength and courage in face of despair. Psychologically, Esther is haunted by the “little shadow boxer,” a persistent presence and hope that sustains her. She experiences both the physical symptoms of pregnancy and the deep emotional turmoil of loss and expectation. Her mind is described as clear and luminous amid the confusion and sorrow of her body, suggesting a complex inner life where hope and despair coexist. Esther Longtree is a figure of profound maternal tragedy and endurance. She embodies the pain of unrealized potential, the mystery of fertility and loss, and the resilience of the human spirit. Her story is steeped in symbolism: her body as womb and grave, her lost children as ghosts and shadows, her struggle as a metaphor for unfulfilled creation and hope amid desolation. See Esther Longtree.
    - Esther Longtree symbolizes a profound and tragic history of loss, barrenness, and unfulfilled potential that can be read as an allegory for certain aspects of the American experience, particularly in the Midwest and frontier regions. Her story embodies themes of repeated failure and disappointment in birth and creation, despite persistent hope and effort. She is perpetually pregnant yet never successfully gives birth to a living child, instead bearing countless stillborns,

symbolizing a cycle of loss and despair. Her condition, an everlasting pregnancy with multiple stillborn children, reflects a history marked by sterile or fruitless attempts at creation and growth. The fathers of her children are often absent, sterile, or incapable, representing the failures of human agency and perhaps the broken promises of American expansion, settlement, or progress. The sterile salesmen, the transient men who pass through her life, can be seen as metaphors for the exploitative, transient nature of early economic ventures and social relationships in certain parts of the country, where hope for new life or renewal often met with harsh realities and repeated disappointments. Esther's narrative is also deeply tied to the natural and atmospheric conditions of the Midwest or frontier (unusual atmospheric pressure, thinning ether, creeping glaciers, cold starlight, and the harshness of the natural environment) suggesting a land that is difficult to cultivate and sustain life in the traditional sense. This may symbolize the historical hardships endured by settlers and their descendants: the physical challenges of the land, the cold and unforgiving climate, and the spiritual or emotional barrenness that accompanied these struggles. Esther's lonely, misunderstood existence, her isolation from family and community, and the ignorance of her parents reflect a broader social history of alienation and neglect, possibly alluding to marginalized or overlooked populations in American history, especially women who bore the burdens of fertility and loss in silence. She carries the legacy of these losses quietly yet with a luminous hope, knitting layettes and preparing for a child that might someday be born alive, symbolizing the persistence of hope and renewal in the face of overwhelming hardship and repeated failure. Esther Longtree symbolizes the history of human and environmental struggle in the American Midwest or frontier: the repeated disappointments in birth and renewal, the harshness of the environment, the failures of human connections, and the enduring hope amid loss and barrenness. Her figure serves as a poignant metaphor for the tragic, often unrecognized history of creation and loss that underlies the American experience in these regions.

- "a braying, sighing sound almost like a mule": Esther, "the mule woman," came partly from Marc Chagall's painting of a pregnant "mule lady" in a bridal veil, which Young "had not seen when I wrote the book," and partly from Charlie Chaplin. Young remembered a scene in The Gold Rush (1925) in which Charlie invites a beautiful lady to dinner, "instead of that a mule arrives," and he "entertains the mule as if it were a lady": "Charlie has been a great inspiration to this book from start to finish" (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). No such scene appears in the film as released. Steven Moore recalled that Young would have titled the Esther section "Mule" (Steven Moore, "Remembering Marguerite Young," 1999, in Dalkey Days). See Esther Longtree.
- "Esther Longtree, the passive policeman's only daughter": The passive policeman was W. C. Fields. Young's editor, Burroughs Mitchell, told her that his favorite character was "the passive policeman in the graveyard that separated couples," who reminded him of Fields, and she told him that it was Fields (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). See Esther Longtree.

- “for she was soon to have a sweet, sweet little baby”: The line is spoken by Esther Longtree, a character haunted by endless pregnancies and stillbirths. This line is deeply symbolic and layered with meaning. Esther Longtree has experienced numerous stillbirths and losses of children fathered by various men who passed through her life. The “sweet, sweet little baby” she anticipates is not only a literal unborn child but also represents a profound hope for life and renewal amidst despair and loss. This baby “would cry in her arms” signifies the first living child she might finally hold and nurture, a sign of successful birth after so many failures. The phrase “that would kill them all” is metaphorical and suggests a transformative power of this forthcoming child. It implies that this child will “kill” or end the haunting presence of all the previous dead or stillborn children or the ghosts and memories that have burdened Esther. In other words, the living child will supersede the dead children, symbolically putting to rest the sorrow, loss, and endless cycle of stillbirths that have defined her life. This child could “kill” the past grief and suffering, bringing a new beginning.
- “We are ships passing in the night and honking”: “Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing, / Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness” (Longfellow, Tales of a Wayside Inn, 1863). This phrase may refer to the poem, Tales of a Wayside Inn by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow.
- “Johnny-jump-ups springing in her path”: Johnny-jump-ups symbolize the delicate, fragile, and often invisible presence of Esther’s stillborn children and the impermanence of life and hope in the midst of suffering.
- “Johnny-jump-ups springing in her path”: The Johnny-jump-up, the wild pansy, is also called heartsease; in A Midsummer Night’s Dream it is love-in-idleness, whose juice makes the sleeper love the first creature seen on waking (2.1). See Shakespeare.
- “those old, puny, sterile salesmen”: American traveling salesmen, or “drummers,” evolved from frontier peddlers carrying wagons of goods to figures selling encyclopedias, sewing machines, and elixirs, becoming cultural icons known for face-to-face pitches, sometimes using exaggerated claims, yet essential in connecting rural America to commerce through their personalized service before mass advertising took over, though they faced suspicion as “con men.” Their journey involved developing systematic sales techniques, using sample cases, and becoming central to American consumer culture, even while being portrayed as both mythic and untrustworthy figures.
    - The salesmen appear recurrently as figures who pass through the town and interact with Esther Longtree, the waitress who is perpetually pregnant but only bears stillborn children. These men represent sterile, ephemeral fathers who contribute to Esther’s endless cycle of conception and loss. They are described variously as “old, puny, sterile salesmen” and are often linked to the notion of futility and failure in reproduction. Despite their repeated presence in Esther’s life, they do not provide the stable, living progeny she longs for. Instead, they are associated with sterile conceptions and the birth of stillborn children who haunt her.

    - The different salesmen, such as the piano-tuner, the horn-blower, the tin roofer, the soap salesman, the rubber salesman, the featherweight, the Chicago detective, and others highlight the diversity yet uniformly disappointing nature of these transient relationships. Each is portrayed as a figure who fails to fulfill the biological or emotional role of a father, symbolizing the sterile, fractured modern world where connections are fleeting and fruitless. Their various professions suggest a broad cross-section of society, emphasizing that this sterility and failure transcend social or occupational boundaries. The salesmen symbolize the broader theme of displacement and rootlessness. They are drifters, passing through, unable or unwilling to form lasting bonds. They also embody the void and the mystery of loss that permeates Esther's life, as they often write years later to inquire if the child they fathered was ever born, unaware or unwilling to accept the reality of their sterility and the stillbirths.
    - The salesmen collectively symbolize the failure of fertility and the loneliness of human existence in the novel's landscape. They represent the absent or inadequate father figure and the broader societal and cosmic forces that contribute to Esther's tragic, endless pregnancy and loss. The salesmen are trapped in cycles of hope and disappointment, mirroring Esther's own cycles of conception and loss, and underscore the novel's themes of death, loss, and the haunting presence of what might have been.
- "the little shadow boxer, him inside, my other heart": See The Little Shadow Boxer.
- "Eat grass like the wild ass in the fields": Of Nebuchadnezzar, driven out in his madness: "his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen" (Daniel 5:21, KJV). See The Bible.
- "Balaam's ass beheld an angel": Balaam's ass may refer to Balaam's story in the Bible starting in Numbers 22. God finally permits Balaam to go but with instructions to say only what He commands. Balaam then sets out in the morning with the princes of Moab. God becomes angry that he went, implying that he only used Balaam as a tool to further his will, and sends the Angel of the Lord to prevent him. At first, the angel is seen only by the donkey Balaam is riding, which tries to avoid the angel. After Balaam starts punishing the donkey for refusing to move, it is miraculously given the power to speak to Balaam, and it complains about Balaam's treatment. At this point, Balaam is allowed to see the angel, who informs him that the donkey's turning away from the messenger is the only reason the angel did not kill Balaam. Balaam immediately repents, but is told to go on. "And the ass saw the angel of the LORD standing in the way, and his sword drawn in his hand" (Numbers 22:23, KJV). See The Bible.
- "the winnowing test": "Whose fan is in his hand, and he will throughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff" (Matthew 3:12, KJV). See The Bible.
- "face the Ghostly Reaper": See the Ghostly Reaper in the Chapter 68 resources. See Death and Mortality.

- “There were as many stillborn as the autumn leaves”: In Esther Longtree’s dialogue, she makes several philosophical and symbolic references that reflect her profound meditation on life, creation, loss, and existence. These references are woven into her reflections on her repeated pregnancies, stillbirths, and her unique condition of “everlasting pregnancy.” Esther speaks repeatedly of her numerous stillborn children as “leaves,” “snowflakes,” and “stars,” emphasizing the natural cycles of birth and death, creation and dissolution. This links to philosophical meditations on impermanence and the transitory nature of existence. She frequently refers to the “void,” the “shadow,” and “the unknown heavens,” reflecting on what is unrealized or invisible in life: an existential contemplation of what lies beyond human perception or understanding. This resonates with themes of mystery and the limits of human knowledge. Esther imagines her pregnancy as connected to cosmic forces: stars, the Milky Way, atmospheric pressure, and the ether. She even recounts a mystical experience on a desert island where she witnessed wild mares pregnant without males, suggesting a mystical or imaginative form of creation that transcends conventional biology. This evokes philosophical ideas about nature’s mysteries and creative power beyond conventional human understanding. She refers to the “bubble,” “foam,” and “afterbirth” as metaphors for creation itself, pondering if all creation might be just these transient phenomena. This metaphor has a philosophical resonance with ideas about the provisional or ephemeral nature of existence and reality. Esther contemplates the mysterious “Who killed cock robin?” question, ultimately concluding that death is a universal, impersonal force: no one is solely to blame, and it is the natural fate of all beings. This reflects a fatalistic or existential acceptance of mortality. She embodies the paradox of being “brilliant but dumb,” “beautiful but misunderstood,” “strong but burdened,” which reflects philosophical tensions between appearance and reality, strength and vulnerability, hope and despair. Esther’s reflections on her lonely, misunderstood condition, her parents’ ignorance, and the many “fathers” who come and go, highlight themes of alienation and the human search for meaning and connection. Esther’s narrative blurs the line between imagination and reality, such as when she speaks of knitting without thread or the foetus swimming beyond ivory cliffs, suggesting a philosophical inquiry into the nature of perception, belief, and the creative power of the mind. Despite her sorrow, Esther expresses a persistent hope that “something will be born,” reflecting a philosophical tension between despair and hope, a fundamental human condition. Esther’s dialogue is rich with philosophical symbolism about life’s mysteries, the burden of fertility and loss, the cosmic and individual scale of existence, and the human confrontation with mortality and meaning. These reflections position her as a tragic yet luminous figure embodying elemental human experiences and mysteries.
- “off the coast of the Old Dominion”: “Old Dominion” is Virginia’s well-known nickname, given by King Charles II of England to thank the colony for its loyalty during the English Civil War, signifying it as a cherished, longstanding territory of the crown, and it’s also a nod to its status as one of the oldest English overseas dominions. The name reflects Virginia’s early colonial significance and its historical ties to the monarchy, appearing on colonial seals and adopted officially as a state slogan.

    - Wild ponies have run on Assateague Island, off Virginia and Maryland, for centuries; legend makes them survivors of a Spanish shipwreck. Marguerite Henry's Misty of Chincoteague (1947) made them famous. See Horses and Carriages and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "the wild white mothers be fecundated by the wind": There are myths about animals, not just mares, being impregnated by the wind. Pliny and Virgil told it of the mares of Lusitania. See the wind-made mares in the Chapter 71 resources. See Horses and Carriages.
- "a poor mule, or else everlastingly pregnant": Esther is described as a mule laboring on and on much like the myth of Sisyphus where Zeus punished him for cheating death twice by forcing him to roll an immense boulder up a hill only for it to roll down every time it neared the top, repeating this action for eternity. Through the classical influence on modern culture, tasks that are both laborious and futile are therefore described as Sisyphean. See Greek Mythology.
- "old Dr. O'Leary had told her only this morning": See Justice O'Leary.
- "as if she dropped a handkerchief": Dropping a handkerchief was also used when describing "...a moment's passage, was a handkerchief dropped from the hand of God…" by Mr. Spitzer. See the Chapter 50 resources.
- "all the Fallopian tubes": Fallopian tubes (in a female mammal) is either of a pair of tubes along which eggs travel from the ovaries to the uterus. They are named for Gabriele Falloppio, the Italian anatomist who described them in 1561. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- "the skies had unrolled like a scroll on the last day": "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together" (Revelation 6:14, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- "It is probably the medica materia": Medica materia is a Latin term from the history of pharmacy for the body of collected knowledge about the therapeutic properties of any substance used for healing. The term derives from the title of a work by the Ancient Greek physician Pedanius Dioscorides. In the 20th century it was changed to pharmacology.
- "had never had to take a stitch": "The stitch" may refer to a procedure called an episiotomy, also known as perineotomy and is a surgical incision of the perineum and the posterior vaginal wall generally done by a midwife or obstetrician. It was in the 50s in the US called the "husband stitch" because it was believed to return a woman's vaginal opening to its original size. The routine is no longer recommended for vaginal births except in emergencies. Despite this, it is one of the most common surgical procedures specific to women. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "for she had lost no teeth as did most women who, in her condition, lacked the calcium": It is a myth that women's teeth become worse during pregnancy since any calcium needed would be taken from the bones and not the teeth. If a pregnant

woman’s diet is not sufficient then nutrients for the baby will be leached from the mother. The old saying was “a child, a tooth.”

- “the General Electric representative”: General Electric or General Electric Company (GE) is an American multinational conglomerate founded in 1892, and incorporated in New York state and headquartered in Boston. (Wikipedia)
- “the Cumberland Gap”: The Cumberland Gap is a pass through the long ridge of the Cumberland Mountains, within the Appalachian Mountains, near the junction of the U.S. states of Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee. It is famous in American colonial history for its role as a key passageway through the lower central Appalachians. (Wikipedia)
- “the man who was on his way to salty Utah, the Mormon”: “Salty Utah” may refer to Salt Lake City which is the capital and most populous city of the U.S. state of Utah, as well as the seat of Salt Lake County, the most populous county in Utah. (Wikipedia)
    - Mormons are a religious and cultural group, the principal branch of the Latter Day Saint movement started by Joseph Smith in upstate New York during the 1820s. The largest number of members reside in Utah. (Wikipedia) See American Religious Movements.
- “the W.P.A.”: The W.P.A. may refer to the Works Progress Administration, renamed in 1939 as the Work Projects Administration, which was an American New Deal agency that employed millions of jobseekers, mostly men who were not formally educated, to carry out public works projects.
- “a little Jehovah’s Witness”: Jehovah’s Witnesses in America, initially Bible Students, grew from the late 1800s under Charles Taze Russell, faced intense persecution during the 1930s & WWII for neutrality, adopted the name in 1931, expanded significantly with organized campaigns and Gilead training, and solidified doctrines like the 1935 “great crowd” redefinition, all while building their distinctive identity through publications, conventions, and door-to-door work, establishing a strong presence despite opposition. See American Religious Movements.
- “her walnut jewelry”: Walnut jewelry, spanning from historical, hand-polished Chinese health balls (sometimes worn or carried as status symbols) to Victorian-era “fancywork” using shells for keepsakes, signifies a blend of natural, symbolic, and sentimental adornment. It represents durability and connection to nature, often featuring carved shells or polished walnut wood.
- “her wooden shoes”: Wooden shoes, known as klompen in the Netherlands, originated in the Middle Ages (circa 13th century) as durable, affordable, and waterproof footwear for farmers, fishermen, and laborers across Europe. Carved from alder, willow, or poplar, they provided protection against damp, muddy conditions and sharp objects. While traditional, they became iconic Dutch, Swedish, and European cultural items.
- “the pecan trees that were brought from the old Jerusalem”: Old Jerusalem, a 5,000-year-old city, has been a central hub of religious and political conflict, serving as the Jewish capital since King David (c. 1000 B.C.) and holding immense significance for Christians and Muslims. The current 0.9-square-kilometer walled city, rebuilt by the

Ottomans in the 16th century, is divided into Armenian, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim quarters.

- “the moon gleamings of pomegranates”: Within the novel’s themes of life, death, and transformation, pomegranates symbolize the richness and complexity of these cycles, fertility, and the mysterious transitions between states of being.
- “to borrow a nickel for his drink”: Esther asked for Dr. O’Leary’s advice when he came in to get a drink. A nickel then bought a cup of coffee or a glass of beer, and played a record on the jukebox.
- “for God loves a silent woman”: “A silent and loving woman is a gift of the Lord” (Ecclesiasticus 26:14, in the Apocrypha of the King James Bible); “Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection” (1 Timothy 2:11, KJV). See The Bible and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “watched the marathon skaters”: See the ice-skaters and marathon dancers in the Chapter 71 resources.
- “was vertiginous”: Vertiginous means dizzy.
- “her garter snapping”: Garters originated in the Dark Ages as practical, functional bands (leather or ribbon) used by both men and women to hold up stockings, evolving from simple ties to decorative accessories by the 18th century. They became essential, specialized lingerie in the 19th/early 20th centuries before largely disappearing with the advent of elastic, nylon, and pantyhose.
- “the oldest pinochle player”: Pinochle originated in 19th-century Germany from the French game Bezique, evolving from Binokel, with its name possibly meaning “eyeglasses” (from the Queen of Spades and Jack of Diamonds combo). German immigrants brought it to America, where it became hugely popular in the late 1800s and early 1900s, especially in the Midwest, growing into a beloved game rivaling poker and bridge, featuring unique melding and trick-taking mechanics with a special 48-card deck. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
- “buried layettes laid out in long white boxes”: Young’s first poem, written at sixteen, “was about preparing a layette for my unborn fatherless baby,” and “it does become the character of Esther Longtree in Miss Macintosh, My Darling, many decades later.” An English teacher told her “that a young girl should not have such thoughts on her mind” (Marguerite Young, interview, WNYC radio, New York). On a train to Chicago a man told her of a cocker spaniel whose false pregnancy was eased only by giving “her toys to play with as if the baby were really there” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Esther Longtree and Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
    - A layette is a curated collection of clothing and essentials for a newborn, traditionally prepared by expectant mothers through sewing or knitting. Originating from the French term for a small drawer or box (laie) in the 17th-19th centuries, it evolved from hand-stitched, essential linens to modern, pre-curated sets, often used in charity programs for mothers in need.

- “the moon-globed persimmon”: Persimmon, peach, and cherry: these fruit trees, with their blossoms and fallen fruits, are evocative images of the ephemeral nature of life and the enduring sorrow that accompanies it throughout the novel.
- “a Finnish worker”: Finnish workers in America were primarily part of a large wave of immigrants (1864-1924) employed in heavy labor, particularly mining in Michigan and Minnesota, logging, and farming. Often fleeing poverty and political turmoil, they were known for being hard-working, literate, and settling in tight-knit, often socialist-leaning communities.
- “She had never eaten ergot”: Ergot is a fungus that in the 1930s companies marketed to women whose pregnancy was not progressing since abortion, drugs that aborted a fetus and birth control devices were illegal. The FTC deemed the pills unsafe and ineffective and stopped their sale. In 1774 it is documented that midwives used ergot to ease delivery of a baby. In 1808 the New York doctor John Stearns published his use of ergot, “pulvis parturiens,” to hasten labor. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “breeding lovebirds”: Lovebirds, are small parrots native to Africa and Madagascar, with nine distinct species identified. Known for their intense social bonding and “allo-preening” behavior, they were popularized in Europe during the 1800s as pets. Early records date to the 1600s, though they were extensively trapped and traded in the 19th and 20th centuries. See Birds.
- “thank you, George Washington”: George Washington was an aggressive surveyor and land speculator who acquired over 50,000 acres, often on indigenous lands, earning him the name “Town Destroyer” (Conotocarious) from the Iroquois. He was a lifelong, large-scale slaveholder, inheriting ten enslaved people at age eleven and later controlling over 300, while navigating brutal, disease-ridden early frontier life. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “Martin Luther”: Martin Luther was a German priest, theologian, author and hymn writer. A former Augustinian friar, he is best known among Christians as the seminal figure in the Protestant Reformation and as the namesake of Lutheranism. (Wikipedia)
    - In his last years Luther turned on the Jews in On the Jews and Their Lies (1543), a tract the Nazis reprinted. See Judaism.
- “Beau Geste”: Beau Geste is an adventure novel by British writer P. C. Wren, which details the adventures of three English brothers who enlist separately in the French Foreign Legion following the theft of a valuable jewel from the country house of a relative. Published in 1924, the novel is set in the period before World War I. It has been adapted for the screen several times. (Wikipedia)
- “she might be dropsical”: Dropsy is an archaic medical term for the swelling of soft tissues due to the excessive accumulation of fluid (edema). Historically used to describe symptoms of underlying diseases like heart failure, kidney disease, or malnutrition, it is now known simply as edema. Symptoms include swollen legs, ankles, or abdomen, and tight, stretched skin.

- “What if the over-active foetus”: The spelling “foetus” entered English from Late Latin (around the 16th century) as a “hypercorrection” based on Latin words like amoenus, adding the ‘o’ where it wasn’t etymologically correct, though it became common in British/Commonwealth English and medical fields for a time. The true Latin root is fetus, meaning “offspring,” making “fetus” the etymologically correct form, now the standard globally in medicine and preferred in the U.S., while “foetus” persists in non-medical UK usage.
- “a breech birth”: A breech birth occurs when a baby is positioned feet or bottom down instead of head-down near the end of pregnancy (around 36-37 weeks). While most babies turn head-down, about 3-5% remain in this position, which carries a higher risk for vaginal delivery, often requiring a C-section. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- “the Hoosier Amateur Star-Gazers”: “Hoosier” refers to the U.S. state of Indiana. It is the official nickname for residents of Indiana, used since the mid-19th century, and serves as the state’s official demonym (the name for a person from a specific place). See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “the maternal pelvis was smaller than the needle’s eye”: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24, KJV). See The Bible.
- “outside the precincts of the Starry Girdle, the Milky Way”: The Milky Way or Milky Way Galaxy is the galaxy that includes the Solar System, with the name describing the galaxy’s appearance from Earth: a hazy band of light seen in the night sky formed from stars in other arms of the galaxy, which are so far away that they cannot be individually distinguished by the naked eye. (Wikipedia) See Astronomy.
- “it could pass through as in the twinkling of an eye”: “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump” (1 Corinthians 15:52, KJV). See The Bible.
- “the great bubble which precedes creation”: World egg, cosmic egg or mundane egg are mythological motifs found in the cosmogonies of many cultures that are present in Proto-Indo-European culture and other cultures and civilizations. Typically, the world egg is a beginning of some sort, and the universe or some primordial being comes into existence by breaking the shell of the egg, sometimes lain on the primordial waters of the Earth. Eggs symbolize the unification of two complementary principles from which life or existence, in its most fundamental philosophical sense, emerges.
- “The wailings, the gnashings of teeth”: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12, KJV). See The Bible.
- “The jukebox repairman”: The jukebox, a nickel a record, filled the taverns and diners of the 1930s and 1940s. See Music and Composers.
- “Who killed cock robin?”: Who Killed Cock Robin is an English nursery rhyme. Although the earliest known record of the song is from the mid-eighteenth century, there is some evidence that it is much older. Versions of the story appear to exist in other countries, including Germany. There are a number of theories that have been advanced to explain the meaning of the rhyme. According to Celtic traditions, Lugh, the

sun god who dies as the nights get longer after the summer solstice, is marked in the old Celtic pictographic calendar with a bow-and-arrow shape. Lugh was the primary god representing the red sun and was also known in Welsh as Coch Rhi Ben, which when anglicized would mean Cock Robin (coch meaning red, rhi meaning lord, ben meaning leader) This may be a reference to the belief that souls became birds after death. The sparrow who kills him with his bow and arrow may represent Brân the Blessed, the god of winter in the form of a raven. (Wikipedia) Its answer, first printed in Tommy Thumb's Pretty Song Book (1744), is "I, said the Sparrow, / With my bow and arrow." Esther's last words echo it: "Ah, I knew, she saw, who killed him!" See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Birds.

- "Was there a babe lost in the woods, a babe lost in the snow?": In the ballad of the Babes in the Wood (1595), two orphaned children, abandoned by their wicked uncle, die in the forest and are covered with leaves by robins. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- "Did not all people come into the world to die, as the preacher sayeth": "A time to be born, and a time to die" (Ecclesiastes 3:2, KJV). See Ecclesiastes.
- "had died of scarlet fever": Before antibiotics, scarlet fever was one of the great killers of children; penicillin made it curable in the 1940s.
- "selling Fuller brushes from door to door": Fuller Brushes are high-quality cleaning tools, personal care items, and brushes for various, specialized, and durable household uses, produced by The Fuller Brush Company since 1906. Known for being "built to last," these products range from brooms, mops, and cleaning supplies to hairbrushes and personal care products. The Fuller Brush Man, going door to door, became an American type.
- "the darkly shining cheval glass": Cheval glass is a long mirror, mounted on a swivel in a frame, allowing it to be tilted.

Vocabulary

Abacus

A frame with beads on wires, used for counting.

Akimbo

With hands on hips and elbows turned out.

Assuage

To ease or soothe.

Avid

Eager or greedy.

Billows

Great waves.

Blear

Dim and watery, as eyes are with age or weeping.

Breech

Of a birth, buttocks or feet first.

Burden

The refrain of a song; also a load.

Caparisoned

Richly decked out, like a horse in ornamental trappings.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Cheval glass

A tall mirror swung in a frame so that it can be tilted.

Clammy

Damp, cold, and sticky.

Cupola

A small dome on a roof.

Daft

Silly or crazy.

Deluge

A great flood or downpour. The Deluge is Noah’s flood.

Denuded

Stripped bare.

Derangement

Disorder, especially of the mind.

Dropsical

Swollen with fluid; suffering from dropsy.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Drummer

A traveling salesman.

Ergot

A fungus of rye and grasses, used to hasten childbirth.

Facade

The front of a building; a false front.

Fecundate

To make fertile.

Filament

A fine thread or fiber.

Foetus

An unborn child.

Garter

A band worn around the leg to hold up a stocking.

Hoar-frost

White frost formed as feathery ice crystals.

Hypocrisies

Pretenses of virtue or feeling one does not have.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Interstices

Small gaps or spaces between things.

Kewpie

A plump, wide-eyed baby doll.

Layette

A set of clothing and linens for a newborn.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Lustrous

Shining with a soft glow.

Mastication

Chewing.

Melodiously

Tunefully.

Modicum

A small amount.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Nebula

A cloud of gas and dust in space; once any hazy patch of light among the stars, including galaxies.

Ominous

Threatening; foreboding.

Omnivorous

Eating everything; taking in everything.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Palpable

Able to be touched or felt; plain to see.

Perineum

The area between the genitals and the anus.

Phosphorescent

Glowing faintly in the dark.

Pinochle

A card game for two to four players, played with a 48-card deck.

Ponderous

Heavy; slow and labored.

Recessive

Tending to recede; hidden or held back.

Senile

Weakened in mind by old age.

Sepulchral

Of the tomb; gloomy and deathly.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Slumberous

Sleepy; inducing sleep.

Striated

Marked with thin parallel lines or bands.

Torpor

A sluggish, heavy, half-asleep state.

Turgid

Swollen; also, pompous in style.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Vertiginous

Dizzy; causing dizziness.

Chapter 73

Content note: *The Esther Longtree chapters (72 to 81) deal with stillbirth and pregnancy loss, rape, infanticide, racist violence including lynching, and cruelty to children. This chapter describes stillbirths and the hidden remains of infants.*

Summary

Esther Longtree, everlastingly pregnant, has given birth so often to nothing that she remembers her stillborn only as fragments, “an eye, an ear, a long gold hair, a fingernail, a cobweb,” hidden in hollow stumps, streams, and snowdrifts, and the undertaker complains that she brings him no business. Dying fathers, salesmen and insurance agents, write to ask whether their children lived, and on old Doctor’s advice she says nothing. The strongest of them, Joe Goldberg, the Jewish featherweight champion now wasting from tuberculosis in the Colorado mountains, writes of the night he raped her among the tombs of a hillside graveyard and calls her the greatest victory of his life; she remembers the graveyard but not him. An old grey mule, barren, stands by at every love. She fears a trial for murder, for the old Chicago detective, another of the fathers, is hunting proof that she killed his three. She remembers a labor alone under a barren dwarf apple tree, summer turning to winter in a single night, and the birth of nothing, the hardest birth to bear, while a white feather drifted down from some Arctic bird.

Characters present

Esther Longtree · Joe Goldberg · Justice O’Leary · The Chicago Detective · Phoebe · Coleman Bluebough · Abigail Porter

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Duality and Doubles · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Horses and Carriages

Allusions: Ancient Egypt · Angels and Archangels · Astronomy · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Judaism · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter opens and repeatedly returns to the motif of Esther’s “everlasting pregnancy,” a state in which she is perpetually carrying children who are never fully born or who are stillborn, described as fragments like “an eye, an ear, a long gold hair,

a fingernail, a cobweb.” She has a swollen womb and “the whistle of the stillborn in her ears.”

- Throughout the chapter, the narrative emphasizes the letters sent to Esther by several dying men, “the fathers,” who inquire about the children they supposedly fathered with her. These men seek reassurance that their progeny live, clinging to hope at the moment of death. Esther keeps silent, as her old, drunken doctor advises, to preserve their vanity and peace. She cannot confirm their hopes because, in fact, the children are “snowflakes,” “marsh butterflies,” or other insubstantial forms.
- A particularly poignant and detailed passage concerns Joe Goldberg, the champion featherweight boxer who wrote long, anguished letters to Esther as he wasted away from tuberculosis. He remembered her as the “peak of his existence,” the greatest “victory” among his battles, and begged for remembrance and forgiveness. Esther, however, cannot recall him clearly as his image is “lost in clouds” and like “the weight of a feather” in her mind, unlike the weaker men whose memories linger more distinctly.
- Joe Goldberg’s memory of meeting Esther in a graveyard on a foggy, windy night is recounted in detail. It was rape. He “had taken her against her will,” he “had held her pinioned in his arms,” and he “had knocked off the nose of an angel as they struggled,” yet he remembers it as the greatest victory of his life. The graveyard setting ties the crime to death and decay, reinforcing the chapter’s motifs of mortality and the ambiguity of life and conception.
- Repeatedly, the narrative returns to Esther’s silence and her solitary endurance of her condition. She neither confirms nor denies the existence of the children to the fathers and has no answers for the legal or emotional claims made upon her. Her silence is portrayed as a form of protection for herself and the dying men and as a reflection of the “imponderable answer” she cannot find.
- One of the most emotionally charged passages describes a labor in which Esther endures all the pains of childbirth but delivers “nothing.” In this “birth of nothing” her body is broken and her labor intense, but no child emerges.
- The chapter uses the image of an old mule, barren and mournful, as a recurring symbol of sterility and loneliness that stands by whenever Esther is with a lover. Similarly, the white feather that drifted down as she staggered across the snow after the birth of nothing is interpreted as a possible “message from the silence,” a sign of hope amid despair. These symbols deepen the thematic exploration of fertility, loss, and the fragile boundary between life and death.
- Esther faces the threat of legal inquiry and possible trial for “murder” because her stillborn children have disappeared: the old Chicago detective is hunting proof, and the undertaker complains that she has not brought business to the graveyard. This introduces a grim social dimension to her plight, where her mysterious condition could be criminalized, adding to her burden of silence and secrecy.
- Throughout, Esther struggles with memory: she cannot recall all the fathers or children, especially the strong featherweight champion, despite his vivid letters and pleas.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “The birth of nothing was the hardest birth to bear.” Why would it be harder than any other?
- “Her lack of any feeling was her deepest feeling now.” How can an absence be the deepest feeling?
- “A woman’s faith was her pregnancy.” What does faith mean for Esther?

Characters

- Joe Goldberg calls the night he raped Esther the “peak of his existence.” What does it say about him that he counts her among his victories?
- “The strongest men were the weakest.” Is this true of Joe Goldberg?
- Old Doctor tells Esther to say nothing to the dying fathers. “Supreme knowledge was always the last cruelty.” Is her silence kindness or cruelty?

Connections

- Joe comes of a family of fighters “beginning with those who had fought the angels.” How is his last bout, with God on a peak above the clouds, like Jacob’s?
- The salesman thinks his wife and her twin are two women “like the evening star and the morning star,” but Esther knows “the evening star and the morning star were one star.” Where else in the novel are two people one?
- The old mule, “the barren animal who could not be mated,” stands by at every love. Why does it follow Esther?

Reflection

- “Why were the sterile fathers never blamed?” Who is blamed for a lost child, then and now?
- “Time would heal all wounds but hers.” Are there wounds that time does not heal?
- The graveyard children were “cut down in the flower of their youth” and given funerals, while Esther’s had none. Why do some deaths get mourned and others hidden?

Research: Characters

Esther Longtree

- Big-boned, slow-moving waitress, cross-eyed, with a deformed foot and swollen womb.

- Maternal, compassionate, yet burdened by a mysterious, continuous pregnancy with stillborn children.
- Silent and evasive when questioned by fathers, embodying endurance, sorrow, and resilience.
- Symbolizes fertility, loss, and the complex intersection of memory and identity.

Joe Goldberg (Champion Featherweight)

- A once-powerful boxing champion, now frail and dying of tuberculosis.
- Writes long, emotional letters to Esther, hoping to be remembered and to claim his child.
- Represents strength, vulnerability, and the tragic human fight against death.
- He raped Esther in a graveyard and remembers it as the “peak of his existence”; she remembers the graveyard but not him.

Old Doctor

- A drunken, disillusioned physician who advises Esther to maintain silence with dying men.
- Offers a philosophical perspective on death, illness, and the illusions surrounding conception and fertility.

The Fathers (Traveling Salesmen, Sterile Men)

- Many are weak, sterile, or self-centered men who impregnated Esther but never took responsibility.
- They symbolize failure, disappointment, and the social stigma attached to Esther’s condition.

The Chicago detective

- A symbolic figure representing societal judgment, scrutiny, and the external pressures faced by Esther Longtree. Though he appears only indirectly through Esther’s thoughts and fears, his presence is significant and multifaceted.
- The detective symbolizes the potential legal and moral condemnation that Esther fears. She imagines a scenario where she might be arrested, tried, and accused of murder for the stillborn children she has carried and lost over the years. The detective’s investigation represents society’s attempt to impose order and assign blame on Esther for the tragic outcomes of her pregnancies, despite her innocence in her own mind.
- The detective is “old” and “worm-ridden,” and he is himself one of the fathers, “another old, sterile father,” hunting proof “that she had killed his three whom she had never borne or who were born without eyes.” He stands for the many fathers who

impregnated Esther and took no responsibility for the children. The detective's search for proof and evidence reflects a broader theme of male absence and desertion, with Esther bearing the burden alone.

- Esther fears the detective's inquiries, which might lead to public exposure of her condition and the stillborn children. She worries about appearing before a jury while visibly pregnant, the social humiliation involved, and the invasive nature of such an investigation. This fear adds to her isolation and suffering, emphasizing the harshness of societal judgment towards women in her position.
- The detective's efforts to find evidence of murder or wrongdoing are ultimately futile, as Esther has hidden the stillborn children in natural places (streams, fields, under snowdrifts) making proof elusive.
- Esther's silence and refusal to answer inquiries, partly motivated by kindness to the dying fathers and partly by self-preservation, contrast with the detective's probing.

Phoebe

- Phoebe is mentioned in the context of a graveyard, specifically as "the old washwoman's grave" with a statue that has a bulbous nose, warts, wrinkles, and a sunbonnet. Joe Goldberg names her statue in his letters as proof that he was in the graveyard with Esther.
- Phoebe's statue symbolizes one of the many tombs in the graveyard, representing the past and the presence of the dead in the narrative. She is part of the imagery of mortality and memory that permeates the story.
- Phoebe is a symbolic figure within the narrative, evoking themes of death, memory, and the passage of time.

Coleman Bluebough

- Coleman Bluebough is mentioned in the context of Esther Longtree's story as a figure associated with old deaths and graves, named on a tombstone in the graveyard where Joe Goldberg raped Esther.
- Esther Longtree recalls the name Coleman Bluebough, who died at the age of three, and his place is marked among other graves and memorials in the narrative.
- The mention of Coleman Bluebough helps underscore themes of death, stillbirth, and loss that pervade Esther Longtree's life and experiences, particularly her repeated pregnancies and the stillborn children she mourns.
- Coleman Bluebough represents one of the many children who have died young or were stillborn, figures that are part of Esther Longtree's troubled memories and grief.

Abigail Porter

- Abigail Porter is referenced as a person whose grave is marked in the graveyard, and she is among the many figures evoked in the narration that surrounds Esther

Longtree’s story.

- The graveyard where she rests is described as a place filled with various symbolic elements like crosses, rustling owls, winged beings, inscriptions, and old statues. Abigail Porter is part of a broader meditation on death, memory, and loss within the narrative.

Research: Themes

- Esther Longtree is a woman perpetually pregnant, carrying the memory and burden of many stillborn children: fragments such as an eye, ear, fingernail, cobweb, or snowflake rather than whole babies. This condition is both literal and symbolic, representing loss, unfulfilled motherhood, and isolation. Her pregnancy is a metaphor for enduring sorrow and hope intertwined.
- Esther struggles to remember the fathers of her many lost children and even the details of conception, while the dying fathers vividly recall her and their supposed children. The featherweight champion Joe Goldberg, one of the few who wrote her, haunts her memory, but she cannot fully recall him, symbolizing the elusive and fragmented nature of memory.
- Despite her perpetual pregnancy and maternal instincts, Esther is isolated, misunderstood, and burdened with silence. She mothered many children who never lived, and she bears the emotional weight alone, rarely responding to inquiries from dying fathers, protecting their illusions and her own fragile peace.
- The novel explores the boundary between life and death, conception and loss. The children are often invisible and symbolized as feathers, snowflakes, or shadows which highlight the ephemeral nature of existence and the impossibility of closure or concrete answers.
- Joe Goldberg represents a powerful figure in Esther’s life and the narrative: strong and victorious in his prime, yet reduced to a frail, dying man battling God. His letters to Esther reveal his longing for remembrance and his hopes for their child, underscoring themes of memory, regret, and the human desire for legacy.
- Esther faces potential accusations, including murder of her stillborn children, reflecting societal judgment and misunderstanding of her condition. She fears trial and public humiliation, but she remains protective of her silence and her unborn “little shadow boxer.”

Research: Symbols and Imagery

- Stillborn Children as Snowflakes, Feathers, Cobwebs: These fragile, ephemeral images represent the children that Esther carries but never fully births. They highlight invisibility, loss, and the intangible nature of her motherhood.
- The Graveyard: The location of Esther’s encounter with Joe Goldberg symbolizes death, the boundary between life and afterlife, and the haunting memory of their union.

- The Old Mule: Represents sterility, loneliness, and the persistence of life without fruition. It is Esther’s constant companion symbolizing the barrenness surrounding her fertility.
- The Little Shadow Boxer: The unborn child she feels under her heart, symbolizing hope, continuation, and the enduring mystery of life and death.
- Blood-Stained Clothes and Bruises: Signify the pain, violence, and social stigma Esther endures during her labors and life. They also underscore the physical and emotional toll of her condition.

Research: Resources

- “said Esther Longtree, a big-boned, slow-moving waitress”: Esther Longtree emerges as a profoundly tragic and complex figure burdened by perpetual pregnancy and the sorrow of countless stillborn children. Her character is marked by an overwhelming maternal instinct intertwined with mystery, loneliness, and a haunting sense of loss. Esther is described as a “big, dumb-headed waitress,” slow-moving and physically altered by her condition: one foot is deformed, her womb swollen, and her body constantly expanding with what she perceives as an “everlasting pregnancy.” This physical state symbolizes her ceaseless burden and the weight of her unresolved grief. Her dark hair often drifts before her eyes, symbolizing both a literal and metaphorical veil between her and the world around her, emphasizing her isolation and internal confusion. Despite the numerous pregnancies resulting only in stillborns or incomplete births (“an eye, an ear, a long gold hair, a fingernail, a cobweb”) Esther remains intensely maternal. She has mothered everything from her childhood thumb and big toe to a bullfrog, underscoring her nurturing nature even in the face of continual loss. This maternal impulse is paradoxical; she is both the source of life and a witness to death and absence, which causes her embarrassment and deep sorrow. Many men, termed “fathers,” have impregnated her, yet none seem to have produced a living child. These men are generally weak, sterile, or dying, and several write to Esther as they face death, seeking acknowledgment of their supposed offspring. Esther, however, rarely answers these inquiries. She prefers to maintain silence to preserve the dignity and hope of the dying fathers, fearing the cruelty that truth would impose. This silence also protects her from the pain of confronting the truth about her stillborn children and the uncertain paternity of her current perpetual pregnancy. A significant figure in Esther’s narrative is Joe Goldberg, the champion featherweight boxer, who wrote to her desperately in his dying days. He remembers their encounter in a graveyard: he raped her there, “had taken her against her will,” “deflowered her,” and “had knocked her out, stone cold.” Despite his vivid memories and longing for recognition, Esther cannot recall him clearly, only the graveyard and the circumstances of their meeting. This failure to remember symbolizes her fragmented and overwhelmed state of mind. Joe represents the strongest of the fathers who becomes weak and ephemeral like a feather, and Esther’s inability to anchor him in her memory contrasts sharply with her vivid remembrance of the weaker men. Esther’s narrative is steeped in symbolic

imagery: the stillborn children as snowflakes, feathers, cobwebs, and shadows; the old mule representing sterility and loneliness; the graveyard setting for the conception of Joe Goldberg's child; and the recurring motif of silence as both protection and sorrow. Her "everlasting pregnancy" could be read as a metaphor for enduring grief, unfulfilled potential, and the human condition of bearing loss silently. Her story is riddled with ambiguity about reality versus memory, truth versus illusion, and life versus death. Esther is socially isolated, working alone in a restaurant with fewer and fewer customers, burdened by her physical state and the mystery of her pregnancies. There is an undercurrent of potential accusation against her, from a Chicago detective who suspects her in a forgotten murder of stillborn children to the threat of a public trial. This looming social judgment contrasts with Esther's own self-view as a suffering, unselfish mother who has never demanded support or recognition from the fathers. Despite her suffering and the enormity of her loss, Esther exhibits resilience. She continues "waxing, waxing, never waning," embodying a strange, almost supernatural endurance. Yet there is also resignation and confusion: she cannot fully grasp her own condition, cannot remember many fathers, and exists in a liminal space between hope and despair, life and death. Esther Longtree is a figure of tragic maternal devotion, loss, and mystery. Her physical and emotional existence is defined by an endless cycle of pregnancy and stillbirth, a heavy silence toward the men who impregnated her, and a haunting ambiguity about what is real and remembered. Her story explores themes of fertility, death, memory, and the human tendency to shield others from harsh truths through silence. She stands as a poignant embodiment of suffering and endurance. See Esther Longtree.

- Esther Longtree symbolizes a complex and tragic history of loss, abandonment, and the elusive promise of fertility and continuity that can be read metaphorically as reflecting aspects of American history. Her character embodies the sorrow of countless lost hopes and unfulfilled potential: she is "everlastingly pregnant" yet only ever gives birth to stillborn children: fragments like "snowflakes," "cobwebs," "little feet," or "golden hair." These stillborns are the children of many fathers, most of whom are sterile or absent, and who only awaken a sense of conscience or responsibility at their deathbed, asking about the children they never knew. Esther's silence toward these dying fathers symbolizes the unanswerable questions of lineage, legacy, and accountability in a fragmented, transient society where promises remain unfulfilled and where the past cannot be fully reconciled with the present. This condition can be interpreted as symbolic of the broader American experience, particularly the history of displacement, broken promises, and the elusiveness of the American Dream. Esther's endless pregnancies with no living offspring reflect the cycles of hope and disappointment in a land marked by migration, loss, and the failure of paternal or institutional responsibility. The many "fathers" who impregnate her but then disappear or fail to support her children can be related to the many waves of settlers, immigrants, and transient individuals who have contributed to the making of America but whose legacies are uncertain or incomplete. The fact that Esther hides her stillborns "everywhere," in streams, under snow, in tree stumps, and yet is threatened with accusations of murder, can be seen

as a metaphor for the buried or forgotten histories of marginalized people and the silenced suffering that underlies American progress. The undertaker's complaint that she brings no business because she hides the evidence of death symbolizes the societal reluctance or failure to confront these hidden tragedies. Her life is also connected to a landscape marked by graveyards, broken fences, and natural elements like wind, snow, and autumn leaves, evoking the American frontier and the harsh realities faced by those living on its margins. Esther Longtree's tragic and ambiguous history symbolizes the haunted, fragmented, and often unacknowledged history of America itself: a land of many fathers but few fulfilled legacies; a place where life and death, hope and despair, fertility and barrenness coexist; and where the true stories of loss and endurance are obscured by silence and the passage of time. Esther Longtree stands as a profound metaphor for the unresolved burdens and contradictions in American history (the tension between promise and loss, presence and absence, birth and death) that shape the nation's identity.

- "his long practice of medica materia": Materia medica (It encompasses ancient and medieval knowledge of remedies, with a foundational text being Dioscorides' De Materia Medica) refers to the comprehensive body of knowledge, historically cataloging the origins, properties, and preparation of substances used to treat diseases. These remedies are derived from natural sources, primarily plants, but also animals and minerals, and are considered precursors to modern pharmacology.
- "too, too solid for his tastes": "O, that this too too solid flesh would melt, / Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!" (Hamlet, 1.2). Dew falls all through this chapter. See Shakespeare.
- "worse than the Chaldeans": In the Bible the Chaldeans are the Babylonians of Nebuchadnezzar, who burned the Temple and carried the people of Judah into captivity (2 Kings 25). Habakkuk calls them "that bitter and hasty nation" (Habakkuk 1:6, KJV), and in Daniel they are the king's astrologers: "the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans" (Daniel 2:2, KJV). For a Jewish fighter, no people could be worse. See The Bible and Judaism.
    - Chaldeans may refer to Chaldean Catholics who are adherents of the Chaldean Catholic Church, which originates from the historic Church of the East. The Chaldean community originates from groups of adherents of the Church of the East that entered into communion with the Roman Catholic Church in the 16th and 17th centuries. They were indigenous to the regions of northern Iraq, southeastern Turkey, northeastern Syria and northwestern Iran, many have migrated to Western countries including the United States, Canada, Mexico, Australia, Sweden and Germany. Many of them also live in Lebanon, Egypt, Palestine, Israel, Jordan, Iran, Turkey, and Georgia. (Wikipedia)
- "the salesmen, the insurance agents": American traveling salesmen (or "drummers") were vital, iconic agents of commerce, bridging manufacturers with rural and small-town retailers throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries. They drove expansion by selling everything from textiles and machinery to household goods via rail and later automobiles, often utilizing direct-to-consumer, persuasive tactics before declining due

to urbanization. Salesmen used personal charm and sometimes exaggerated pitches to move goods, often operating under a “caveat emptor” (buyer beware) market. They introduced items like sewing machines, pots, encyclopedias, and personal care products.

- “In her vast super-fecundation”: In medicine, superfecundation is the fertilizing of two or more eggs from one cycle in separate acts of intercourse, so that twins may have different fathers. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- “the brave little Jew, hard as rock”: Jewish fighters ruled American boxing in the first half of the twentieth century: twenty-six Jewish world champions between 1910 and 1940, most of them wearing the Star of David on their trunks. Abe Attell held the featherweight title from 1906 to 1912 (he first claimed it in 1901) and was later tied to the fixing of the 1919 World Series. Benny Leonard was lightweight champion from 1917 to 1925, and Barney Ross, raised in Chicago, held titles in the 1930s. See Joe Goldberg and Judaism.
- “Tuberculosis, God’s hand”: Tuberculosis was a leading cause of death in the US in the early 1900s, thriving in crowded, unsanitary, and poverty-stricken urban areas. Before effective antibiotics (streptomycin in 1944, isoniazid in 1952), treatment focused on sanatoriums, fresh air, and surgery. Mortality fell from 194 per 100,000 in 1900 to 40 by 1945 due to public health initiatives.
- “Joe Goldberg, the golden cock”: The surname Goldberg is of German/Yiddish origin, meaning “gold mountain,” formed from the German words Gold (gold) and Berg (mountain/hill). It’s a common Ashkenazi Jewish surname, used both as a habitational name from places named Goldberg and as an artificial or ornamental name, often adopted for its sound or association with wealth. Joe, the gold mountain, dies in the mountains and calls Esther the “peak of his existence among the snowy peaks.” See Joe Goldberg.
- “an Indiana waitress said to be everlastingly pregnant”: Indiana’s history spans from prehistoric Native American mounds to becoming the 19th state in 1816 and establishing itself as “The Crossroads of America” by 1937. Key milestones included significant Civil War participation, pioneering professional baseball in 1871, and becoming a manufacturing and agricultural hub. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- “in Chicago or St. Louis or Kansas City”: Chicago, founded in 1833 and incorporated in 1837, grew from a small trading post at the mouth of the Chicago River into a major industrial, rail, and manufacturing hub by the mid-20th century. Key eras included rapid growth after the 1871 fire, pioneering skyscraper architecture (1880s-90s), and becoming a postwar, segregated city by the 1950s.
    - Founded in 1764 by French fur traders, St. Louis grew from a strategic Mississippi River trading post into a major 19th-century industrial and transportation hub. Following its 1876 separation from the county, the city boomed as a manufacturing center, peaked in population around 1950, and began facing suburban flight and modernization, including early planning for the Gateway Arch.

    - Kansas City was founded in the 1830s as a Missouri River trading post, evolving from a frontier river town into a major 19th-century railroad hub and cattle center. Known as a wide-open “Paris of the Plains” during Prohibition, the city grew significantly through the mid-20th century, developing a strong jazz scene, a thriving downtown, and expanding its physical footprint significantly by 1960.
- “a man dying in the Colorado mountains”: Colorado’s history was defined by Native American habitation, Spanish exploration, and a rapid transition from a mining frontier to a 38th state (1876). The 1858-59 Pike’s Peak Gold Rush sparked major settlement, while the late 19th-century economy shifted to ranching and farming.
    - Doctors sent consumptives west for the dry, high air, and Denver filled with them. National Jewish Hospital for Consumptives opened there in 1899 under the motto “None may enter who can pay, none can pay who enter” (University of Denver Libraries, “Chasing the Cure”), and the Jewish Consumptives’ Relief Society opened at Lakewood in 1904. See Judaism.
- “married to a twin whose identical twin was married to no one”: Twins who change places in the night echo the Spitzer twins, Joachim and Peron, one never sure which of the two he is. See Joachim Spitzer, Peron Spitzer, and Duality and Doubles.
- “the evening star and the morning star were one star”: The evening star and the morning star are both the planet Venus, called Hesperus at dusk and Phosphorus at dawn; the Greeks credited Pythagoras or Parmenides with discovering they were one. In 1892 the philosopher Gottlob Frege made “the morning star is the evening star” his famous example of two names with one meaning. See Astronomy and Duality and Doubles.
- “high above the tree-line where no birds sang”: “The sedge has withered from the lake, / And no birds sing” (Keats, “La Belle Dame sans Merci,” 1819). See Romantic Poets.
- “the pygmies, the Egyptians, the Irish, whoever they were”: Fight posters billed boxers by nation and race, and Irish-American fighters such as John L. Sullivan, heavyweight champion from 1882 to 1892, ruled the American ring before the Jewish fighters rose. “Whoever they were” shows how little his opponents meant to Joe.
    - Pygmies are among Africa’s oldest inhabitants, with ancestors diverging from other populations roughly 60,000 to 100,000 years ago, inhabiting Central African rainforests as hunter-gatherers. They are characterized by short stature (often under 5 feet) and traditionally live in intimate, symbiotic relationships with neighboring Bantu farming communities.
    - In 1904 the St. Louis World’s Fair put Ota Benga, a Mbuti man from the Congo, on display in its anthropology exhibit, and in 1906 the Bronx Zoo caged him in its monkey house until Black ministers forced his release. He died by suicide in Lynchburg, Virginia, in 1916. See Society, Class, and Race.
    - Ancient Egyptian civilization, emerging around 3100 B.C. after the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt, thrived for over 3,000 years along the Nile River. Known for pharaohs, hieroglyphs, and monumental architecture like the pyramids. This

advanced society was sustained by the Nile's predictable floods. The history is divided into Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms. See Ancient Egypt.

    - Irish history spans from prehistoric hunter-gatherer settlements around 10,000 BCE to a modern, independent nation. Defined by Celtic (Gaelic) culture, it endured Viking raids, Norman conquests (1169), and English colonization, leading to the 17th-century Penal Laws, the Great Famine (1845-1851), and 20th-century independence.

- "Battling Joe, champion featherweight, golden cock": "Battling" was a popular ring name in the early twentieth century, carried by fighters such as Battling Nelson and Battling Siki. The featherweight class, set at 126 pounds, sits just above bantamweight.
    - Historical weight classes for boxing are: heavyweight at 200+ pounds, light heavyweight at 168-175 pounds, middleweight at 154-160 pounds, welterweight at 140-147 pounds, lightweight at 130-135 pounds, featherweight at 122-126 pounds, bantamweight at 115-118 pounds, flyweight at 108-112 pounds.
- "a fighter in the Jewish family, beginning with those who had fought the angels": "And Jacob was left alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day" (Genesis 32:24, KJV). The man renamed him Israel, "for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Genesis 32:28, KJV); Hosea says "he had power over the angel, and prevailed" (Hosea 12:4, KJV). Joe's last bout, with God on a peak above the clouds, is Jacob's, and he is losing it. See The Bible, Angels and Archangels, and Judaism.
- "the birth control devices littering the bare ground": Before 1965, birth control in the US relied on barriers, withdrawal, and, later, hormonal methods, with access heavily restricted by the Comstock Act of 1873. Common methods included condoms (vulcanized rubber by 1839), diaphragms, spermicides, and dangerous, ineffective douches marketed as "feminine hygiene." The first oral contraceptive pill was approved in 1960. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "old Phoebe's statue": Old Phoebe was a washwoman, and the Phoebe of the Bible was a servant of the church: "I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea" (Romans 16:1, KJV; the King James spells her name Phebe). The Greek word translated "servant" is diakonos, deacon, and she is the only woman so named in the Bible; Paul trusted her to carry his letter to Rome. Where modern translations of 1 Timothy 3:11 speak of women deacons, the King James Version has "Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things." In Greek mythology Phoebe was a Titaness, grandmother of Apollo and Artemis; the name means bright. See Phoebe, The Bible, Women, Gender, and Marriage, and Greek Mythology.
- "Ephemeral all die at sunset": Mayflies belong to the order Ephemeroptera, from the Greek ephemeros, "lasting a day"; the adults live from a few hours to a day or two. Aristotle wrote of a creature on the river Hypanis that lives a single day. See Death and Mortality.
- "Coleman Bluebough, dead at the age of three": See Coleman Bluebough.

- “Mrs. Abigail Porter, who folded up her tent and crept silently away”: “And the night shall be filled with music, / And the cares, that infest the day, / Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs, / And as silently steal away” (Longfellow, “The Day Is Done,” 1844). See Abigail Porter.
- “there had been thirty rounds”: Glove fights once ran long: on July 4, 1910, in Reno, Jack Johnson, the first Black heavyweight champion, knocked out Jim Jeffries, the “Great White Hope,” in the fifteenth round of a fight scheduled for forty-five. Riots broke out in some two dozen places, most of them white mobs attacking Black Americans; between 11 and 26 people were killed, among them a Black man lynched in Wheeling, West Virginia, for driving an expensive car (Wikipedia). New York’s Walker Law of 1920 capped bouts at fifteen rounds. See Society, Class, and Race and Joe Goldberg.
- “cut down in the flower of their youth”: “He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not” (Job 14:2, KJV). See The Bible and Death and Mortality.
- “taken by the Ghostly Reaper’s sickle”: The Grim Reaper originated in 14th-century Europe, evolving from medieval personifications of death during the Black Death pandemic. Representing the inevitability of mortality, this figure is typically depicted as a skeleton in a dark robe carrying a scythe to harvest souls. It blends ancient mythologies, such as the Greek figure Cronus, with a profound, culturally pervasive fear of the unknown. See the Ghostly Reaper in the Chapter 68 resources. See Death and Mortality.
- “The old grey mule had stood with head hanging over a fence”: See the barren mule in the Chapter 72 resources. See Horses and Carriages.
- “under the frozen cranberry marsh”: A cranberry marsh (or bog) is a specialized wetland habitat where cranberries grow on low-running vines in acidic soil, typically in Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and other northern regions. Contrary to popular belief, they do not grow in water year-round, but are flooded in autumn for harvest, as the berries float, and in winter for frost protection.
- “Something under the green quince”: In the US, green quince are typically under-ripe, hard, and extremely tart, often covered in a fuzzy coating that disappears as they turn golden-yellow in late fall. Primarily grown in California and imported from Chile, these fragrant fruits are available from August through December in specialty, Latin American, or Middle Eastern markets.
- “the old Chicago detective was trying to find the proof”: England’s Act to Prevent the Destroying and Murthering of Bastard Children (1624) presumed that an unmarried mother who hid the death of her newborn had murdered it, unless she could prove “by one witness at the least” that the child was born dead; the penalty was death. It stood until 1803. In Massachusetts Hannah Piggen was reportedly the last woman hanged for concealing a birth, in 1785 (Wikipedia). Concealment of birth is still a crime in many states. See The Chicago Detective, Women, Gender, and Marriage, and Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.

- “the flowering horse chestnut, the bloody flower”: The horse chestnut, introduced to the US from Europe in the 1700s, is a popular, large ornamental shade tree featuring showy white spring flowers, palmately compound leaves, and inedible, shiny brown nuts enclosed in spiky, green husks. Common in urban landscapes, parks, and the Midwest, these trees thrive in zones 3-7.
- “dead robin redbreast under a ten-foot snowdrift”: See “Who killed cock robin?” and the Babes in the Wood, covered with leaves by robins, in the Chapter 72 resources. See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Birds.
- “she might endure the birth of nothing”: “We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind” (Isaiah 26:18, KJV). See The Bible and Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- “a white feather of some far-flying Arctic bird”: To show the white feather is to show cowardice, from the cockpit, where a white feather in a gamecock’s tail was taken as the mark of a poor fighter. The feather falls for the featherweight, the golden cock. See Birds and Joe Goldberg.

Vocabulary

Astraddle

With one leg on each side; astride.

Bantamweight

In boxing, the class just below featherweight, named for the small bantam chicken.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Biceps

The large muscle at the front of the upper arm.

Bleachers

Cheap, uncovered rows of benches for spectators.

Capacious

Roomy; able to hold much.

Cranium

The skull.

Defile

A narrow pass between mountains.

Deflowered

Robbed of virginity.

Dubiety

Doubt; a feeling of uncertainty.

Emaciated

Wasted away, very thin.

Ephemeral

Lasting a very short time.

Featherweight

In boxing, the class just above bantamweight, long limited to 126 pounds; anything very light.

Fecundate

To make fertile.

Feint

A pretended blow meant to throw an opponent off guard.

Fishmoth

A silverfish, the small wingless insect that eats paper and starch.

Imponderable

Something that cannot be measured, weighed, or judged.

Ironmonger

A dealer in hardware.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Lustrous

Shining with a soft glow.

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Moldering

Slowly crumbling into decay.

Ossified

Turned to bone; hardened.

Palpable

Able to be touched or felt; plain to see.

Perineal

Of the perineum, the area between the genitals and the anus.

Pinioned

Held or bound fast, especially by the arms.

Progeny

Offspring.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Robust

Strong and healthy.

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard. Spar is also the name for certain shiny, easily split crystalline minerals, such as Iceland spar.

Sunbonnet

A wide-brimmed cloth bonnet that shades the face and neck.

Superfecundation

The fertilizing of two or more eggs from one cycle in separate acts of intercourse, so that twins may have different fathers.

Undulating

Rising and falling in waves.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Vagaries

Unpredictable changes or whims.

Vagary

A whim; an odd notion.

Visitant

A visitor, especially a ghostly or supernatural one.

Washwoman

A woman who takes in washing for pay.

Wraith

A ghost; a faint, pale shape.

Chapter 74

Content note: *The Esther Longtree chapters (72 to 81) deal with stillbirth and pregnancy loss, rape, infanticide, racist violence including lynching, and cruelty to children. This chapter is one of the hardest in the novel: Esther describes being raped, three winters running, by the Chicago detective, who found her unconscious in the fields.*

Summary

Esther dreads the trial she expects next autumn, when the town's women will crowd the courthouse to accuse her and she will be unable to produce the three children the Chicago detective says she killed. Her worst mistake, she thinks, was writing to him, a father who was not dying. Three winters, hunting a man who had killed several wives, he found her lying in the frozen fields and took her for a corpse; he felt her pulse, found her heartbeat, and raped her, leaving his eye-glasses, his calling card, a bone button, a thread, and "the frozen conception" behind. He came once as a locksmith, once as a soap salesman, once as himself, and told her he was partly wax. When she wrote that she needed an abortion he sent her the name of an abortionist under police protection; now he accuses her of murdering his children. She sets her shame beside a man's freedom to boast of his bastards, waxes like the slow moon, and speaks of the murder of her heart when she was young. A small, warped child's hand lies across her womb, and her own childhood reproaches her.

Characters present

Esther Longtree · The Chicago Detective · Esther's Father

Concepts present

Themes: Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Fear and Courage · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Identity and the Self · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth · Society, Class, and Race · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Horses and Carriages · Moon and Stars · Pregnancy, Birth, and Children · Roses and Flowers · Snow, Ice, and Winter · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Marguerite Young on Her Craft

Allusions: Angels and Archangels · Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Judaism · Music and Composers · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · Revelation and the Apocalypse

Key passages

From the research

- Esther expresses her dread and isolation as she anticipates a courtroom trial, where she will be accused and misunderstood by a crowd of women who will judge her harshly without truly understanding her. It underscores her loneliness and the societal scrutiny she faces, as well as the impossibility of defending herself against accusations about her maternity and morality.
- The detective's repeated, disguised appearances and his cold, investigative demeanor create a haunting, almost spectral presence in Esther's life. He is both the father of her stillborn children, by rape, and the figure who pursues her in the law, embodying both violation and threat.
- The narrative of the detective's rape of Esther is described with a mixture of detached observation and emotional complexity. The experience is both a physical violation and a symbolic act that precipitates her ongoing "pregnancy" with stillborn children, both literal and metaphorical.
- The motif of being "always pregnant" with stillborn children recurs throughout this chapter. This is also tied to her physical and emotional condition, which isolates her further.
- Esther contrasts her own suffering and social condemnation as a woman with the freedom and impunity of men, highlighting societal hypocrisy and the loneliness of her position.
- Esther traces her sorrows to "the murder of her heart when she was young."
- Despite the external pressures, accusations, and her own confusions, Esther claims a mysterious, almost radiant identity, self-sufficient and brooding, unwilling to explain herself to anyone.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "She had felt as if a candle burning had raped her." What does the candle say about a man who calls himself "partly wax"?
- "He was a Christopher Columbus in the world of the dead." What does Esther mean?
- "What would happen would be worse than what would not happen." What does Esther fear most?

Characters

- The detective felt her pulse, found her heartbeat, and then raped her. Why does Esther say "She had not felt violated"?

- “He had solved all life’s mysteries but his own, the one he was creating then.” What is his own mystery?
- Esther wrote to the detective “as if she had resisted.” Why does she change the story in her letters?

Connections

- “A man could have gone off whistling after he had done something wrong.” Where else in the novel do men go off whistling?
- Esther goes on “dragging the stars after her.” How is she like the woman with child in Revelation 12?
- “A woman abortionist who enjoyed police protection” is offered by the very detective who now accuses Esther of murder. What does that say about the law?

Reflection

- “Conception was always a secret to the mother, too, as well as to the father.” Is that still true?
- “Who was innocent? Who was guilty?” How would you answer for Esther?
- “Her own childhood reproached her.” What might have happened when she was young?

Research: Characters

Esther Longtree

- The protagonist, a woman who is perpetually pregnant yet burdened with loss and mystery.
- She is introspective, lonely, and caught between hope and despair.
- She fears legal prosecution and societal judgment but is also fiercely protective of her own narrative and secrets.

The Chicago Detective

- The father of Esther’s children: three winters he found her unconscious in the fields, took her for a corpse, felt her pulse, and raped her.
- He hunts murderers and now accuses Esther of murdering his children, though he himself raped her and sent her the name of an abortionist “who enjoyed police protection.”
- He represents authority, suspicion, and the complexities of truth and guilt.

Esther’s Father (the Policeman)

- Symbolizes familial and societal surveillance and judgment.
- His passive role highlights Esther’s isolation and the inescapability of the small-town environment.

Research: Themes

Motherhood and Loss

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth

- Esther experiences repeated pregnancies that result in stillbirths, symbolizing loss, unfulfilled potential, and emotional trauma.
- Her womb is described as swollen with “empty waters,” a metaphor for hope and despair coexisting.

Societal Judgment and Isolation

See: Isolation and Connection · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Society, Class, and Race

- Esther fears the court trial, anticipating gossip, blame, and misunderstanding from the community.
- She is alienated and misunderstood, with the jury and townspeople serving as a metaphor for harsh societal judgment.

Mystery and Ambiguity

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The narrative blurs reality and memory. Esther’s story is full of mysteries: the paternity of her children, the nature of her pregnancies, and the actions of the detective.
- The repeated motif of “stillborn” children and the detective’s ambiguous role deepen this theme.

Powerlessness and Defiance

See: Fear and Courage

- Despite her vulnerability, Esther exhibits moments of defiance, especially against unfair accusations and societal expectations.
- Her internal world remains rich and complex, even as she is perceived as “crazy” or “mulish.”

The Passage of Time and Memory

See: Memory and the Past · Time

- The cyclical nature of seasons (autumn, winter, spring) parallels Esther's repeated pregnancies and losses, symbolizing the persistence of trauma and hope over time.

Gender and Identity

See: Identity and the Self · Women, Gender, and Marriage

- The text contrasts Esther's experiences with societal expectations of men and women, highlighting gendered double standards, especially concerning sexuality, motherhood, and blame.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Stillborn Children

See: Pregnancy, Birth, and Children

- Symbolize lost potential, grief, and the failure of life to manifest fully.

The Chicago Detective's Bloody Knife

- Represents violence, mystery, and perhaps the intrusion of external forces into Esther's life.

The Old Rosebud

See: Roses and Flowers

- Placed on Esther's body, symbolizing innocence, death, or a token of remorse.

The Seasons (Winter and Autumn)

See: Snow, Ice, and Winter

- Reflect desolation, death, and the cyclical nature of Esther's suffering.

The Small Warped Hand

- "A small, warped, mole-colored hand," a child's hand, laid across her womb and her mouth; it seems tied to "something cold and small and dead that she had seen when she was much younger."

Birds (Blackbirds, Sobbing Bird)

See: Birds

- Represent sorrow, the passage of time, and the fragility of life.

The Shroud with Many Pockets

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts

- Symbolizes the secrets Esther keeps, the hidden aspects of her identity and history.

Research: Resources

- “Esther Longtree had gone on with her expectations”: Esther Longtree in this chapter is portrayed as a profoundly tragic and complex figure, embodying themes of loss, mystery, maternal suffering, and societal judgment. Her character is marked by an overwhelming burden of perpetual pregnancy and stillbirths, an existence both physically and emotionally laden with pain and unanswered questions. Esther’s situation is unique and unprecedented in the legal realm, as she faces the threat of arrest and trial for the disappearance or death of her children: children who may never have been born or who remain unseen by others. She is caught in a web of suspicion and gossip, misunderstood and condemned by her community and the justice system, yet she remains deeply isolated, bearing her sorrow silently and without defense. This isolation is compounded by her physical condition (repeatedly pregnant yet without the relief of childbirth) and by the haunting presence of her absent children, described metaphorically as her “tears” and “stillborn” who haunt her mind and body. Her relationship with the Chicago detective, who is implicated as the father of her lost children, adds layers of complexity and darkness to her narrative. The detective’s repeated appearances (disguised as various characters) are both invasive and inscrutable. Esther’s encounters with him are marked by violence, mystery, and a sense of inevitability: she is raped by him, yet the experience is described with a strange passivity and detachment, as if she were “sleeping in the grass” and indifferent. This rapist-father figure represents a brutal intrusion into her life, one that leaves physical and psychological scars, but also a tangled mystery of conception, conception without life, and lost pregnancies. Esther’s internal world is rich with symbolism and metaphor: the “stillborn” children, the “broken gooseberry bushes,” the “buzzard hanging rounded like a period” all evoke a landscape of death, loss, and unfulfilled potential. Despite her suffering, Esther is radiant and self-sufficient in a strange way, carrying her burden with a stubborn dignity. She is aware of the social judgments (accusations of insanity, immorality, or deceit) but she resists these with a fierce inner knowledge of her own innocence and the mystery of her condition. Her loneliness and estrangement are deeply felt, yet she remains luminous, a figure of both vulnerability and strength. The chapter also explores Esther’s reflections on gender and societal double standards. She contrasts her own experience as a woman burdened with loss and silence to the freedom a man might have in fathering children without consequence or shame. Her pregnancy and stillbirths are not only physical but symbolic of her emotional and existential state: a life marked by “murder of her heart,” repeated disappointments, and unanswered questions about innocence and guilt. Esther Longtree is a character defined by enigmatic suffering, caught between the natural and the supernatural, the legal and the personal. She embodies a tragic

maternal figure whose story is one of loss made visible and invisible, a woman burdened by an unexplainable condition and an unresolvable mystery. Her narrative is steeped in poetic imagery and a haunting sense of inevitability and silence, marking her as both victim and enigma within the novel's broader themes of reality, illusion, and the passage of time. See Esther Longtree.

  - Esther Longtree symbolizes a complex and tragic history of female suffering, loss, and misunderstood maternity that can be read as an allegory for broader historical and social issues in the United States. Her life, marked by repeated pregnancies, stillbirths, and the mysterious disappearance or loss of her children, reflects the harsh realities faced by many women, especially those marginalized or without social support. Esther's experiences evoke themes of abandonment, societal judgment, and the silencing of women's voices, particularly in the context of reproductive rights and maternal health. The narrative describes her perpetual state of pregnancy and loss, the accusations she faces from being called an "old maid" to insinuations of infanticide and her helplessness before the law and community gossip. This represents a history of women's reproductive experiences often ignored or stigmatized by society and legal systems. Her story also touches on the failures of paternal responsibility, as the Chicago detective (a figure of authority) is implicated in her rape and desertion, embodying male cruelty and neglect. Esther's repeated encounters with the detective, who is seeking evidence and truth in a cold, clinical way, symbolize the invasive and often hostile scrutiny women face from institutions. Her isolation in a small town, where every movement is known, contrasts with the anonymity she imagines in a big city like Chicago, highlighting the oppressive small-town social surveillance prevalent in American history. Her story, which is full of loss, silence, and the mystery of unacknowledged or stillborn children, can be seen as symbolizing the broader historical experiences of women who have suffered reproductive trauma, been marginalized in legal and social systems, and whose lives have been shaped by forces beyond their control. The imagery of barren family trees, repeated stillbirths, and accusations of guilt without proof evokes the historical struggles with fertility, motherhood, and female agency in the US. Esther Longtree's history symbolizes the hidden, painful legacies of women's reproductive lives in American history, including issues of maternity, loss, societal judgment, and the often cruel intersection of personal suffering with institutional authority.

- "Her menses had stopped so long ago": Menses, commonly known as a period or menstrual flow, is the monthly shedding of the uterine lining (endometrium) that occurs when a pregnancy does not happen. It is a natural part of the reproductive cycle, typically lasting 2 to 7 days, and is characterized by bleeding from the uterus.
- "to be let alone outside the pale of law": The Pale was the English-ruled ground around Dublin; to be beyond the pale was to be outside the law and its protection. The Pale of Settlement (1791 to 1917) was the land at the western edge of the Russian Empire where Jews were forced to live. See Judaism.

- “All the women would flock to the courthouse in droves”: Andrea Dworkin wrote the book Right Wing Women that examined how women are exploited by right wing, conservative politics. They answer women’s fears about their place in the world with offers of chivalrous protection within the domain and under the control of men through patriarchal structures such as the male head of household. It reassures women that they do not need to change the status quo, but accept it, and take whatever access to power is given, almost exclusively along gender defined norms. When these women see other women flaunting these gender norms, they bond with their fathers, husbands or father-figures to form a power base through misogyny, the enforcement branch of patriarchy, to bring the status quo back in force. Right-Wing Women was published in 1983. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “an old maid plucking at a daisy’s petals”: “He loves me, he loves me not.” In French the game is effeuiller la marguerite, plucking the daisy, and marguerite is the French for daisy. See Roses and Flowers and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “a crazy old mule in heat”: See the barren mule in the Chapter 72 resources and the Chapter 73 resources. See Horses and Carriages.
- “little white faces propped on ice floes”: See Exploration and the Poles.
- “the captain of a Great Lakes steamer”: The Great Lakes Storm of November 1913, the worst on record, wrecked nineteen ships and sank twelve, several with all hands; about 250 sailors died. See The Sea and Water.
- “some old preacher or jack-in-the-pulpit”: The jack-in-the-pulpit is a woodland wildflower whose spadix stands under a hooded spathe like a preacher in his pulpit; the Johnny-jump-up is the wild pansy, the four o’clock opens in late afternoon, and shepherd’s purse is named for its heart-shaped seed pods. See Roses and Flowers.
- “a Chicago detective and specialist in murder mysteries”: The Chicago Detective can be understood symbolically as a representation of a police state or police corruption through several layers of meaning revealed in the novel. See The Chicago Detective.
    - The Chicago Detective appears as an omnipresent, persistent figure who repeatedly pursues Esther Longtree, the woman at the center of a murder mystery involving unknown children and dark accusations. He comes “three times in three different years” looking for evidence and never finds the murderer but consistently finds Esther herself, lying vulnerable and exposed. His repeated visits and obsessive investigations suggest an invasive, overreaching authority typical of a police state that monitors and controls individuals without clear cause.
    - Esther Longtree’s experience with the Chicago Detective is marked by fear and victimization. She is “raped” by him in a mysterious way, leaving behind “evidence, the symptoms, the signs” (his “eye-glasses, his calling card, a bone button, the frozen conception, a thread, and a single spot of brown blood”) which haunts her. This portrayal aligns the detective with a corrupt or abusive power that violates personal boundaries and fabricates or misuses evidence to persecute the vulnerable.

    - The Detective's attitude toward "white" versus "black" deaths underscores a racial bias, a hallmark of systemic police corruption and institutional racism. In Chapter 77, "he only dealt with the deaths of little white children, for the deaths of the little black children were not his business, there being so many and so unimportant." This selective interest in victims based on race symbolizes the partiality and injustice within a corrupt police system.
    - The Detective is described as one who "had solved all life's mysteries but his own" and "crept in among murderers and had gotten their confessions by confessing his own imaginary crimes." He is trapped in a cycle of investigating crimes, yet he himself is implicated in the system's violence and injustice. This reflects the idea of a police state where the enforcers are both agents and victims of systemic oppression, unable to escape the machinery they uphold.
    - The detective's inability to find the true culprit yet his readiness to implicate Esther Longtree highlights the paranoia and miscarriage of justice prevalent in such systems.
    - The detective's "many murder cases" and obsession with "quiet mysteries" where "there had never been a body" (Chapters 76 and 77) symbolize not only literal crimes but the suppression or erasure of truths inconvenient to those in power. The recurring motif of "quiet, quiet murders" points to systemic silencing and cover-ups typical in corrupt regimes.
    - The detective is associated with "old evidence staring, new evidence, trampled grass," and "a clue which led nowhere" (Chapters 76 and 68). This suggests the manipulation or fabrication of evidence which is a central tool of police corruption to maintain control or silence dissent.
    - The detective threatened Esther Longtree with legal persecution and exposed her to the scrutiny of a judgmental society. This intertwines with the theme of social control exercised by authoritarian entities that use fear and punishment to maintain order.
    - The Chicago Detective functions symbolically as an embodiment of police state oppression and corruption. He is a figure of invasive surveillance, racial bias, miscarriage of justice, and systemic violence. His relentless pursuit of a vulnerable woman, selective concern for victims based on race, and role in perpetuating a cycle of unending investigation without resolution all reflect the mechanisms by which a police state enforces control through fear, misinformation, and partiality. The Detective's character exposes the tragic human consequences of living under such a regime, where truth is elusive and justice is compromised.
- "a man who had killed several wives": In Perrault's Bluebeard (1697) a husband murders wife after wife. Chicago had its own: Johann Hoch, the "Stockyard Bluebeard," married at least 55 women between 1890 and 1905, poisoning many with arsenic, and was hanged in Chicago in 1906. See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- "his eye-glasses, his footprints, too, his calling card": These are all clues used in famous mystery novels. The Golden Age of Detective Fiction (roughly 1913-1939) was

an era between the World Wars defined by polite, “whodunit” puzzle mysteries, primarily featuring British writers like Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, and Ngaio Marsh. These stories favored intellectual, fair-play clues over violence, often set in closed circles like country houses, focusing on solving the murder rather than dark, psychological grit. The “closed circle” of suspects, “fair play” (all clues provided to the reader), and the focus on the “whodunit” puzzle. Iconic characters from this time period: Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, Lord Peter Wimsey, Perry Mason, and Philip Marlowe. E.C. Bentley’s Trent’s Last Case (1913) is often cited as the beginning, with Christie’s The Mysterious Affair at Styles (1920) setting the standard. The Detection Club, founded in 1930, established “rules” for the genre, such as no faked clues or supernatural solutions. The stories offered escapism, featuring a return to order after a “sanitized” version of murder, often reflecting a desire to move past the trauma of World War I. While often associated with the British “cozy” style, the era also saw the rise of American “hard-boiled” fiction. American hard-boiled detective fiction is a gritty, unsentimental subgenre emerging in the 1920s-30s, defined by cynical private eyes, urban corruption, fast-paced dialogue, and brutal violence. Pioneered by Dashiell Hammett and perfected by Raymond Chandler, these stories moved away from genteel puzzles to realistic crime, often published in pulp magazines like Black Mask.

    - During the Golden Age of Detective Fiction, eyeglasses generally symbolized intellectualism, keen observation, or a specific social, physical, or moral state. They were used to signify a character’s scholarly status, wealth, or, in some cases, to conceal identity or suggest a hidden, vulnerable, or untrustworthy nature.
    - In the Victorian and Golden Age eras, footprints functioned as vital, often clichéd, forensic evidence used to reconstruct a crime scene in the absence of advanced, systematic fingerprinting. They served as a tangible link between a suspect and the crime, often revealing clues about the perpetrator’s physical characteristics, movement, and identity.
    - A calling card, also known as a visiting card, generally refers to two distinct concepts: a social tool of the Victorian/Edwardian era and a signature item left by a criminal at a crime scene.
    - A thread as a clue refers both to a literal, physical object and, metaphorically, to the clue which guided a detective through the “labyrinth” of a crime, originating from the Greek myth of Theseus and Ariadne.
- “a moss rosebud brown as a mushroom”: The moss rose, its buds furred with green moss, was a favorite of Victorian gardens. See Roses and Flowers.
- “ringing, ringing, ringing in his ears”: During Esther’s part in the book the repetition of three words appears as if Esther has a stutter. In rhetoric, epizeuxis is the repetition of a word or phrase in immediate succession, typically within the same sentence, for vehemence or emphasis. A closely related rhetorical device is diacope, which involves word repetition that is broken up by a single intervening word, or a small number of intervening words. As a rhetorical device, epizeuxis is utilized to create an emotional

appeal, thereby inspiring and motivating the audience. However, epizeuxis can also be used for comic effect.

- “He had despoiled the withered flowers”: To deflower and to despoil: Esther was “deflowered” in the graveyard in the Chapter 73 resources.
- “a bone button, the frozen conception”: A bone button as a clue generally signifies a crucial, mundane, and often overlooked piece of physical evidence that identifies a suspect based on their social standing, clothing, or actions. In the “Golden Age” of detective fiction, such items were used to show how a killer could be convicted by a small, everyday object rather than just fingerprints or bloodstains.
- “She had felt as if a candle burning had raped her”: The detective is “partly wax,” and later “his fire was burned out, perhaps had never been. Perhaps there was no candle.”
- “Oh, mother, what have you done with my father?”: Esther’s mother and the passive policeman, “still on their long honeymoon,” appear in the Chapter 72 resources. See Esther’s Father.
- “an abyss into which she might fall, dragging the stars after her”: “And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars: And she being with child cried, travailing in birth. . . . And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven” (Revelation 12:1-2, 4, KJV). The dragon waits to devour her child. See Revelation and the Apocalypse and Moon and Stars.
- “This Chicago detective was creating quite a problem even now”: The detective’s suit “was based upon a real case which happened in Chicago,” which Young read about in a New York paper, “and I wove it into my story” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). See The Chicago Detective and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “He was a Christopher Columbus in the world of the dead”: Christopher Columbus was an Italian explorer and navigator who completed four Spanish-based voyages across the Atlantic Ocean sponsored by the Catholic Monarchs of Spain, opening the way for the widespread European exploration and colonization of the Americas. His expeditions were the first known European contact with the Caribbean, Central America, and South America. See Exploration and the Poles.
    - On Hispaniola Columbus enslaved the Taíno; in 1495 he shipped some 500 to Spain to be sold, and about 200 died on the voyage. In 1500 he was arrested for his cruelty as governor and sent home in chains. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “of the babes who were murdered in the woods”: See the Babes in the Wood in the Chapter 72 resources. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “the poisoned blackbirds falling from the sky”: Blackbird control programs in the US aimed at reducing large roosting populations often involved, albeit with limited success, the use of toxic baits in open or plowed fields. These efforts often caused accidental mortality of non-target wildlife species. See Birds.

- “Where was her lost girlhood?”: On the one hand this can be symbolic and on the other men do perpetrate the majority of the violence against women and other men probably due to men and boys being socialized to accept masculine stereotypes that reinforce violence toward others and themselves. The most dangerous time for a woman is when she is trying to leave an abusive relationship. Gendered thinking about women is that they are supposed to be mysterious and cultivate feminine aspects to be appealing to men. This is sexist in that one would not apply the same statement to men as it is applied to women. Women are not mysterious or impossible to understand but rather there is so little actual data collected and used scientifically, socially or historically about women. It is understandable in this context that men can feel that way since they never hear anything different than the baseline of men applied to everything. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “she had lost her toxic condition”: Toxemia of pregnancy, now called preeclampsia, brings high blood pressure, swelling, and sometimes convulsions (eclampsia); before modern prenatal care it was one of the great killers of mothers. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- “the mark of the gavel on his forehead”: “And the LORD set a mark upon Cain” (Genesis 4:15, KJV). See Genesis.
- “a shroud with many, many pockets”: “Shrouds have no pockets”: what is hidden in life cannot be carried into death. An Italian proverb in English print since 1854, it is also a Yiddish saying. See Judaism and Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “The birth veil had perhaps never been lifted from her face”: A child born with the caul, the birth membrane, over the face was said to have second sight and never to drown; sailors bought cauls as charms. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “Conception was always a secret to the mother”: In many cultures, the discussion of all sexual issues has traditionally been considered taboo, and adolescents were not given any information on sexual matters. Such instruction, as was given, was traditionally left to a child’s parents, and often this was put off until just before their marriage. However, in the late 19th century, the progressive education movement led to the introduction of sex education as social hygiene in North American school curricula and the introduction of school-based sex education. Despite early inroads of school-based sex education, most of the information on sexual matters in the mid-20th century was obtained informally from friends and the media, and much of this information was deficient or of dubious value, especially during the period following puberty, when curiosity about sexual matters was the most acute. This deficiency was heightened by the increasing incidence of teenage pregnancies, particularly in Western countries after the 1960s.
- “some old pecan trees that were brought here from the old world”: The pecan is native to North America, growing wild along the Mississippi and its rivers; “pecan” is an Algonquian word. In the Chapter 72 resources Esther speaks of “the pecan trees that were brought from the old Jerusalem.”

- “a woman abortionist who enjoyed police protection”: Abortion was a crime in Illinois from 1867 until 1973. In Chicago, the historian Leslie J. Reagan found, the state prosecuted chiefly abortionists, most often after a woman had died, and police questioned dying women about their abortionists and lovers to obtain “dying declarations.” Reagan, When Abortion Was a Crime (1997). See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “she had done much lying but no laying”: Young seems to at least in part use Esther to explore the sexual double standard where men who have many sexual experiences are considered studs, while women who have many sexual experiences are considered sluts. A double standard is the application of different sets of principles for situations that are, in principle, the same. Research has found that casual sexual activity is regarded as more acceptable for men than for women. Double standards between men and women can potentially exist with regards to: dating, cohabitation, virginity, marriage/remarriage, sexual abuse/assault/harassment, domestic violence and singleness. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “she was only a silent piano with dusty keys”: In the Chapter 72 resources Esther insists, “I am a white piano.” See Music and Composers.
- “God, she was not mulish!”: Esther insisted that she was not “mulish.” Being mulish means to be stubborn. See Horses and Carriages.
- “A man could have gone off whistling after he had done something wrong”: He “could have bragged about this in a railroad station, how many bastards he had had.” See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “as if she had resisted”: She was “sleeping in the grass” and “unresponsive except to memory”; consent cannot be given asleep or unconscious. See Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.
- “this rape of a sightless child, for this was only one of many”: Esther lay with “her sightless brown eyes staring fixedly at the grey, hovering winter sky.” She calls herself a sightless child, and this rape “only one of many.” See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “She guessed it had all been over too soon”: Young may be referring to rape culture in which rape is pervasive and normalized due to societal attitudes about gender and sexuality. Behaviors commonly associated with rape culture include victim blaming, slut-shaming, sexual objectification, trivializing rape, denial of widespread rape, refusing to acknowledge the harm caused by sexual violence, or some combination of these. Men and women who are victims of sexual violence may not report the assault because of shame, the stigma, not being believed and the criminal justice system. Traumatic memories since there is a heightened emotional response often are remembered as specific details about the event as opposed to false memories. Research shows that forgetting, not thinking about, and even misremembering an assault may be both necessary and adaptive to help survivors cope with their reality. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “Like the slow moon itself”: Esther, “waxing, waxing, never waning” in the Chapter 73 resources, now “waxed, reddish in wind,” like “a scarred, dead, cold, bald planet.” See

Moon and Stars.

- “Her own childhood reproached her”: This section may refer to the death of Esther’s baby when she was young and how that traumatized her even now. Rape has been used as a plot device in literature and other media. It has been criticized for using rape as a metaphor that displaces the actual, violent and traumatic act of rape. It is considered misogynistic in the way female rape victims continue to be cast as collateral damage and the assault and rape of women is used as a plot point in a narrative that is fundamentally about men. Young is making this about Esther and showing how things would be different if she were a man. Young makes many references to mythology. The struggle to escape from sexual pursuit is one of the most popular motifs of Greek mythology: Persephone, Callisto, Daphne, Europa, Io, etc. Greek mythology depicts women as vulnerable to assault, able to escape only through death, or metamorphosis like Daphne who becomes a laurel tree. The consequence of fleeing sexual violence is another type of force on the body, the loss of the human form where women who survive sexual violence become pregnant, and when gods as the rapists, produce a hero child. The Chicago detective takes Esther for a corpse, then feels her pulse, finds her heartbeat, and rapes her. Chione in Greek mythology was said to be so beautiful that she was the object of a thousand men’s desire. Hermes put Chione into a deep sleep with his wand and proceeded to rape her. Since Young has said Esther is the mother of us all and Mr. Spitzer as the father of us all, these could be archetypes for Adam and Eve and possibly Lilith. In On the Origin of the World, part of the Nag Hammadi Library, the rulers of the world rape the earthly Eve, and she bears their children. In the midrash Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, Samael, riding the serpent, seduces Eve and fathers Cain; later Kabbalah makes Lilith, Adam’s first wife, Samael’s bride. The Talmud says that in the years Adam was apart from Eve he fathered spirits, demons, and lilin (Eruvin 18b). See Greek Mythology, Genesis, and Angels and Archangels.

Vocabulary

Abortionist

One who performs abortions.

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Amplitude

Largeness; fullness of size or extent.

Astraddle

With one leg on each side; astride.

Brackish

Of water: slightly salty, as where a river meets the sea.

Burden

The refrain of a song; also a load.

Certitude

Certainty.

Consummation

The completion or fulfillment of something.

Contrition

Deep sorrow for a wrong one has done.

Deflowered

Robbed of virginity.

Despoil

To rob or strip of something valuable.

Discretion

Good judgment; tact in keeping a secret.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Featherweight

In boxing, the class just above bantamweight, long limited to 126 pounds; anything very light.

Foetus

An unborn child.

Gavel

A small mallet a judge or chairman uses to call for order.

Groveling

Crawling on the ground; abasing oneself.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Imploring

Begging earnestly.

Incriminate

To make someone appear guilty of a crime.

Inquest

A legal inquiry, especially into a death.

Insolent

Rude and disrespectful.

Jack-in-the-pulpit

A woodland plant whose flower spike stands under a hooded leaf, like a preacher in a pulpit.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Menses

The monthly flow of blood from the womb; menstruation.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Postscript

A note added after the signature of a letter.

Prowess

Skill or daring, especially in fighting or in love.

Quicksilver

Mercury, the liquid metal; anything quick and shining.

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Rimless

Of eyeglasses, with no frame around the lenses.

Seepage

A slow oozing or leaking of liquid.

Sepulchral

Of the tomb; gloomy and deathly.

Speculative

Thoughtful and wondering; based on guesswork.

Undulating

Rising and falling in waves.

Vaultless

Without a vault or arched roof; open, unbounded.

Zenith

The highest point.

Chapter 75

Content note: *The Esther Longtree chapters (72 to 81) deal with stillbirth and pregnancy loss, rape, infanticide, racist violence including lynching, and cruelty to children. This chapter describes a miscarriage Esther forced by beating her womb, the dead infant thrown into a river, and her dream that her own father fathered it.*

Summary

Vera listens to Esther all morning, perhaps through many mornings. Esther wonders whether she carries a child or a benign tumor, and admits that she told the Chicago detective, who raped her and left her to face the disgrace, that he would be a father when the child was already dead. Long ago, young and frightened, she knelt by the river beating the child in her womb; a fisherman who heard her screams helped her wrap the dead baby in a gunny sack and throw it into the river above the dam. Years later it comes back at night, a mud baby bigger in death than in life, a funeral wreath hanging from its navel, and in her dreams it is the policeman's son: her father was the father. She sets out food on the window sill for a tall child who never comes in, nurses her own hand, and fits two wedding rings on her nipples. The detective now writes that he will prove she murdered his three children. She hopes the coming war, "killing all the men and some of the children," will make one or two old murders matter less.

Characters present

Esther Longtree · The Chicago Detective · Esther's Father

Concepts present

Themes: Dreams and Imagination · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Fear and Courage · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Moon and Stars · Pregnancy, Birth, and Children · Roses and Flowers · Shadows · The Sea and Water · Weddings and Funerals

Allusions: Exploration and the Poles · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Homer's Epics · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · Revelation and the Apocalypse · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, Esther reflects on her condition (her swelling body compared to a “face under water”) and the ambiguity of whether her growth is motherhood or a “benign tumor.” She is simultaneously hopeful and fearful, uncertain whether the growth inside her is a child or a symbol of past trauma and miscarriage.
- A pivotal passage reveals that Esther was raped by a detective who left her to face disgrace alone. Her complex feelings toward the detective (wanting to deceive him, to mystify the “solver of mysteries,” yet also wanting to express her pain) highlight her isolation and trauma. She acknowledges that the child in her womb was already dead when the detective came, underscoring a sense of hopelessness and despair.
- Long ago, young and frightened, Esther knelt by the river “beating the child in her womb” to force out a baby who was “already dead and heavy inside”; a fisherman who heard her screams helped her wrap it in a gunny sack and throw it into the river above the dam. The fisherman wonders if he is dreaming or sunstruck.
- Esther’s recurring nightmares of the dead baby who “would come floating back to her” in various forms (mud baby, seed, star) serve as a powerful motif for unresolved grief and memory. The child is both “ugly” and “beautiful,” “bigger in death than it had been in life,” representing how trauma continues to grow and haunt her psyche despite physical absence.
- The chapter explores Esther’s suspicion that her own father, the policeman, might be the father of the dead child, a deeply disturbing and taboo notion. The imagery of the funeral wreath and the policeman’s whistle evokes a chilling connection between family, authority, and violation.
- Despite her losses, Esther yearns for motherhood and imagines children flocking around her. She tries to nurture an “eldest son” who never comes indoors, hiding food for him and hoping for his return.
- Esther’s fear of going to court, accused of murdering her children, is a critical passage that highlights her vulnerability and the social stigma she faces. The detective’s threatening letters and the possibility of being blamed for deaths without physical evidence deepen her anxiety and sense of injustice.
- The metaphor that once made pregnant by a man, Esther “was always bearing his children ever afterward,” underscores the cyclical and inescapable nature of her trauma.
- Toward the end, Esther’s stubbornness and refusal to explain herself unless compelled reveal her resilience and complexity. She hopes for a future free of past shadows and miscarriages, longing for the happiness and fulfillment that motherhood might bring, despite the chaotic and painful history she carries.
- The closing lines reflect on the coming war and its capacity to kill “all the men and some of the children,” suggesting that in the larger scale of human suffering, Esther’s

personal tragedies might seem insignificant.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “She had the miscarriages, and other women had the carriages.” What does the pun reveal?
- Esther says “her tears were her children.” What does she mean?
- “A woman of her character preferred uncertainty, the great question mark.” Why would she?

Characters

- In her dream the mud baby “was the policeman’s son, and her father was the father.” Why does this child, alone among the stillborn, keep coming back?
- The fisherman “was not sure he himself was not dreaming.” Why does he never speak of it again?
- The tall child is “one who was not dead, one who called her mother.” Who is he?

Connections

- The mourners enter “through the ivory portals.” In Homer, false dreams pass through the gate of ivory. Is Esther’s dream true or false?
- The detective’s “wife said that he was sterile.” How does that change his accusation?
- “If she was made pregnant once by a man, she was always bearing his children ever afterward.” How does this explain the “little detectives”?

Reflection

- “The only anguish would be the anguish of knowing entirely what was so.” Is uncertainty ever a mercy?
- “Nothing had been washed away.” What cannot be washed away?
- “One or two old murders should not have mattered so much” with a war coming. Does a war make private grief smaller?

Research: Characters

Esther Longtree

- The protagonist of this chapter; a woman burdened by miscarriages, trauma, and social suspicion, yet clinging to hope and faith.

The Chicago Detective

- A figure of violence and threat; he raped Esther and later accuses her of murder.

The Fisherman

- A compassionate figure who helps Esther dispose of a stillborn child and never speaks of it again. Fishing with a red geranium for bait, he had just seen “another stillborn, almost exactly like this,” and was “not sure he himself was not dreaming.”

Esther’s Father

- The night policeman. Esther “loved her father from a distance,” and in her dream the mud baby is his son.

Mud baby

- The “mud baby” is one of Esther’s stillborn children, soft as a marsh butterfly. Young and frightened, she beat the child in her womb to force out a baby “already dead and heavy inside”; she wanted to bury it in the mud, but the fisherman wrapped it in a gunny sack and put it into the river “so that it would be washed away.” It returns in her dreams “bigger in death than it had been in life,” swollen and covered with mud and brambles, with “awful starlight which was not starlight” on its face. It would “come floating back to her in the roar of dreams” and “spread its fingers wide,” made of “glass, twigs, brambles, mud, sand, starlight.”
- The mud baby is linked ambiguously to the men in her life, including her father, a policeman, and a detective who raped her. A funeral wreath hangs from its navel, and its male organs are hidden from the moonlight, signs of the secrecy, shame, and societal judgment she faces. She nurses her own hands to soothe pain and fits wedding rings on her nipples, and she lives with a “great question mark.”

Tall Child

- The tall child is not the mud baby. He is “her other, other, other child, one who whistled at the window, one who wore no funeral wreath, one who was not dead, one who called her mother.”
- He is “her eldest son, her little boy who would not come in out of the darkness, who would not eat, who said he did not trust his mother.” Each night, even in sub-zero weather, she sets food on the window sill for him: cold cereal, old bones, toast stolen from the restaurant, apples, cheese. “But there was never the print of a tooth.”
- Her mother scolds her for hiding bread under her pillow and apples everywhere, not knowing whom the food is for.

Research: Themes

Motherhood and Loss

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth

- Esther is pregnant but plagued by miscarriages and stillborn children, some of whom return as haunting apparitions in her dreams.
- The passage frequently contrasts the physical reality of her miscarriages with her emotional and spiritual yearning to be a mother.
- The idea of motherhood is both a source of hope and despair; she desires motherhood passionately but is tormented by repeated loss.

Grief and Trauma

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Esther's grief is pervasive and seems untethered, wandering like a ghost over a vast emotional landscape.
- She experiences violent trauma, including rape by a detective, which deepens her sense of disgrace and isolation.
- Her memories are fragmented and filled with uncertainty, reflecting the trauma's impact on her sense of reality.

Memory and Uncertainty

See: Memory and the Past

- The narrative is marked by confusion between what is real and imagined. Esther questions whether the growth in her womb is a benign tumor or a conscience.
- She struggles with uncertainty about the paternity of her children and the reality of her experiences.
- The recurring motif of "the little shadow boxer" symbolizes this uncertainty and elusive truth.

The Body and the Supernatural

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- Esther's body is a site of suffering and mystery; her miscarriages are described in surreal terms (e.g., "mud baby," "marble statue," "ectoplasm").
- The dead babies return as ghostly figures, sometimes walking, sometimes lying in boats, symbolizing unresolved grief and the supernatural intrusion into her life.

Justice and Injustice

See: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice

- Esther faces suspicion and possible accusation of murder regarding her children.
- The detective who raped her threatens her, accusing her of killing his children, adding a layer of societal judgment and legal peril.
- Her father being a policeman adds complexity to her relationship with authority and justice.

Isolation and Resistance

See: Isolation and Connection · Fear and Courage

- Esther is isolated emotionally and socially, with only vague support from a fisherman and conflicted feelings toward her parents.
- Despite her hardship, she exhibits stubbornness and a refusal to explain or defend herself fully.
- She clings to hope for motherhood and resists being broken by the accusations and losses.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Stillborn Children

See: Pregnancy, Birth, and Children

- Represent loss, guilt, and the haunting past; they return in dreams as a “mud baby,” a “marble statue,” and ghostly figures.

The Funeral Wreath

See: Roses and Flowers · Weddings and Funerals

- Symbolizes death and mourning; it appears on the dead baby and connects to Esther’s fears about paternity and legacy.

The River and Water

See: The Sea and Water

- Associated with cleansing, oblivion, and the passage of time; the river carries away dead babies, symbolizing attempts to escape grief.

The Moonlight and Starlight

See: Moon and Stars · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Juxtaposed images representing the mysterious, supernatural, and elusive nature of Esther’s experience.

The Little Shadow Boxer

See: Shadows

- A mysterious child figure that embodies Esther’s ambiguous feelings about her unborn child and her fractured conscience.

Esther and the Abortion Rights Movement

- Esther Longtree is a complex, symbolic character whose life and experiences can be analyzed in the context of the abortion rights movement in the US.
- Esther Longtree is portrayed as a woman burdened by an “everlasting pregnancy,” haunted by multiple stillborn children, miscarriages, and the symbolic weight of unborn or lost children. She is at once maternal and mysteriously barren, pregnant yet never fully delivering living offspring that the world can recognize or accept. Her pregnancies are often described as “clouded,” “mysterious,” or “stillborn,” and she experiences isolation, societal judgment, and legal threats because of her reproductive history.
- Esther faces accusations, lawsuits, and societal condemnation for the loss or absence of children, implicitly tied to notions of infanticide or abortion. She dreads being brought to court, exposed to public scrutiny, and misjudged by a jury that cannot understand her unique suffering and mystery.
- Esther’s narrative is filled with ambiguity since she does not always know the fathers of her children, nor can she fully explain the fate of her pregnancies. This ambiguity echoes the clandestine and complex nature of abortion and reproductive control for women of her era, especially those marginalized by society.
- Despite her “mulish” stubbornness and physical strength, Esther is powerless against the forces governing her body and fate. She is caught between societal expectations, personal despair, and the biological realities of her reproductive health. Her identity as a mother is fraught with loss, secrecy, and yearning.
- The stillborn children and the “little shadow boxer” under her heart symbolize both the tangible and intangible losses women endure: lost potential lives, societal invisibility, and the emotional and spiritual costs of reproductive control or failure.
- Esther’s fear of legal entanglement, the threat of arrest, and the impossibility of proving her innocence reflect the harsh realities women faced when dealing with unwanted pregnancies or abortions before legal reform. Her case is described as unprecedented, with no legal precedent to protect her.

Historical Context

- Abortion was a criminal offense in most states, punishable by fines, imprisonment, and social disgrace. Laws were stringent, and enforcement was often harsh, particularly for poor or marginalized women.
- Abortions were generally only permitted to save the life of the mother, and even then, access was restricted and dangerous. Women often sought illegal and unsafe

procedures.

- The early abortion rights movement began to take shape in the 1950s and early 1960s, advocating for legal reform to protect women's health and autonomy. Activists challenged the criminalization and pushed for exceptions and ultimately for the right to abortion itself.
- Abortion was associated with moral failure and criminality. Women who had abortions or miscarriages were often stigmatized as sinners or murderers, a theme echoed in Esther's fear of public judgment and legal accusation.
- Esther's secretive pregnancies, miscarriages, and the threat of legal action mirror the precarious position of women in the pre-1964 US abortion context. Her fear of exposure, societal condemnation, and her isolation reflect the lack of support or understanding women faced.
- Esther's case is described as not being covered by any law, highlighting the legal vacuum and absence of rights for women like her before reform. This underscores the historical reality where women had little recourse and were vulnerable to prosecution.
- Esther internalizes and externalizes the stigma attached to reproductive failure, much as women were publicly and privately judged harshly for abortions or miscarriages. The accusations of murder, infanticide, or madness parallel societal responses to women's reproductive choices or misfortunes.
- The narrative portrays figures such as doctors, detectives, and the legal system as intrusive and judgmental, echoing the control and surveillance women's bodies were subjected to, especially regarding reproduction and abortion.
- Esther's uncertain reproductive history, multiple possible fathers, and the surreal quality of her pregnancies evoke the secretive and often misunderstood nature of abortion experiences before legalization, where women's stories were fragmented and hidden. Esther Longtree embodies the tragic, mysterious, and socially fraught experience of a woman caught in the web of reproductive loss, societal judgment, and legal peril characteristic of the era before the first abortion rights reforms in the US. Her story, rich in symbolism and emotional complexity, reflects the harsh realities faced by many women: criminalization, stigma, fear, and isolation. Esther Longtree's character and her narrative can be seen as a poignant, allegorical exploration of the consequences of restrictive reproductive laws and the deep personal and societal costs borne by women in that historical context.

Research: Resources

- "So I listened to Esther Longtree's tale of woe": Esther Longtree in this chapter is portrayed as a deeply tragic and complex figure whose life is marked by sorrow, loss, and an overwhelming burden of maternal suffering. Her narrative is laden with symbolism and a haunting sense of ambiguity between life and death, reality and illusion. Esther is described as a large, swollen woman who is often pregnant or carrying the weight of pregnancies, many of which have ended in miscarriage or

stillbirth. She is physically affected by her experiences, with her body growing and swelling “like a face under water” and her heart “roaring” with pain and confusion. This corporeal imagery reflects her emotional turmoil and the heavy burden she carries. Esther is haunted by the memory of her stillborn children, especially a particular “dead baby” who recurs in her dreams and visions. This child appears as a ghostly, mutable figure: sometimes a mud baby, sometimes a star, sometimes walking and whistling like a policeman (her father). This spectral child embodies Esther’s unresolved grief and the mysterious, painful legacy of her reproductive history. The child’s presence symbolizes the inescapable past that “spread its fingers” into her present, confusing her maternal identity and her sense of reality. Esther’s narrative is fraught with uncertainty about the paternity of her children, including both the living and the dead. She suspects her father, the night policeman, might be the father of one child, which adds a disturbing layer of incestuous implication and deepens her psychological conflict. She also grapples with the menace of a detective who raped her and later threatens her with accusations of murder regarding her lost children. Esther’s sense of guilt and fear is compounded by this external pressure, making her situation even more tragic and isolating. Despite the miscarriages and losses, Esther’s yearning for motherhood remains central to her identity. She imagines herself surrounded by children, calling to them, feeling on the verge of “something big.” Yet, she is tormented by doubts, wondering if what she feels is not motherhood but a “benign tumor,” a metaphor for something unnatural or pathological growing inside her. This tension between hope and despair, life and death, defines her tragic longing. Esther is a stubborn, “mulish” woman who resists explanation or confession. She keeps her pain hidden, crying aloud only when she is sure no one is near. She is wary of judgment and the legal consequences she might face, especially from the detective’s accusations. Her isolation is both physical and psychological, as she navigates a world that neither fully understands nor sympathizes with her. The chapter uses rich, poetic imagery to convey Esther’s inner life: the “quail rustling among the purple shadows,” the “marble children,” the “funeral wreath,” and the “mud baby” all evoke the blending of life, death, memory, and dream. The river motif, with the stillborn children thrown into its current, suggests the flow of time and the attempt to wash away pain and guilt, though ultimately unsuccessfully. Esther’s story reflects broader themes of female suffering, reproductive trauma, and social marginalization. Her experiences are not merely personal but speak to the harsh realities faced by many women, especially those who are poor, vulnerable, and victimized. Her connection to various men (the detective, the policeman father, other “dying fathers”) and her ambiguous reproductive history also hint at societal failures and abuses. Esther Longtree is a profoundly tragic character embodying the painful complexities of motherhood, loss, and survival. She is caught between hope and despair, reality and dream, the past and an uncertain future, her life shadowed by death and the haunting presence of lost children. Her narrative is a poignant exploration of grief, guilt, and the human desire for connection and meaning amid suffering. See Esther Longtree.

- Esther Longtree embodies a deeply tragic and complex symbol of American history, particularly the history of marginalized and dispossessed women who have endured

cycles of loss, violence, and erasure. Her story is a series of miscarriages, stillbirths, and pregnancies marked by trauma and abandonment that can be read as an allegory for the broader historical experiences of women in the United States who have borne the consequences of social neglect, patriarchal oppression, and systemic injustice. Esther's repeated miscarriages and the haunting presence of her dead children symbolize the lost potential and silenced voices of countless women who suffered physical and emotional damage, often in anonymity and without justice. The references to her being raped by a detective, the mysterious paternity of her children including insinuations of incest (her father possibly being the father of one child), and the threat of legal prosecution for supposed murder suggest the historical reality of women victimized by those in power (law enforcement, family patriarchs, and societal structures) that failed or actively oppressed them. Esther's condition (physically swollen, burdened with grief, and haunted by ghostly children) also metaphorically represents the burden of historical trauma that accumulates over generations. Her narrative touches on themes of women's reproductive rights denied or controlled, the stigma and silence surrounding miscarriages and stillbirths, and the societal tendency to blame or shame women for such tragedies. Esther's life reflects the harshness of economic and social hardship, implied by her work as a waitress, her isolation, and the absence of support. Her struggle resonates with the stories of working-class women who faced exploitation and abandonment. Esther Longtree symbolizes the history of American women who have been subjected to violence, reproductive suffering, and social marginalization: a history marked by loss, injustice, and resilience. Through her, Young evokes the silent, painful legacies of many such women, whose experiences are written into the fabric of the nation's troubled past.

- "Often, she pondered upon difficult questions": "...pondered upon difficult questions, some legal, some illegal… often, was raped when there was no one present but a ghostly, mean, mean child… She could not always blame men for her disappointments. Sometimes she blamed the child…" The children ruined her body and "...her raped, wounded sky, the whole world?" During and after pregnancy, a woman's body undergoes significant changes, including increased blood volume and heart rate, breast enlargement, and skin changes like stretch marks. Postpartum, the uterus shrinks, abdominal muscles may separate (diastasis recti), and some muscles may be weakened, potentially leading to urinary incontinence. Other common after-effects include changes in shoe size, wider hips, and hair loss after an initial period of thicker hair. During pregnancy, organs like the uterus, stomach, and intestines are pushed and shifted by the growing fetus to make room. After pregnancy, these organs gradually return to their pre-pregnancy positions over several weeks or months. Vaginal stretching happens as the baby moves down the birth canal. As the baby's head descends, it interacts with the vaginal walls and pelvic floor, causing the tissues and muscles to stretch significantly. Computer models show that some pelvic floor muscles can stretch to more than three times their normal resting length. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.

- “it might be a benign tumor, this growth”: In pseudocyesis, false or phantom pregnancy, a woman believes she is pregnant and her body follows: the menses stop, the belly swells, she feels the child move. Mary Tudor, Queen of England, believed herself pregnant in 1554 and 1555; London rang its bells for a prince who was never born. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “she would be pregnant if the stars fell like leaves upon a rotted world”: “And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind” (Revelation 6:13, KJV). Untimely figs are fruit dropped before it ripens. See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “had not borne witness against herself”: Esther had resisted and not “...borne witness against herself, for it would have been illegal to do so, and her own father was the policeman.” This may refer to the Fifth Amendment in the United States where, Pleading the Fifth, is often used to invoke the self-incrimination clause when witnesses decline to answer questions where the answers might incriminate them. The amendment (1791) says no one “shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself.” See Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.
- “While dangling a red geranium for bait”: A red geranium may be herb Robert (Geranium robertianum), the small wild red cranesbill, also called red robin, stinking Bob, and death-come-quickly; folk magic linked it with luck and fertility. Geranium comes from the Greek geranos, crane, for the beak-shaped seed pods, and in German the plant is Stinkender Storchschnabel, stinking stork’s-bill. Because the stork was already an established European symbol of birth, family, and new babies, people linked the stork’s-bill herb to conception and depicted it alongside storks in folk art. See Roses and Flowers and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “wearing its birth veil like a bridal veil”: See the caul in the Chapter 74 resources. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “They had thrown the stillborn into the river above the dam”: This may refer to the Mississippi Burning Case on August 4, 1964, FBI agents discovered the bodies of three civil rights workers (James Chaney, Michael Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman) buried in an earthen dam on a farm in Neshoba County, MS. The workers had been murdered by members of the Ku Klux Klan and a local deputy sheriff on June 21, 1964, and their bodies were buried within the construction of the dam. The novel was published in 1965. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “perhaps clear to the Gulf of Mexico”: From Indiana the Wabash runs to the Ohio, the Ohio to the Mississippi, and the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest and The Sea and Water.
- “Nothing was brought to light that had been hidden”: Esther reverses the Gospel: “For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad” (Mark 4:22, KJV). See The Bible.
- “Sometimes it was a mud baby”: Mud baby may refer to Tar-Baby in the second of the Uncle Remus stories published in 1881. It is about a doll made of tar and turpentine used by the villainous Brer Fox to entrap Brer Rabbit. The more that Brer Rabbit fights

the Tar-Baby, the more entangled he becomes.The term tar baby has come to refer to a problem that is exacerbated by attempts to struggle with it, or by extension to a situation in which mere contact can lead to becoming inextricably involved. Although the term “tar baby” is documented as coming from a folktale of African origin, its modern meaning in America is different. Many consider tar baby to be a racial term for African Americans. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
    - Joel Chandler Harris, a white Georgia journalist, took the tales from Black storytellers, some of them enslaved on the Turnwold plantation where he worked as a boy, and put them in the mouth of Uncle Remus, a contented old former slave of white Southern fantasy. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “through the ivory portals”: In the Odyssey (Book 19) Penelope says that dreams come through two gates: those through the gate of ivory deceive, those through the gate of horn come true. Virgil sends Aeneas back from the underworld through the ivory gate (Aeneid 6). See Homer’s Epics and Dreams and Imagination.
- “some little windowpeeper”: In the Coventry legend, Peeping Tom, the tailor who looked out at Lady Godiva as she rode naked through the town, was struck blind. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “hear the lovebirds crying for their mother”: See Esther’s lovebirds in the Chapter 72 resources. See Birds.
- “She was the Poles, she guessed”: See Exploration and the Poles and the ice floes in the Chapter 74 resources.
- “she ate geraniums and paper and string”: Pica, the craving to eat things that are not food (clay, chalk, paper, ice, starch), is common in pregnancy and has been described since antiquity; the word is Latin for magpie, the bird that will eat anything. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- “whose little hands had stung like nettles upon her cheeks”: Esther’s mother slapped her as a child. See Esther’s Father and Esther’s parents in the Chapter 72 resources.
- “Was she a maypole or what”: A maypole is a tall wooden pole erected as a part of various European folk festivals, around which a maypole dance often takes place. The festivals may occur in May or Pentecost, although in some countries it is instead erected at Midsummer. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “even if there were no corpses derelicti”: Esther’s “corpses derelicti” mangles corpus delicti, “the body of the crime,” the legal rule that a crime must be shown to have happened before anyone can be convicted of it; she mixes in corpses and derelicts. The phrase is often misread to mean that there can be no murder conviction without a body. See Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.
- “for it was not her business if his wife said that he was sterile”: The detective is married, and he and his wife each say the other is sterile. See The Chicago Detective.
- “the soap salesman’s soap baby”: The Chicago detective once came “as a soap salesman in the winter meadows” (Chapter 74). See The Chicago Detective.
- “It was the world of this creation that was wrong, O’Leary said”: See Justice O’Leary.

- “especially when there was going to be another war soon”: Esther couldn’t understand why anyone would “...bother a poor creature like her… especially when there was going to be another war soon, killing all the men and some of the children, and one or two old murders should not have mattered so much, especially if it was nothing murdered?” This phrase expresses a sense of futility and the overwhelming insignificance of individual tragedies in the face of much larger, impending catastrophes, namely, war and mass death. The “other war” is the Second World War, then coming.

Vocabulary

Amplitude

Largeness; fullness of size or extent.

Benign

Gentle, kindly; of a tumor, not cancerous.

Clammy

Damp, cold, and sticky.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Ectoplasm

The ghostly substance said to flow from a medium in a trance.

Foetus

An unborn child.

Gauze

A thin, transparent fabric.

Graham cracker

A sweet cracker of whole-wheat graham flour.

Gunny sack

A coarse sack of jute or burlap.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Inarticulate

Unable to express oneself clearly.

Inquest

A legal inquiry, especially into a death.

Irksome

Annoying; tiresome.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Maypole

A tall pole wreathed with flowers and ribbons for dancing around on May Day.

Mercurial

Quick and changeable in mood. From the swift Roman messenger god Mercury and the liquid metal named for him.

Misbegotten

Born out of wedlock; badly conceived.

Nettle

A plant with stinging hairs.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Quail

A small, plump ground bird hunted as game.

Tethered

Tied with a rope or chain.

Tremulous

Trembling; quivering.

Chapter 76

Content note: *The Esther Longtree chapters (72 to 81) deal with stillbirth and pregnancy loss, rape, infanticide, racist violence including lynching, and cruelty to children. This chapter deals with infant death and abortion; Esther says she once tried to kill herself, and tells of a girl made pregnant by the police in a jail.*

Summary

Esther wonders whether her successful conceptions were her worst mistakes. She tells of the Chicago detective, who wears disguises and solves every mystery but his own, above all the “quiet, quiet mysteries” where no bodies are missed; he writes that he will track her to her grave if she does not produce his living children. He is still hunting the “bleeding rapist” whose handiwork he found in Esther, and now she says he “had never touched her.” Her stillborn children hover and applaud whenever she lies with a salesman, and a small brown hand closes her womb. She would rather face trial for mass infanticide than for one murder, says she once tried to kill herself, and confesses that in her mother’s womb she murdered her twin by kicking it out too early. Cupid has missed her, though her heart is broken by experience. Fired from teaching school on false charges, she knits and unravels a black hood for a child to be born white as snow, and she is tired of all the men and all the fathers.

Characters present

Esther Longtree · The Chicago Detective

Concepts present

Themes: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Isolation and Connection · Love · Memory and the Past · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · The Sea and Water · Twins and Doubles

Philosophy: Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica · Freud and Jung

Allusions: Ancient Egypt · Angels and Archangels · Astronomy · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Homer’s Epics · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Music and Composers · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · Shakespeare

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, Esther contemplates her past life, realizing that her “successful conceptions” might have been her worst mistakes: her “unfulfilled abortions” and

“many births.” This passage reveals her conflicted feelings about motherhood, conception, and the pain intertwined with creation and loss. She is puzzled by her “last triumphant pregnancy” and the “diffused radiance” she feels despite her troubles. This sets the tone for her psychological and emotional state throughout the chapter.

- The Chicago detective is portrayed as a relentless figure, always uncovering “murders, murders everywhere,” yet unable to solve his own mysteries. He pursues crimes both “quiet” and “loud.” He represents external pressure on Esther, threatening exposure for her alleged crimes concerning his children.
- The Chicago detective’s fascination with “quiet mysteries” or murders “where no bodies were missed” parallels Esther’s own experience with stillborn children and miscarriages. The notion that murder and loss can be silent, unrecorded, and unseen reflects Esther’s hidden suffering and the societal invisibility of her pain.
- A poignant passage details how Esther perceives her numerous stillborn children as “robed, bloodless,” hovering between life and death, sometimes applauding her “act of intercourse.”
- Esther’s thoughts on being accused, tried, and perhaps imprisoned reveal her resignation and complex acceptance of her circumstances. She contemplates the “mass infanticide” she might be charged with and paradoxically finds a form of comfort in the vastness of her “cosmic” evidence: her body, nature, and memories.
- Towards the end, Esther wonders why Cupid, the god of love, has “missed her,” even though her heart is broken.
- The closing passages describe Esther’s daily life bound by routine yet wild and free in spirit, marked by visions of birth and death, presences and evidence everywhere she goes. Despite her hardships and the looming threat of trial, she holds onto a flicker of hope and purpose, knitting and unraveling a black hood symbolizing night and birth.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “There were always two ways of cruelty.” What are the two?
- “She was always knitting and unravelling the black hood for one who would be born as white as melting snow.” Why black, and why unravel it?
- “Her children were snowflakes drifting in eternity, were leaves, were tears.” What do the three images share?

Characters

- Now Esther says the detective “had never touched her” and “was no more than a mistaken father.” How does this square with Chapter 74?
- The detective hunts “the bleeding rapist” and finds “his handiwork, Esther Longtree.” Whose handiwork?

- “She had tried to kill herself.” Why does Esther say it so quietly, between other thoughts?

Connections

- Esther “had murdered her twin by kicking it out early.” How does this echo the Spitzer twins?
- Like Penelope at her loom, Esther is “knitting and unravelling.” What is she waiting for?
- “Who had not killed cock robin among the fallen autumn leaves?” How has Esther’s answer changed since Chapter 72?

Reflection

- “There were some little boys who were murderers, too, and killed their mothers, but it was only because their mothers had already killed them.” Is that fair to the mothers?
- “Her heart had been broken by experience.” Can experience break a heart as love does?
- “She was guilty of some kind of crime.” Why does Esther feel guilty even where she is innocent?

Research: Characters

Esther Longtree

- A complex woman, described as pregnant and burdened with past conceptions that were either miscarriages or stillbirths.
- She is reflective, brooding on her life’s mistakes and her uncertain relations with the detective and the many men (salesmen) she encounters.
- Esther is maternal yet haunted, caught between hope and despair, and struggles with her identity and the accusations she faces.

The Chicago Detective

- An enigmatic figure who has solved countless murders, both loud and quiet, often using disguises and undercover tactics.
- He is relentless and invasive, unable to avoid uncovering dark secrets wherever he goes.
- His interest in Esther is personal, as he believes she has his children.
- He is still hunting “the bleeding rapist” and says he found “his handiwork, Esther Longtree with her clothes torn and her mouth foaming”; yet in Chapter 74 Esther says the detective raped her, and here that he “had never touched her.”
- His presence represents judgment, law, and the relentless pursuit of truth.

Research: Themes

Motherhood and Infanticide

See: Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth

- Esther's experience with pregnancy is fraught with loss, as she has many stillborn or miscarried children, which the detective calls "quiet mysteries."
- The concept of murder is extended metaphorically to include unborn or unconceived children, highlighting complex feelings of guilt and responsibility.

Memory and Guilt

See: Memory and the Past · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice

- Esther is haunted by memories of past events, including her twin's death in utero, her own repeated losses, and her interactions with men.
- These memories induce a sense of guilt, self-accusation, and uncertainty about truth and justice.

Justice and Investigation

See: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice

- The detective's role symbolizes the pursuit of truth and justice, but also the intrusion and exposure of private pain.
- His tireless search uncovers "quiet murders" that society ignores, reflecting on the nature of crime and detection beyond the obvious.

Isolation and Alienation

See: Isolation and Connection

- Esther's internal world is lonely and bleak. She feels persecuted by both the detective and her memories.
- Her physical environment (a messy bedroom, empty cradle) mirrors her emotional and psychological state.

The Feminine and the Unseen

See: Women, Gender, and Marriage

- The narrative explores the unseen aspects of womanhood (miscarriage, stillbirth, and the emotional landscape tied to pregnancy and motherhood) often ignored or silenced in society.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

- Pregnancy and Birth: Symbolizes creation, life, and hope, but in Esther's case, it also represents loss, failure, and mystery. Her "last triumphant pregnancy" is tinged with both anticipation and dread.
- Stillborn Children / Silent Murders: Represent the quiet tragedies that go unnoticed. They haunt Esther and serve as metaphors for lost potential and hidden guilt.
- The Detective's Disguises: His changing appearance symbolizes the fluidity of identity, the hidden truths beneath surfaces, and the persistent nature of truth-seeking.
- Nature (Leaves, Autumn, Flowers, Moths): Recurring natural imagery symbolizes cycles of life and death, decay and renewal, and Esther's connection to a cosmic order beyond human understanding.
- The Empty Cradle and Wedding Rings: The empty cradle signifies lost children and unfulfilled motherhood, while wedding rings on Esther's nipples but not her fingers suggest a distorted or incomplete domestic/marital identity.

Research: Resources

- "Poor Esther Longtree, who might be killed by little Johnny-jump-up": Esther Longtree emerges in this chapter as a deeply tragic and complex figure, embodying themes of fertility, loss, sorrow, and marginalization. Her character is portrayed with a rich, symbolic density that reveals much about her internal struggles and her relationship to the world around her. Esther is described as physically large, often pregnant or swollen, with features like a long nose and crossed eyes, evoking a somewhat grotesque yet poignant image. She is burdened by repeated pregnancies, many of which end in stillbirths or miscarriages. This physical condition mirrors her emotional state: she is exhausted, confused, and isolated, caught in a cycle of hope and despair. Her body and mind are both "clouded" and "indistinct," reflecting her fragmented sense of self and history. Esther's experience of pregnancy and motherhood is fraught with sorrow and complexity. She carries numerous "stillborn children," described almost as ghostly presences hovering around her, watching her with innocent smiles and applause, yet also causing her pain and distraction during intercourse. These spectral children symbolize her lost potential for motherhood and the deep trauma of repeated loss. She does not reject these children but claims them as hers, showing a profound maternal attachment despite the pain they bring. However, this attachment is intertwined with guilt and confusion, as she contemplates the nature of her past conceptions and births. Esther is entangled with a Chicago detective who is aggressively pursuing proof of his paternity of her children. This detective symbolizes the harsh, intrusive forces of society, law, and judgment. Esther fears his investigations, seeing them as threats that could expose her to legal and social punishment. Yet at the same time, she contemplates the possibility of the trial with a strange blend of hope and resignation, almost welcoming the exposure as a form of acknowledgment of her suffering and existence. This ambivalence highlights her

isolation and the precariousness of her position as a woman burdened by reproductive tragedy and societal scrutiny. The chapter frequently returns to motifs of birth and death, conception and miscarriage, seen both literally and metaphorically in Esther's story. She is described as knitting and unravelling a black hood, symbolizing the night and mystery surrounding her existence. Her pregnancies are "clouded," and her children are often invisible or spectral, linking her personal tragedy to broader cosmic or existential mysteries. Esther's life is likened to an "empty coffin on the water," merging images of life and death, presence and absence. This symbolism situates her story within larger themes of loss, fate, and the unknowable forces shaping human experience. Despite her suffering, Esther exhibits a kind of wildness and defiance. She runs, she laughs, she knits, she endures. She is "wilder than people thought," living a life bounded by routine but also marked by moments of freedom and rebellion. Her laughter in the face of the detective's threats and the looming trial shows a resilience and complexity that defy simple victimhood. Esther's narrative is one of survival amid despair, of a woman caught between social condemnation and her own intricate inner world. Esther's experience is deeply intertwined with natural imagery: autumn leaves, winter bees, snowflakes, mists, rivers, and stars. These elements emphasize the cosmic scale of her suffering and the universality of her predicament. Her children are likened to "snowflakes drifting in eternity" and "robed" children and "old cherubim," linking personal loss to the eternal cycles of life and death. This connection to nature and the cosmos reinforces the mystical and tragic dimensions of her character. Esther Longtree is a richly drawn figure whose story encapsulates themes of loss, fertility, maternal anguish, societal judgment, and existential mystery. She is at once vulnerable and resilient, tragic and wild, caught in a liminal space between life and death, hope and despair. The chapter paints her not merely as a victim but as a complex woman grappling with profound personal and cosmic questions, embodying the novel's broader exploration of human suffering and endurance. See Esther Longtree.

- Esther Longtree symbolizes a deeply tragic and complex history of fertility, loss, and maternal suffering that can be read as a metaphor for the burdens borne by many women across American history, particularly those marginalized or caught in cycles of neglect and violence. Her character embodies the pain of countless stillbirths, miscarriages, and unfulfilled pregnancies, reflecting a history of loss not only of children but of potential, hope, and future generations. Esther's experience of repeated pregnancies resulting in stillborn or unconceived children, her reflections on the silent, "quiet mysteries" of death without visible bodies, and her haunted sense of guilt and accusation evoke a history of women's reproductive struggles often ignored or misunderstood in society. She is portrayed as carrying the weight of many unborn or lost children "snowflakes drifting in eternity," "leaves," "tears" symbolizing not only personal loss but perhaps collective losses related to the harsh realities of life for women who have been abandoned, mistreated, or rendered invisible by legal and social systems. Esther's sense of persecution, threatened by a detective's pursuit to uncover her "children," parallels the historical scrutiny and moral judgment women have faced regarding their reproductive lives, particularly those who have suffered trauma or have been entangled in social and legal conflicts

about motherhood and fertility. Her uncertainty, her tangled memories, and the spectral presence of her many lost children evoke a history marked by silence, stigmatization, and the often invisible consequences of violence, both physical and societal, against women. Esther Longtree symbolizes the historical narrative of reproductive suffering and the silenced tragedies of many American women, embodying themes of loss, survival, and the complex interplay between personal history and broader social forces in the United States. Her story reflects a history of pain and resilience, maternal sacrifice, and the haunting presence of what is lost or denied in American society.

- “her pupa, her Little Tom Thumb”: Little Tom Thumb may refer to Tom Thumb, a character in English folklore. The History of Tom Thumb was published in 1621 and was the first fairy tale printed in English. Tom Thumb may have been a real person born around 1519, as there is a grave purporting to be his. The grave measures just 16 inches in length. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “to bring life into this sad, mistaken world”: This is a deeply personal, philosophical, and biological question. Despite widespread anxiety about environmental issues, political instability, and suffering, many women continue to choose motherhood. Many believe that creating new life is an act of defiance against despair, bringing love, joy, and potential for positive change into the world. They may believe they can raise children who will contribute to fixing the world’s mistakes, acting as agents of change. Humans are biologically programmed to reproduce, with hormonal and physiological influences often reinforcing the desire to have children. This desire is frequently described as a powerful, instinctual urge. Having children is often seen as a way to find purpose, share love, and create a deeper, lasting connection with a partner. Women are recognized for their immense resilience and capacity to act as “backbones of communities,” even in difficult circumstances, by nurturing the next generation. Some argue that while the world contains suffering, it also holds immense beauty and joy, and that experiencing life, including its challenges, is worthwhile. Despite the trend toward smaller families, significant social, religious, and familial pressures still exist, urging women to conform to the traditional expectation of having children. For many, the desire to experience motherhood and the unique bond with a child outweighs the perceived risks of the world. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “thin as a comma sleeping in the womb of time”: “There are many events in the womb of time which will be delivered” (Iago, Othello, 1.3). See Shakespeare.
- “He had solved the quiet, quiet mysteries”: Young talked about a section of the book that expanded on Mr. Spitzer’s story where whatever he wanted, even if he did not want it, came to him. It was advised that she remove it from the novel and she did. It seems the story of the Chicago detective has that same pattern. See Joachim Spitzer.
    - The Chicago detective may refer to a French detective from the 1880s, Robert Ledru, who was famous for solving crimes until a murder he was helping to investigate led to proof that he was, in fact, the murderer. Through an experiment conducted by the police it was determined that he suffered from stress and while sleepwalking, if he had access to a weapon, would shoot and kill a person.

- “There were always two ways of cruelty”: The idea that “Nothing could ever seem to happen by itself in one cruel, conclusive way” implies that events, especially traumatic or violent ones, are not simple or linear. Psychologically, this aligns with systemic views of behavior, where one action is often a response to another, and causes are multifaceted. The recognition of “two ways of cruelty” acknowledges that hurt and harm are often reciprocated or that one form of cruelty begets another, reflecting the complexity of human interactions and the difficulty of assigning singular blame.
- “there were some little boys who were murderers, too”: The belief that “some little boys who were murderers, too, and killed their mothers, but it was only because their mothers had already killed them, in quick ways and slow ways” suggests a psychological interpretation of violence as a symptom or consequence of earlier trauma, specifically maternal harm or neglect. This resonates with psychoanalytic and developmental psychology concepts about how early childhood experiences, especially those involving caregivers, profoundly shape emotional regulation, attachment, and later behavior. Children who experience harm, whether physical, emotional, or symbolic (such as neglect or abandonment), may internalize and later reenact these patterns, sometimes violently. The phrase “mothers had already killed them, in quick ways and slow ways” can be interpreted both literally and metaphorically. Psychologically, “killing” here may represent not only physical harm but also emotional or psychological damage such as: rejection, neglect, or emotional unavailability. This “kills” parts of the child’s spirit, identity, or sense of safety. This damage can manifest later in destructive behaviors, including violence towards others, even those closest to the child. The passage underscores the difficulty in attributing simple blame in situations of cruelty and violence. It suggests a cycle where victims may become perpetrators, and cruelty can be both cause and effect. This aligns with psychological understandings of the “cycle of abuse,” where patterns of trauma perpetuate across generations or within family dynamics, making it challenging to identify clear origins or solutions. The sentence carries an existential weight, reflecting on the ambiguity and complexity of human suffering. It challenges the reader to see cruelty not as a straightforward moral failing but as part of a tangled web of pain and reaction. Psychologically, this can be related to the concept of moral injury or the struggle to reconcile acts of harm within relationships that are also sources of love and care. See Freud and Jung.
    - Historical context: Mothers are often blamed for their children’s lives due to historical gender roles that place the burden of child-rearing primarily on them, a phenomenon called mother blaming. This can be seen in societal beliefs, professional fields like medicine and social work, and media, where mothers are assumed to be the cause of their children’s problems, from developmental issues like autism to behavioral problems. This practice overlooks external factors and other contributors to a child’s life and well-being, leading to guilt, shame, and a failure to address underlying issues appropriately. Blaming mothers for their children’s problems, despite gender inequality and lack of support, is a long-standing issue rooted in misogyny and societal expectations. Unequal gender roles

assign mothers the bulk of childcare and emotional labor, creating a standard of perfection that is impossible to meet and leaves them vulnerable to blame.

- “the hangman’s noose or the electric chair”: The electric chair was first used at Auburn Prison, New York, on William Kemmler in 1890; the execution took two jolts and eight minutes. See Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.
- “not like Cleopatra”: Cleopatra may refer to Cleopatra VII Philopator who was Queen of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt and its last active ruler. Her death in 30 B.C., by the bite of an asp smuggled in a basket of figs as Plutarch tells it, is history’s most famous unsolved case of murder or suicide. See Ancient Egypt.
- “a sunken ship of leaden sails and stone hull and stone bells”: See Debussy’s Sunken Cathedral and the drowned city of Ys, whose bells ring under the sea, in the Chapter 59 resources. See The Sea and Water and Music and Composers.
- “the death of the moth”: Virginia Woolf’s essay “The Death of the Moth” (1942) watches a day moth die at a window: “O yes, he seemed to say, death is stronger than I am.”
- “Some new crime would break, loud and noisy”: “Some new crime would break, loud and noisy, and the quiet mysteries would remain quiet forever if that was so.” The U.S. news cycle evolved from a slow, partisan, and highly local system in the early 18th century to a fast-paced, nationalized, and professionalized industry dominated by newspaper chains, radio, and the emergence of network television by the early 1960s. Early Colonial to Early 19th Century: Early journalism focused heavily on international news, which was often weeks or months old by the time it arrived by ship. Newspapers in the 18th and early 19th centuries were often subsidized by political parties or factions, acting as propaganda tools rather than objective information sources. Initially, newspapers were expensive and tailored to political and mercantile elites. Mid-19th Century: The launch of The Sun in 1833 revolutionized news by making it affordable (one cent) and focused on human-interest stories, crime, and gossip, targeting a mass audience. The invention of the telegraph and high-speed steam-powered printing presses in the 1840s enabled news to travel instantly, facilitating the growth of national news stories. The mid-19th century saw the rise of the Associated Press (AP), which allowed for the standardization of national news reporting. Late 19th to Early 20th Century: Publishers like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst engaged in sensationalized, scandalous, and often inaccurate reporting to boost circulation. In response to yellow journalism, the early 20th century saw a shift toward, and demand for, objective, “informed” journalism, exemplified by the New York Times under Adolph Ochs. By 1900, massive newspaper chains, such as the Hearst organization, dominated the landscape. 1920s to 1950s: In the 1920s and 1930s, radio introduced the first “instant” news updates, with major expansion during World War II. The Radio Act of 1927 and the Communications Act of 1934 (creating the FCC) brought standards and licensing to the airwaves. By the 1950s, daily television news began to displace radio and newsreels as the dominant medium, with the “Big Three” networks (NBC, CBS, ABC) dominating the airwaves. The news cycle was defined by the daily morning or evening newspaper and the nightly 15-to-30 minute evening news broadcast (e.g., CBS Evening News with Walter Cronkite). Audiences relied on a few

trusted figures to interpret major events, such as the Cold War, the Civil Rights movement, and the Kennedy assassination. The 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debate, televised to 70 million viewers, highlighted the shift toward image-driven, nationalized media, setting the stage for the intense, image-focused coverage of the mid-1960s.

- “who hovered at the ivory gates between life and death”: See the gates of horn and ivory in the Chapter 75 resources. See Homer’s Epics.
- “little policemen with funeral wreaths, little windowpeepers with blinded eyes”: The mud baby with its funeral wreath, “the policeman’s son,” and the little windowpeeper are in the Chapter 75 resources.
- “Even when the ejaculation of the male organ had fallen upon the empty air”: “And Onan knew that the seed should not be his; and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother’s wife, that he spilled it on the ground” (Genesis 38:9, KJV). The LORD slew him for it. See Genesis.
- “to other little salesmen”: The salesmen characters in the novel may symbolically reflect various aspects of capitalism in the US through their behaviors, roles, and the social contexts they inhabit.
    - The salesmen appear repeatedly throughout the novel in different guises, selling a wide range of goods, from everyday objects like brooms, bird cages, and toys, to more abstract commodities like stocks and bonds. Their omnipresence symbolizes the reach of capitalist commerce into every facet of life, even into the most personal and intimate spaces of the characters. They reflect the diversity and saturation of market interactions in American life.
    - The salesmen often embody the pressures, anxieties, and instabilities caused by the capitalist system. Many salesmen in the novel are depicted as transient, struggling, or lost figures, highlighting the precariousness and alienation experienced by those caught in the capitalist economy. They symbolize the vulnerability of individuals within a capitalist society.
    - The salesmen also represent the commodification of human relations and the alienation inherent in capitalism. They sell not only material goods but also intangible things like securities and futures, connecting to themes of speculation and the illusion of wealth. This commodification extends to human relationships, as seen in the metaphor of the salesmen interacting with stillborn children or lost souls, symbolizing how capitalism can reduce human value to market transactions and speculative interests.
    - The novel hints at exploitation and inequality through the salesmen’s interactions and the socio-economic backdrop. The salesmen, as agents of this system, are both participants in and victims of such exploitation.
    - The salesmen’s activities also symbolize the illusory and unstable nature of capitalist wealth. The novel repeatedly emphasizes the ephemeral quality of money and possessions: stocks that may be worthless, jewels that may be fake, and transient fortunes. The salesmen’s persistent presence amidst loss, deception, and

uncertainty reflects capitalism's inherent volatility and the elusiveness of material success.
    - The salesmen embody human desires fueled by capitalism: desire for wealth, security, social status, and belonging. However, these desires are often unfulfilled or lead to suffering, as seen in the characters' personal tragedies and the broader social critiques embedded in the narrative. The salesmen's relentless selling and the characters' interactions with them suggest the endless cycle of desire and consumption characteristic of capitalist societies.
    - The salesmen in Miss MacIntosh, My Darling symbolize capitalism in the US by representing its ubiquity, its impact on individuals, the commodification of human relations, capitalist exploitation and inequality, the illusory nature of wealth, and the insatiable human desires it engenders. They serve as embodiments of the economic forces shaping the characters' lives and the social environment of the novel, reflecting both the promise and the perils of capitalist society.
- "no rubber corporation or Wall Street corporation": Esther means she never used a condom. Rubber condoms followed Goodyear's vulcanization of rubber (1844); thinner latex condoms came in the 1920s. Under the Comstock Act of 1873 mailing contraceptives or information about them was a federal crime. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
    - Major firms like U.S. Rubber (1892), Goodyear (1898), and Firestone (1900) emerged to supply tires for the booming automotive industry. The industry has been defined by intense monopolization, the 20th-century shift to synthetic rubber, and, historically, brutal exploitation during the Amazonian boom.
    - In King Leopold II's Congo Free State (1885 to 1908), villagers who failed to meet rubber quotas were flogged, held hostage, and killed, and soldiers cut off hands as proof of the bullets they had used. See Society, Class, and Race.
    - Wall Street originated from a 17th-century Dutch stockade in New Amsterdam, evolving into the center of American finance after 24 brokers signed the Buttonwood Agreement in 1792 to formalize securities trading. It became the nation's financial hub by the late 1800s, growing through industrial expansion, the creation of the NYSE in 1863, and the establishment of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York in 1914.
- "old men like old cherubim with bald, flat heads and pot bellies and winged penises": "The flying penis" refers to the ancient Roman and medieval symbol of the winged phallus, known as fascinus, which was used as a protective charm against evil, infertility, and the evil eye. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica and Angels and Archangels.
- "wearing wedding rings upon her nipples but none upon her fingers": Esther's wedding rings on her nipples reflect the tension between societal expectations of womanhood and Esther's actual lived experience: a poignant and poetic symbol of her complex identity and suffering.

- “He would be happier in his ignorance than in his wisdom”: “Where ignorance is bliss, / ’Tis folly to be wise” (Thomas Gray, “Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College,” 1742).
- “the perineal tears, the ossified bones”: Perineal tears are common to some extent during childbirth. Tears can also occur inside the vagina or other parts of the vulva, including the labia.
    - Most simply, the “enlarged birth ring” is the birth canal stretched by many births. It may also refer to a Bandl’s ring, a rare and dangerous complication of obstructed labor that appears as a constriction at the junction between the upper and lower segments of the uterus. In contrast, a normal birth involves the cervix (a ring of muscle at the base of the uterus) dilating to allow a baby to pass through. While the cervix normally enlarges and opens during a vaginal birth, a Bandl’s ring is an abnormal, pathologic ring of thickened muscle that obstructs the birth process.
    - The labia minora are the inner folds of skin of the female external genitalia, located between the labia majora and surrounding the clitoris and vaginal and urethral openings. They vary significantly in size, shape, and color, and their functions include a sexual one, as they engorge with blood during sexual arousal. The appearance of the labia minora can change throughout a person’s life due to factors like genetics, hormones, aging, and weight fluctuations.
    - The labia majora are the two outer, fleshy folds of skin that form the “lips” of the vulva, protecting the other external genitalia. They are located on the mons pubis and extend down to the perineum, and contain sweat and sebaceous glands. These folds enclose and protect the vaginal and urethral openings and can change in appearance due to factors like aging, childbirth, and hormonal shifts.
- “the lost music of the lost echo of the lost chord”: “Seated one day at the organ, / I was weary and ill at ease, / And my fingers wandered idly / Over the noisy keys” (Adelaide Anne Procter, “A Lost Chord,” 1858). Arthur Sullivan set it in 1877 as “The Lost Chord,” one of the best-selling songs of the century. See Music and Composers.
- “She had heard of a girl who was made pregnant by the police in a jail”: Indiana opened the first separate prison for women in the United States in 1873, after the Quaker reformers Rhoda Coffin and Sarah J. Smith exposed the sexual abuse of women prisoners by male guards at the state prison. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “she had put her head into a silvery hornets’ nest”: The idiom to stir up a hornet’s nest means to make trouble or start a commotion.
- “fools rush in where angels fear to tread”: The saying, fools rush in where angels fear to tread, is from An Essay on Criticism, one of the first major poems written by the English writer Alexander Pope. “For fools rush in where angels fear to tread” (1711).
- “She was always knitting and unravelling the black hood”: Penelope, waiting twenty years for Odysseus, wove a shroud for his father by day and unravelled it by night to put off her suitors (Odyssey, Book 2). See Homer’s Epics and Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- “the membrane like a shimmering bridal veil hanging from barren trees”: See the caul in the Chapter 74 resources.
- “by Cupid, the blind god of love”: In classical mythology, Cupid is the god of desire, erotic love, attraction and affection. “And therefore is wing’d Cupid painted blind” (A Midsummer Night’s Dream, 1.1). See Greek Mythology, Love, and Shakespeare.
- “drifting like a cloud with a silver lining”: “Was I deceiv’d, or did a sable cloud / Turn forth her silver lining on the night?” (Milton, Comus, 1634).
- “She had tried to kill herself”: Esther says it once, in passing, and goes straight on to Cock Robin. See Esther Longtree.
- “who had not killed cock robin”: Who Killed Cock Robin is an English nursery rhyme. The earliest record of the rhyme is in Tommy Thumb’s Pretty Song Book. A number of theories have been advanced to explain the meaning of the rhyme: a mythological event, such as the death of the god Balder from Norse mythology, or the ritual sacrifice of a king figure; a parody of the death of King William II, who was killed by an arrow while hunting, and who was known as William Rufus, which means red; the fall of Robert Walpole’s government in 1742, since Robin is a diminutive form of Robert and the first printing is close to the time of the events mentioned. Some folklore readings make the rhyme a seasonal myth, with the red-breasted robin as Lugh, the Irish god of light, skill, and kingship, killed at the turn of the year by winter. In Celtic studies Lugh is often paired with Brân the Blessed, the Welsh giant-king whose name means “Raven” and who was “crowned king over this Island” (Britannica). See the Chapter 72 resources. See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Birds.
- “What twin accused his twin whom he had murdered”: This seems to refer to Joachim and Peron Spitzer and here Esther is saying that Peron killed Joachim and took his identity. See Joachim Spitzer, Peron Spitzer, and Twins and Doubles.
    - One set of twins in mythology where one is divine and the other mortal are Castor and Pollux, known as the Dioscuri. The pair are an example of heteropaternal superfecundation. The Dioscuri were regarded as helpers of humankind and held to be patrons of travelers and of sailors in particular, who invoked them to seek favorable winds. Their role as horsemen and boxers also led to them being regarded as the patrons of athletes and athletic contests. They characteristically intervened at the moment of crisis, aiding those who honored or trusted them. See superfecundation in the Chapter 73 resources.
    - The dioscuri had two twin sisters: Helen of Troy and Clytemnestra.
- “had murdered her twin by kicking it out early”: Physicians have long known that one twin may die early in pregnancy and be shed or reabsorbed. With ultrasound in the 1970s this “vanishing twin” proved far more common than anyone had guessed. See Twins and Doubles and Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- “swimming around Cape Horn”: Cape Horn is the southernmost headland of southern Chile and marks where the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans meet.
    - See Homer Capehorn.

- “or maybe he had got to Capricorn”: Capricorn is the tenth astrological sign in the zodiac originating from the constellation of Capricornus, the horned goat. The Tropic of Capricorn, the southern line of the sun’s farthest reach, takes its name from the sign. See Astrology, Alchemy, and Esoterica and Astronomy.
- “the school trustees who would now be the jury had not fired her on false charges”: Esther once taught school. Rural school boards hired and fired teachers at will, and a woman teacher could be dismissed for marrying, for paint and powder, or for gossip. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Afterbirth

The placenta and membranes expelled after a birth.

Alder

A tree of wet ground, of the birch family.

Bargeman

A man who works on a river barge.

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Embryo

An unborn creature in its earliest stage.

Featherweight

In boxing, the class just above bantamweight, long limited to 126 pounds; anything very light.

Gauze

A thin, transparent fabric.

Haw

The red berry of the hawthorn.

Incriminate

To make someone appear guilty of a crime.

Infanticide

The killing of an infant.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Intrinsic

Belonging to the very nature of a thing.

Labia

The lips of the vulva.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Obituary

A newspaper notice of a death.

Obtrusive

Pushing oneself forward; unwelcome.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Ossified

Turned to bone; hardened.

Palpable

Able to be touched or felt; plain to see.

Papaw

A small native tree of the eastern woods with large, custardy fruit; also pawpaw.

Pendulum

A weight that swings back and forth, as in a clock.

Perchance

Perhaps; by chance.

Perineal

Of the perineum, the area between the genitals and the anus.

Perjury

Lying under oath.

Pupa

An insect in its resting stage inside a cocoon, between larva and adult.

Rouge

A red powder or cream used to color the cheeks or lips.

Sombre

Dark and grave.

Squeamish

Easily sickened or shocked.

Thorax

The chest; the part of the body between the neck and the belly.

Chapter 77

Content note: *The Esther Longtree chapters (72 to 81) deal with stillbirth and pregnancy loss, rape, infanticide, racist violence including lynching, and cruelty to children. This chapter describes the murder of mothers and newborns and of two little girls, one white and one Black, and the detective's racism; Esther's alphabet of accusations includes "a Negro, the night, a noose."*

Summary

Esther asks who killed the heavens, the earth, and love, and decides that cock robin killed cock robin. She has scrubbed the restaurant clean, though the epileptic flour miller, whose son learned that no one can pass a thumb print down, walks the streets white with flour; her bedroom, with its empty cradle, could not bear the jury's search. Once she found a rain-stained alphabet book in the hole where she had hidden a dead child, and every letter became an exhibit against her, from A, the agony, to N, "a Negro, the night, a noose," and R, a rope. The white detective cares only for the deaths of white children: finding a murdered white girl and, farther on, a murdered Black girl in the same woods, he ran screaming and never told the police. He sends her clippings of old murders, among them an old woman abortionist who killed unmarried mothers and their newborns and was caught only after killing a woman who was pregnant in her dreams. Esther remembers that the detective raped her and left her for dead, sees the shadow of murder everywhere, and wonders why the sterile salesmen send ear muffs for babies who may be dead and growing.

Characters present

Esther Longtree · The Chicago Detective · Justice O'Leary · The Old Woman Abortionist

Concepts present

Themes: Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Butterflies and Moths · Horses and Carriages · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Pregnancy, Birth, and Children · Shadows

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Marguerite Young on Her Craft

Allusions: Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Judaism · Lynching and Racial Violence · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · Revelation and the Apocalypse · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- The chapter begins with a profound meditation on who “had killed the heavens,” the earth, and love itself. Esther Longtree, the “stillborn mother,” embodies silent suffering and unanswered cries, reflecting a deep personal and universal grief.
- Esther is described as pregnant but in a strange, watery, almost void-like condition: “pregnant with death,” carrying something intangible rather than a living child. Her isolation is emphasized by her work in the restaurant and her efforts to forget the “moths” and “stillborn who came to her at night.”
- The detective pursues the mystery of children’s deaths but only those of white children, ignoring the black children, whom he deems too many and unimportant. This racial divide in justice and attention highlights societal neglect and racial injustice. The detective’s selective interest and fear of “black mysteries” contrast sharply with Esther’s own encompassing sorrow that transcends race.
- Esther recalls a faded newspaper clipping about an old woman abortionist who killed poor unmarried mothers and babies under her care. The story is haunting, especially the detail about a pregnant woman who was only “pregnant in her dreams,” leading to a fatal mistake that exposed the murderer.
- Esther reflects on sending letters to the detective, possibly as a way to confront or taunt him. She recalls being raped by him, left for dead, and how since then murder has “grown upon this landscape.” This passage reveals deep personal trauma and implicates the detective as both pursuer and perpetrator.
- Throughout the chapter, there are repeated images of shadows, blackbirds, and stillborn children. Esther sees the landscape as perhaps the “world unborn,” hovering on the threshold of realization.
- The passage listing exhibits A through U as letters standing for objects, feelings, and accusations (e.g., A for agony, M for murder, N for Negro, S for shadow) is a powerful symbolic enumeration of all the elements that accuse or haunt Esther. It illustrates the complexity of her guilt, the societal judgment upon her, and the intertwining of personal and collective tragedy.
- Despite all her suffering and the detective’s threats, Esther asserts her preference for silence, mystery, and the void over explanation or judgment. She wants to remain enigmatic, outside the reach of “old human laws” and inquisitions, embracing her unique condition and sorrow as a “great serenity.”
- The chapter ends with Esther questioning who should be responsible for the deaths and losses she embodies. She acknowledges the many “fathers,” the salesmen, census-takers, and others, but ultimately feels her own stubbornness and sorrow are unique. She cherishes the natural world and wonders why she should be punished for “a few mistakes” when she has already suffered so much.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “Cock robin had killed cock robin, so the mystery was solved.” Is it solved?
- The alphabet asks, “Mother, why did you kill me? Mother, why did you not kill me?” Why both questions?
- “Her body was pregnant with death which moved its little hand inside of her.” Whose hand is it?

Characters

- Finding a murdered white girl and a murdered Black girl in the same woods, the detective “had run screaming, stumbling through the woods, and had never written to the police.” What is he afraid of?
- Esther calls hers “this quiet, black mystery.” What does she mean?
- The miller’s son learns that “no one could pass a thumb print down.” Why did Young say she put him into everything she wrote?

Connections

- The old woman abortionist is caught because she killed a woman “pregnant in her dreams.” How is that woman like Esther?
- “Exhibit N, a Negro, the night, a noose.” What history do these words call up?
- Esther would rather be “the scarlet woman” in the courtroom than be searched in her bedroom. Why?

Reflection

- “Who could find the heart of a mystery that had no heart?”
- “Should a woman ever answer a man’s questions?” What is Esther refusing?
- “The men, oh, what children they were!” Is she right?

Research: Characters

Esther Longtree

- The protagonist; a pregnant woman symbolizing loss and mystery.
- Complex, haunted by past pregnancies and the deaths of children, real or imagined.
- Her perspective is lyrical, introspective, and fragmented, blending reality and metaphor.

The Chicago Detective

- Represents societal judgment and racial bias.
- Obsessed with solving murders of white children but indifferent to black children's deaths.
- Seen by Esther as both a threat and possibly the real murderer: "This detective was a murderer."
- He "had raped her before she could cry out" and left her for dead, "the dung of blackbirds caked upon her face."

Old Doctor

- A figure who once tried to aid Esther, representing medical authority and perhaps failed understanding.
- He recognizes Esther's exceptional nature and mystery, telling her "that she was immortal and could not testify."
- Once, called out at night, he delivered a real baby he thought he was dreaming, and declared, "Life is a dream, and I have been wrong and much wronged, and I must give up this practice!"

The Miller

- The miller falls into the flour bin in his epileptic seizures and walks the streets "with the flour falling like snow from his hat." His son had been told that his father would give him "the secret of his exact thumb print upon the flour," passing it down as father to son, but when the old miller dies the son learns that no one can set such a mark on sunset, starlight, or water. Young drew him from a real flour miller who tried to pass on his thumbmark to his son; see "He had been told by his father" above.
- The Miller is a poignant emblem of lost legacy and identity, reflecting the novel's meditation on mortality, memory, and the ineffable mysteries of human existence as presented through Vera's lyrical and fragmented narration.

The Little Boy

- The Little Boy character emerges as a poignant and symbolic figure deeply intertwined with Esther Longtree's complex emotional and psychological landscape.
- The Little Boy is described as an exception among the many stillborn or lost children that haunt Esther. He is distinct because he "grew and cast his shadow," unlike the others who remained stillborn or unmanifested. His crying is described as "like the night wind, like the falling leaves," evoking a mournful, haunting presence that unsettles Esther. She desires to "reach him once with her hands" and to "still him," but she cannot, as he mistrusts her, his own mother, and actively obstructs her path, causing her to stumble, fall, and suffer further losses.

The Old Woman Abortionist

- Mentioned in an old newspaper clipping; accused of killing unmarried mothers and babies.
- Symbolizes institutional cruelty and hidden atrocities.

Research: Themes

Motherhood and Loss

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth

- Esther is “always pregnant,” but the pregnancies are metaphorical and literal, filled with loss and the absence of children (stillborn or never born).
- The grief of lost children haunts her, symbolized by “little bones,” a “little book,” and the shadow of death inside her womb.
- Her pregnancy represents both creation and sterility, life and death simultaneously.

Guilt and Innocence

See: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice

- Esther feels guilt for the “murder” of her children, though this guilt is ambiguous: is she guilty or a victim of fate or society?
- The detective’s pursuit symbolizes societal judgment and the invasive quest for truth. Esther fears exposure but also wishes for some form of public trial to assert control over her narrative.

Racism and Social Injustice

See: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Society, Class, and Race

- The white Chicago detective is interested only in the deaths of white children, ignoring black children’s deaths, revealing racial prejudice and societal neglect.

Mystery and the Unknown

See: Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The nature of Esther’s pregnancies, the deaths, and the detective’s role create a pervasive sense of mystery.
- The chapter explores the limits of understanding and the unknowable facets of human experience.

Nature and Cosmic Imagery

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- Constant references to stars, clouds, birds, leaves, and celestial phenomena frame the narrative in a cosmic context of creation and destruction.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Pregnancy and Stillbirth

See: Pregnancy, Birth, and Children

- Not just physical but symbolic of potential, loss, and unfulfilled possibility.
- Esther's "watery pregnancy" and "wild pregnancy" evoke fragility and chaos.

The Little Book (ABC's)

- Symbolizes innocence, learning, and memory.
- Its presence in the grass where no child is physically found evokes haunting loss.

Birds (Robins, Blackbirds, Moths)

See: Butterflies and Moths · Birds

- Represent life, death, innocence, and societal neglect.
- Blackbirds especially tie to racial themes and death ignored by authorities.

Shadows and Darkness

See: Lamps, Candles, and Light · Shadows

- Recur throughout as metaphors for hidden truths, guilt, and fear.
- Esther's shadow and the detective's shadow symbolize identity and the unknown.

Newspaper Clippings

- Represent external judgment, historical atrocities, and persistent societal violence.

Esther's Parents

- Esther Longtree's parents are portrayed as a mismatched, barren couple who never consummated their marriage, representing a union without real love, flesh, or genuine connection. The father is a large, lumbering, passive policeman (symbolizing authority but with a lonely, ineffectual life) while the mother is a small, delicate, child-like woman, proud of her fragile appearance but emotionally distant and incapable of nurturing.
- Symbolically Esther's parents might represent the fraught and dysfunctional relationship between dominant societal forces and marginalized or oppressed groups in America, especially in terms of gender.

- The father, a “passive policeman” who is “big—her mother, small,” could symbolize the established power structures (law enforcement, government authority) that are large and imposing but ineffective or disconnected in truly addressing human needs or justice. His passivity and loneliness may reflect institutional failure or indifference.
- The mother, fragile and child-like, might represent the traditional, constrained role of women or the idealized but ineffective domestic sphere, unable to assert real agency or nurture true growth. Her narrowness and coldness can symbolize limitations imposed on women or the societal denial of genuine human connection.
- Together, their “unnatural conception” of Esther Longtree, where the “third person” (a go-between woman) carries a silver spoon between them to enable conception, reflects a forced, artificial union that produces a complicated, burdened offspring (Esther), who embodies both the failures and contradictions of this relationship.
- Young read the parents’ artificial conception of Esther as Esther’s own loss: “That’s the loss she’s been trying to replace over and over again through continual pregnancies” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). Of Esther’s lover she said, “this is not a race story because her lover was white in the moonlight and black at dawn. It was her schizophrenia” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). The passive policeman came from W. C. Fields. See the Chapter 72 resources.
- Esther’s parents symbolize the divided and dysfunctional social order in America, embodying the tensions between authority and vulnerability, gender divides, and the consequences of an artificial, loveless union producing a troubled next generation.

Research: Resources

- “Who had killed the heavens, rolling them up like a scroll”: “And all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll” (Isaiah 34:4, KJV). See The Bible.
- “the stillborn mother, stifling her cries”: Esther Longtree in this chapter is portrayed as a deeply tragic and complex figure, embodying sorrow, loss, mystery, and a profound connection to themes of fertility, death, and motherhood. Esther is described as a large, pregnant waitress, often weighed down not only by her physical condition but by the immense emotional burden of repeated stillbirths and lost children she carries within her memory and body. Her pregnancy is symbolic, described as “watery” and “wild,” with her body “pregnant with death,” indicating a continuous cycle of creation and loss intertwined in her existence. She is caught between hope and despair, weighted down “by the death of a small thing,” her body swollen but also fragile, her spinal column curved by the weight of memory. Esther represents the paradox of fertility and sterility simultaneously. Though she is repeatedly pregnant, the children are stillborn or lost, rendering her motherhood incomplete and haunted by absence. This condition makes her a symbol of the “Song of Songs of the sterility which is the creation,” where creation is intertwined with loss and death. Her pregnancy is not just physical but metaphysical, involving the vastness of the universe, stars, and the earth,

all of which seem to be “killed” or destroyed, mirroring her personal tragedy. Her mental state is marked by suspicion, confusion, and a profound sense of mystery. She contemplates who might have “killed the heavens,” the earth, and love itself, reflecting a cosmic grief that parallels her personal losses. She imagines a detective who is both a pursuer and a murderer, embodying the threat of exposure and judgment, while the children she once had or never had remain elusive, “the child that never was.” Esther’s relationship with the detective is complex: she suspects him of having raped her and leaving her for dead, yet he is also the one who threatens to uncover her secret sorrows. Her narrative includes a haunting sense of being pursued and judged unfairly, and she is both victim and accuser in her own story. The chapter also touches on racial issues through the detective’s selective interest in “white” deaths while neglecting “black” ones, revealing societal biases and injustices. Esther, being associated with the “quiet, black mystery,” is marginalized and ignored by official justice, highlighting themes of racial invisibility and systemic neglect. Esther is haunted by old murders, tragedies, and lost children, both personal and historical. She reflects on a mass murderer, abortionist and other cases of maternal and infant death, drawing parallels to her own suffering and guilt. These old stories serve as a backdrop to her present torment and sense of isolation, deepening the theme of a past that refuses to be forgotten. Despite her suffering, Esther shows moments of defiant acceptance and even joy, laughing in her sleep and finding some beauty in the natural world and her own strange, wild condition. She is stubborn, proud, and insists on her innocence in the face of accusation. Her condition is “no dream” but a persistent reality, and she prefers the mystery and silence of her pain to exposure or judgment. Esther Longtree is a figure of immense sorrow and mystery, embodying the tragic intersection of life and death, fertility and sterility, hope and despair. She is pregnant with loss, carrying both physical and metaphysical burdens, haunted by memories, accusations, and societal neglect, especially in the face of racial injustice. Her story is a poignant, symbolic exploration of motherhood, tragedy, and the human condition. See Esther Longtree.

- Esther Longtree symbolizes a tragic and complex history of motherhood, loss, and social neglect in the United States, especially reflecting the fates of unmarried or marginalized women and their children. Her story evokes the suffering of countless women who experienced stillbirths, miscarriages, or the loss of children under harsh social conditions. She is “always pregnant” yet often gives birth to “nothing,” representing the grief of “stillborn” children and the immense sorrow that accompanies such loss. This condition is described as a vast, mysterious, and diffused crime or guilt that is both personal and cosmic in scale, involving death and sterility in creation itself. Esther Longtree’s narrative intertwines with the grim history of illegal or dangerous abortions, as suggested by the story of the old woman abortionist who killed unmarried mothers and their babies in a hospital disguised as care. This history reflects the brutal reality many women faced in times when reproductive rights and safe medical care were inaccessible. The abortionist’s killing of a woman who was “pregnant in her dreams” but had no child underscores the terror and stigma surrounding female reproduction and the societal condemnation of

women’s bodies. Esther’s interactions with the white detective reveal the racial and social divisions in America’s history of violence and injustice. The detective focuses only on the deaths of white children, ignoring the countless black children lost or murdered: a commentary on racial indifference and systemic racism. Esther’s world is described as a “quiet, black mystery,” where black children’s deaths are overlooked, symbolizing the historical neglect and invisibility of black lives in American social and legal systems. Her burden of loss and the constant shadow of death she carries symbolize not only individual grief but also a collective history of women’s suffering, social marginalization, racial injustice, and the silencing of certain kinds of pain. Esther Longtree is a figure embodying the intersection of these historical realities: motherhood, loss, racial discrimination, and societal neglect in the US.

- “cock robin had killed cock robin”: Some folklore readings connect Who Killed Cock Robin with the mythology of Lugh, a warrior, a king, a master craftsman and a savior. The Romans identified him with Mercury, and his slaying of Balor has been compared with the death of the Norse god Baldr. In Celtic studies he is often paired with Brân the Blessed, the Welsh giant-king whose name means “Raven.” St. Mologa has been theorized to be a Christian continuation of Lugh. “Cock robin” appears seven times in Esther Longtree’s chapters. “Who killed Cock Robin?” repeatedly asked in the novel is not just about a single culprit but a symbol of the pervasive and inscrutable nature of death, loss, and guilt. It is a question without a definitive answer, reflecting the novel’s exploration of mystery, suffering, and the silent tragedies that haunt Esther and the world she inhabits. See the Chapter 72 resources and the Chapter 76 resources. See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Birds.
- “hiding his head under his wing”: “The north wind doth blow, / And we shall have snow, / And what will poor Robin do then, poor thing? / He’ll sit in a barn, / And keep himself warm, / And hide his head under his wing, poor thing.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Birds.
- “the universe which, O’Leary said to her, might be quite, quite small”: See Justice O’Leary.
- “He had been told by his father that his father would give him the secret”: “When I started to write about New Harmony, the utopia, I was inspired to do so by an account of a flour miller who tried to pass on his thumbmark to his son. That cannot be done, and the son ended by committing suicide.” Young wrote a short story about him that failed, and “I have put that flour miller and this thumb into ‘Miss MacIntosh, My Darling’ somewhere. In fact, I’ve put that flour miller and his thumb into everything I’ve ever written since,” “the idea of identity and passage of the soul” (Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs, “A Conversation with Marguerite Young,” Review of Contemporary Fiction 23, no. 1, Spring 2003 (1989 original)). See Marguerite Young on Her Craft.
- “If the jurymen came to her bedroom”: Young reminds us that the jury will consist of men. Mississippi, in 1968, was the last state to let women serve on juries, and in Taylor v. Louisiana (1975) the Supreme Court ruled that jury pools excluding women violated

the Sixth Amendment. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.

- “a wild, pregnant mare horsing around in the courtroom”: See the wild mares made pregnant by the wind in the Chapter 72 resources. See Horses and Carriages.
- “she would be the doll, the scarlet woman”: “And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour… MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS” (Revelation 17:4-5, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “raped by a thief in the night”: “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (1 Thessalonians 5:2, KJV). See The Bible.
- “Many an old maid has dreamed thus of being raped”: The idea of women dreaming or fantasizing about being raped comes from a long history supported by male dominated institutions where women are trained to be rape victims which is still being challenged today. The rape fantasy in women is man-made. Women use the rape fantasy to find their sexuality within the context of male sexuality or power drive. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “the Song of Songs of the sterility which is the creation”: The Song of Songs is an erotic poem. It is unique within the Hebrew Bible in that it celebrates sexual love. The two are in harmony, each desiring the other and rejoicing in sexual intimacy. Jewish tradition reads it as an allegory of the relationship between God and Israel In Christianity, it is treated as an allegory celebrating the love between God and Church or Christ and his bride, the Church. The Christian church’s interpretation of the Song is evidence of God’s love for his people, both collectively and individually. Over time a moral element and the bride as Virgin Mary were added. It is unique in that these conclusions are not found in the overtly theological books of the Bible. Those books reveal an imbalance in the relationship between God and man, but Song of Songs is a theological metaphor in which the two partners are equals, bound in a committed relationship. In modern times the poem has attracted the attention of feminist biblical critics, with Phyllis Trible’s “Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation” (1973) and the Feminist Companion to the Bible series edited by Athalya Brenner and Carole Fontaine. See The Bible, Judaism, and Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “Exhibit A, the agony, exhibit B, the birthday”: Esther’s alphabet of accusation echoes the New England Primer (about 1690), the first schoolbook of American children, whose alphabet begins with guilt: “In Adam’s Fall / We sinned all.” See The Bible.
- “exhibit J, a jack-in-the-pulpit, a Jew’s harp”: The hangman carries a Jew’s harp (“A Jew’s harp is not Jewish”) in the Chapter 68 resources, and in Chapter 71 he always plays it before a hanging.
- “exhibit N, a Negro, the night, a noose”: The night, the noose, and the rope that follows at R: the alphabet calls up lynching. The Tuskegee Institute recorded 4,743 lynchings in the United States from 1882 to 1968; 3,446 of the dead were Black. See Lynching and Racial Violence and Society, Class, and Race.

- “But he only dealt with the deaths of little white children”: When Young wrote this the civil rights movement had been going on since 1954. See Society, Class, and Race and Lynching and Racial Violence.
    - In 1955 fourteen-year-old Emmett Till was lynched in Mississippi; an all-white jury acquitted his killers in about an hour. In 1963 a Klan bomb at the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham killed four Black girls, Addie Mae Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Carole Robertson, and Carol Denise McNair; no one was convicted until 1977.
- “had found first her brown mary-janes”: Mary Janes originated in the early 1900s, named after a character in Richard Outcault’s Buster Brown comic strip (1902), and were popularized by the Brown Shoe Company. Originally, brown or black, low-cut strap shoes were worn by both young boys and girls as formal attire. They transitioned into popular women’s fashion in the 1920s-30s and became a 1960s mod icon.
- “The detective had sent her a yellowed newspaper clipping”: The Chicago detective sent Esther a “yellowed newspaper clipping” that read “Mass Murderess Apprehended Accused by Dead Mothers and Dead Children.” There was nothing about the fathers. It was a “...woman abortionist and her timid little assistant…” who had killed “...all the poor, unmarried mothers and their babies, too, in a hospital which she ran for that purpose.” The mothers were described as well treated right up until their delivery. It said the fathers sent bouquets. When the mother was supposed to deliver, mother and baby were killed “...by the cruel, old abortionist, a large woman, weighing almost three hundred pounds.” The babies were buried with lime. See The Old Woman Abortionist.
    - Lime is used at mass grave sites to capture the scent of decay and keep soil pH high. Low pH soil is an indicator for a mass grave as the decomposition products are acidic and lower the soil pH. Adding lime reduces this acidity.
    - The newspaper was dated as happening during the “horse and buggy age.” The “old woman abortionist” kept at her trade until she murdered a “...woman who was not, who never could have been a mother.” This story may have its roots in real events.
    - Baby farming is the historical practice of accepting custody of an infant or child in exchange for payment in late-Victorian Britain and, less commonly, in Australia and the United States. Some baby farmers adopted children by paying lump-sum payments, while others cared for infants for periodic payments. There are several women or couples in the past that murdered or allowed the adopted children to die through starvation. Even the Catholic run Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home in Ireland illegally adopted children without their mother’s consent and the Home had an abnormally high child death rate with malnourished, emaciated babies. A significant amount of children’s remains were discovered in a septic tank on the property. There was also mistreatment and abuse of the mothers.
    - One of the most famous baby farming child murderers was Amelia Dyer. She murdered infants in her care over a thirty-year period during the Victorian era in the United Kingdom. Trained as a nurse and widowed in 1869, Dyer turned to baby

farming to support herself. She initially cared for the children legitimately, then began directly murdering children she took in, strangling at least some of them, and disposing of the bodies to avoid attention. She was caught because the body of a child was found in the river. The “timid assistant” may refer to Dyer’s 23-year-old daughter Polly who assisted in the child murder of Doris Marmon.

    - Abortion has been used to separate good women from bad women. This stigma punishes the bad woman in society. Even if the abortion is necessary to save a woman’s life, religion often stipulates that a woman must sacrifice herself. It is better to die than live with the stigma of having an abortion. The only good heroine is a dead one. When Young was writing this over eighteen years, abortion was illegal, and contraception was restricted by law until Griswold v. Connecticut (1965).

- “was natural and a mother should suffer”: This may refer to Genesis 3:16 as Eve and women’s punishment for being cast out of the Garden of Eden. “In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children” (Genesis 3:16, KJV). See Genesis and Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- “pregnant in her dreams even though there was neither child nor father”: Esther may be suffering from False pregnancy or pseudocyesis. It is the appearance of clinical or subclinical signs and symptoms associated with pregnancy although the individual is not physically carrying a baby. The mistaken impression that one is pregnant includes signs and symptoms such as tender breasts with secretions, abdominal growth, delayed menstrual periods, and subjective feelings of a moving fetus. False pregnancy has a prominent psychiatric component as well as physical manifestations of pregnancy. It can be caused by physical or mental trauma, a chemical imbalance of hormones, and some medical conditions. See pseudocyesis in the Chapter 75 resources. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- “a wall of brass between her and the bodies of creation”: “And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brasen wall” (Jeremiah 15:20, KJV). See The Bible.
- “and the sun blotted out and become as black as sackcloth of hair”: “And the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood” (Revelation 6:12, KJV). See Revelation and the Apocalypse.
- “the bathtub drownings of the brides”: In England George Joseph Smith married and drowned three brides in their baths for their money, the “Brides in the Bath” murders of 1912 to 1914; he was hanged in 1915. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “the father’s skull that was brought home to play with the children”: Esther thought he only solved the “white mysteries.” Esther guessed it might be dead brides or the missing father where the children played with the skull judging by the newspaper clippings the Chicago detective sent her. The missing father may refer to the story Madge told Homer during the bus ride in Chapter 7 about Mr. and Mrs. Tidings.
- “Life is a dream, and I have been wrong and much wronged”: Once when he thought he was dreaming he “delivered a real baby...and said—Oh, I see it all now! Life is a dream, and I have been wrong and much wronged, and I must give up this practice!” This line may refer to a play by Pedro Calderon de la Barca called Life Is A Dream.

Calderón (1600-1681) was a Spanish dramatist, poet, writer and knight of the Order of Santiago. Life Is A Dream is a philosophical allegory regarding the human situation and the mystery of life. The play's central themes are the conflict between free will and fate, as well as restoring one's honor. Other themes include dreams versus reality and the conflict between father and son. La vida es sueño was first performed in 1635.

- "to death which is another form of love": There are several characters, like Miss MacIntosh and Mrs. Hogden, that have manipulated their arguments so they are never wrong or never appear to be wrong.

Vocabulary

Abortionist

One who performs abortions.

Anesthesia

Loss of feeling or sensation, natural or induced.

Bellows

A device that blows air when squeezed, as for a fire.

Bemused

Puzzled and lost in thought.

Bier

A stand on which a corpse or coffin is carried.

Census taker

A person who goes door to door counting people for the census.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Dissolution

A breaking up; decay; death.

Domino

A loose hooded cloak worn with a half mask at a masquerade.

Dominoes

A game played with small oblong tiles marked with spots.

Epileptic

Having epilepsy, a disorder that brings seizures.

Featherweight

In boxing, the class just above bantamweight, long limited to 126 pounds; anything very light.

Foreknowledge

Knowledge of a thing before it happens.

Go-cart

A small child’s wagon or walker.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Inquest

A legal inquiry, especially into a death.

Jack-in-the-pulpit

A woodland plant whose flower spike stands under a hooded leaf, like a preacher in a pulpit.

Juryman

A man serving on a jury.

Lair

A wild animal’s den; a hiding place.

Mary Janes

Low, strapped shoes for children.

Nettle

A plant with stinging hairs.

Oilskin

Cloth made waterproof with oil; a raincoat of it.

Remorseless

Without pity; relentless.

Riddance

Freedom from something unwanted, as in good riddance.

Sackcloth

A coarse cloth worn in mourning or penance.

Tallow

Animal fat used for candles and soap. Tallow-colored is a dull, yellowish white.

Tuning fork

A two-pronged steel fork that sounds one pitch when struck.

Uterus

The womb.

Vortex

A whirlpool or whirlwind.

Chapter 78

Content note: *The Esther Longtree chapters (72 to 81) deal with stillbirth and pregnancy loss, rape, infanticide, racist violence including lynching, and cruelty to children. This chapter describes a mother's cruelty to her young child, hitting her, tying her by a rope in the yard, and blaming her all her life for her twin's stillbirth, and mentions a suicide in the family.*

Summary

Esther was called Little Jackass from birth, because she was born kicking and stubborn. She grew up lonely, bullied at school for her deformed foot and crossed eyes, always stung by bees, always falling. Her tiny, cold mother, a pallid descendant of George Washington's sister, hit her, tied her by a rope to a tree in the yard, and blamed her all her life for the death of her twin, Rosemary, whom Esther had kicked out of the womb months early, stillborn and buried under a pear tree her mother would never name; Rosemary would have been the perfect daughter. As a child Esther dug for her with a spoon and found only a thimble, beads, a broken doll, the toys of the dead. She loves her father, the passive policeman, who patrols the graveyard whistling to warn off the lovers and whose own mother spilled babies like leaves; she embarrasses her mother by telling that her father has a Negro streak and that her mother's brother killed himself. She wonders whether she herself is the shadow, the one who never truly lived.

Characters present

Esther Longtree · Esther's Father · Esther's Mother · Rosemary

Concepts present

Themes: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Identity and the Self · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Horses and Carriages · Pregnancy, Birth, and Children · Roses and Flowers · Shadows · Twins and Doubles · Weddings and Funerals

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology

Allusions: Genesis · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Music and Composers · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- The opening lines explain why Esther was called “Little Jackass” because she was born stubborn, kicking, awkward, and reluctant to be born.
- Esther’s father is described as a passive, slow, and timid policeman who patrols the graveyard at night to warn off lovers. Despite his loneliness and bad luck, Esther feels pity and love for him. She sees herself as a “chip off the old block,” sharing his nature but contrasting with her mother. This passage contrasts the warmth and vitality Esther inherits from her father with the coldness of her mother.
- Her mother is portrayed as small, childish, and cold, with a narrow heart and fragile possessions. Everything in the house is built to her size and easily broken. Esther’s awkwardness and physical attributes are contrasted with her mother’s delicate, fragile nature. This passage helps explain Esther’s difficult upbringing and lack of maternal warmth.
- Esther’s childhood is marked by physical accidents, deformities (like her crippled foot), and social abuse by other children. She is described as always stung by insects. There is the story of the bee flying up her skirts and the buzzing under her skin.
- There is an important passage about Esther’s father’s mother, who gave birth many times, often without realizing it, and whose children mostly survived. This contrasts with Esther’s own fate, where she is haunted by the loss of her own stillborn children.
- Central to the chapter is the revelation that Esther had a twin sister, Rosemary, who was born prematurely and dead because Esther had “kicked the other out” of the womb. This accusation, made repeatedly by her mother, defines much of Esther’s shame, guilt, and identity. Rosemary is described as perfect, delicate, and the child the mother would have preferred. Esther’s lifelong feeling of being a murderer and a shadow is tied to this traumatic event.
- The mother constantly blames Esther for killing Rosemary before birth and accuses her of being ungrateful and awkward. Esther lives with this accusation, which shapes her self-perception as a mulish, sullen child who broke things and was not properly loved or nurtured. This deep maternal rejection is a key to understanding Esther’s emotional struggles.
- Throughout her life, Esther looks for signs of Rosemary or the “other,” digging in the ground, finding small objects buried under trees, and interpreting shadows and noises as traces of the lost twin.
- Esther sometimes wonders if she is the shadow and if the other twin was the one truly born. She doubts her own reality and existence, feeling like an elusive being or ghost.
- The chapter closes with Esther’s reflection on loneliness, the emptiness of life, and the idea that no heart is as great as “non-heart,” no being as beautiful as “non-being.” She sometimes feels like a shadow, never fully found or understood.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- Her father says that to miss by an inch “was the same as to miss it by infinity.” What has he missed?
- “No being so beautiful as non-being. No heart so great as non-heart.” Why would Esther believe this?
- “The graveyard was the place where life began in this county, not where it ended.” What does she mean?

Characters

- Her mother says “if the other had been born alive instead of this big creature, her mother would have been happier.” What does a child do with that?
- “He whistled in the night to warn away the thieves, the lovers. She whistled to let them know when the coast was clear!” How are father and daughter alike?
- Esther tells “that the father had a Negro streak in him, that the mother’s brother had committed suicide.” Why does she enjoy embarrassing her mother?

Connections

- In Chapter 76 Esther confessed to killing her twin. Now we learn the charge came from her mother. Whose story is it?
- Rosemary is for remembrance. What does Esther’s mother keep remembering, and what does she forget?
- “She had been born instead of the shadow.” How is Esther like Mr. Spitzer, who is never sure which twin he is?

Reflection

- “The children were wise by comparison with their fathers.” Is that so?
- “Was she not the shadow?” Have you ever felt like the one who was not wanted?
- Esther never found Rosemary, only “the toys of the dead creature.” What are we looking for when we dig up the past?

Research: Characters

Esther Longtree

- She was called “Little Jackass” due to her stubborn, awkward nature and her difficult birth. She was born kicking and fighting against life itself, a symbol of resistance and

struggle. Her childhood was lonely, marked by accidents, physical scars, and emotional neglect. She made friends of “her natural enemies, the woodpeckers, the bluejays.”

- Esther wrestles with her identity, sometimes wondering if she is the “shadow,” the lesser, the one who should not have lived. She is caught between the life she has and the ghost of the twin she lost, a metaphor for the conflict between existence and non-existence, presence and absence.
- A complex figure embodying strength, stubbornness, and vulnerability. She is deeply affected by her family’s past and her own mysterious shadow, the lost twin. Her physical awkwardness and emotional turmoil underscore her unique resilience and tragic circumstances.

Esther’s father

- He is a passive policeman, seen as a lonely, timid man whose life is confined and unfulfilled. He patrols the graveyard to warn off lovers to avoid arrests. Her mother is a small, childlike woman with little understanding of life or Esther’s struggles. Their marriage lacks love, and Esther inherits nothing from her mother but much from her father’s robust, natural lineage.

Esther’s mother

- She blames her for the death of her twin sister, Rosemary, who was born prematurely and dead. Esther is accused of killing this twin by kicking her in the womb, an act that haunts her throughout her life. This accusation shapes Esther’s self-perception as a murderer even before birth and contributes to her lifelong feelings of guilt and alienation.
- She hit Esther for screaming about the bee, tied her by a rope in the yard, and “had never nursed her at those narrow breasts.”

Rosemary

- Rosemary represents the idealized child who never lived, who would have been perfect and brought ease to the family. Esther’s mother mourns Rosemary and holds her up against Esther, constantly reminding Esther of what she supposedly destroyed. Esther, in contrast, struggles with this shadow, often questioning her own reality and identity.

Research: Themes

Loneliness and Isolation

See: Isolation and Connection

- Esther’s life is marked by solitude and misunderstanding, from her childhood nickname to her estranged family relationships and societal alienation.

Identity and Self-Perception

See: Identity and the Self

- The story explores Esther’s struggle with her own identity. She questions her own existence, haunted by the twin she allegedly killed and by feelings of being an outsider within her own family.

Guilt and Innocence

See: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice

- Esther is burdened with a guilt she cannot fully understand or escape: accused of infanticide before she was even born. This theme explores the complexity of innocence and culpability.

Family Legacy and Conflict

See: Memory and the Past

- The contrast between Esther’s parents, her father’s passivity and her mother’s childishness, frames her difficult inheritance and her complicated relationship with familial love and expectations.

Nature and Symbolism

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- Birds, graveyards, and natural imagery symbolize life, death, and the cycles of existence. The graveyard is paradoxically described as a place of beginning as well as an end, reflecting Esther’s complicated view of life and death.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Graveyard

See: Weddings and Funerals

- A place associated with both death and life, symbolizing the cycle of existence and the blurred line between endings and beginnings.

Birds and Nests

See: Birds

- Birds (woodpeckers, bluejays, blackbirds) symbolize freedom, nature, and sometimes fragility. The blackbirds’ nest with pale blue eggs and gold hair suggests innocence and

the preciousness of life, as well as the shadow of loss.

The Shadow

See: Shadows

- The twin Rosemary often appears as a shadow figure, representing the unseen, the lost, and the internalized guilt and doubt within Esther.

The Alphabet Book and Toys

See: Pregnancy, Birth, and Children

- Objects like the alphabet book, beads, and dolls symbolize childhood innocence, learning, and the traces of the lost twin's existence.

Research: Resources

- "she had been called by one name, Little Jackass": Esther Longtree is portrayed in this chapter as a deeply tragic and complex character, burdened by loneliness, loss, and a profound sense of guilt that shapes her entire existence. Esther is introduced as a "mulish," stubborn, and awkward individual, nicknamed "Little Jackass" because she was born kicking and resisting life from the very beginning. This obstinacy is both physical, shown in her accidents and bruises, and emotional, manifesting in her defiance against her circumstances and her family dynamics. Despite her struggles, Esther tries hard to embrace life, described poetically as a red rose "blooming in the heart of death" or a "white piano in a tinkling stream," symbolizing her vitality and resilience amid suffering. Her family background is marked by estrangement and emotional coldness. Her father, a passive, slow, and timid policeman with a sad, isolated life, contrasts with Esther's fiery nature. He patrols the graveyard to warn off lovers rather than arrest them, embodying a gentle but resigned presence. Esther inherits her strength and naturalness from her father's lineage, which includes Irish, Indian, and possibly Negro ancestry, known for their robust fertility and natural births. In contrast, her mother is tiny, childish, emotionally cold, and narrow-hearted, representing a limiting and oppressive force in Esther's life. A central element of Esther's tragic identity is the burden of a lost twin, Rosemary, who was stillborn before Esther's birth. Esther's mother accuses her repeatedly, laughing and crying, that Esther "killed" Rosemary by kicking her out of the womb, condemning Esther as a murderer even before she was born. This accusation haunts Esther throughout her life, coloring her self-perception with guilt and shame. She grows up overshadowed by the memory of Rosemary, an idealized "perfect" child who would have been obedient, delicate, and beloved, the daughter her mother longed for. Esther, by contrast, is awkward, large, and defiant, and constantly reminded of her failure to be the child her mother wanted. Esther's relationship with motherhood and fertility is deeply fraught. She is often pregnant or swollen but has lost many children, described metaphorically as "little birds," "snowflakes," or "stillborn," which reflects the repeated cycle of hope

and grief she endures. She carries a secret sorrow for these lost children, which she can never openly mourn or explain, and she battles both physical and emotional pain, including an enlarged heart and a crippled foot, which further symbolize her suffering. Her internal world is haunted by shadows, rustlings, and the presence of the lost children, hinting at a mystical or spectral dimension to her grief. Esther digs holes in the earth, searching for remnants of the past, the “shadow” of her twin, and the lost children, but never fully finds peace or closure. She experiences a profound alienation, sometimes doubting her own reality and identity, wondering if she herself is the shadow or the lesser existence, while Rosemary is the “real” one who should have lived. Despite all this, Esther is not without moments of fierce joy and strength. Her laughter can be loud and powerful, shaking the snow from clouds, and she fiercely protects and claims love for the children she does carry, even if they do not survive. Her stubbornness and vitality make her a figure of tragic endurance, struggling against the “nameless grave” and the weight of familial expectations and curses. Esther Longtree is a figure of intense contradiction: strong yet vulnerable, life-affirming yet haunted by death, natural yet marked by unnatural loss. Her story in this chapter reveals themes of maternal grief, the burden of inherited trauma, and the search for identity amid family secrets and personal suffering. Her character embodies the tragic complexity of fertility and loss, the interplay of life and death, and the painful legacies passed down through generations. See Esther Longtree.

- Esther Longtree symbolizes a deep and painful history of struggle, loss, and marginalization that can be read as a reflection of certain aspects of American history, particularly those involving the complex legacies of race, family, and survival. Her lineage is described as mixed: “partly Irish and partly Indian and maybe even had a Negro streak in them,” suggesting the multiracial and multicultural heritage that is part of the American fabric, especially in the context of colonial and frontier histories where Indigenous peoples, European settlers, and African descendants intersected. This mixed heritage points to the tangled histories of racial identity and the often painful intersections of different communities in the United States. Esther’s life is marked by hardship, loneliness, and repeated loss: she has borne many children who have died before or shortly after birth, symbolizing the high rates of infant and maternal mortality historically faced by impoverished, marginalized, or rural populations in the US. Her mother’s accusation that Esther “killed a little child before she was ever born,” referring to the death of her twin Rosemary, suggests the tragic fate of many families who suffered such losses quietly and without support. Her father, a passive policeman whose “life was a prison,” represents the ordinary working-class man trapped in a limited existence, disconnected from emotional life and unable to protect or nurture fully. This dynamic echoes the social and economic constraints faced by many in American history, especially in small, insular communities where traditional roles and isolation prevailed. Esther’s story also touches on the theme of women’s experiences of oppression and misunderstanding: her mother’s coldness, the abuse from schoolmates, and her own physical and emotional pain symbolize the harsh realities women have faced, including neglect, judgment, and the burden of reproductive

suffering. Esther's "mulish" nature and stubbornness reflect resistance and survival despite these adversities, embodying the resilience necessary to endure "long trial, long suffering." Esther Longtree's narrative can be understood as a microcosm of the American historical experience involving racial mixture, frontier hardship, the struggles of working-class families, the tragedy of loss, and the resilience of women caught in cycles of suffering and survival. Her character embodies the silent histories of pain and endurance that underlie much of the American story.

- "being a white piano in a tinkling stream": "I am a white piano," Esther says in the Chapter 72 resources; in the Chapter 74 resources she is "only a silent piano with dusty keys." See Music and Composers.
- "she was the chip off the old block": When the young William Pitt first spoke in Parliament in 1781, Edmund Burke said he was "not merely a chip of the old block, but the old block itself." See Esther's Father.
- "He showed him the way to the bank": Indiana's John Dillinger robbed banks across the Midwest in 1933 and 1934 and broke out of the Crown Point, Indiana, jail with a wooden gun. See Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.
- "The children were wise by comparison with their fathers": The novel portrays children, especially characters like Esther Longtree and Musidora's children, as burdened by premature or inappropriate knowledge of sexual realities. This knowledge is often linked to trauma, loss, and the failure of adult protection. Esther Longtree is depicted as a woman who has been "always pregnant," with many stillborn children and a pervasive sense of loss, loneliness, and burden. She is surrounded by the imagery of children who have suffered or died, and these children represent both literal and symbolic figures of innocence lost and corrupted sexuality. The children are often shown as victims of adult failures, such as unloving or absent parents, societal neglect, and the consequences of adult promiscuity or irresponsibility. They are described as "wise" beyond their years, aware of harsh truths that should be hidden from them, and sometimes as reproachful presences haunting their mothers or the community. Vera, and other characters, like Madge, observe that these children are burdened with knowledge and experiences they cannot comprehend or control, symbolizing a premature confrontation with adult realities. This is reflected in phrases like children "playing at hanging themselves," or being "mysterious shrouded presences" who cause confusion and suffering. The presence of sexually aware children also ties into the motif of pregnancy and birth, which in the novel is often depicted as fraught with mystery, loss, and sometimes death. The characters' struggles with conception, stillbirths, and motherhood are interwoven with a cultural critique of the consequences of repressed or mismanaged sexuality. The motif symbolizes the erosion of childhood innocence in a world where adult hypocrisies, failures, and social decay impinge on the young. It reflects a cultural anxiety about the premature sexualization of children and the failure of society to protect them. These children embody the consequences of broken families, absent or irresponsible parents, and a society that neglects its vulnerable members. Their knowledge of sex is not empowering but burdensome, linked to trauma rather than understanding. The novel critiques the social conditions

that produce such outcomes: poverty, neglect, and moral confusion. The children represent lost potential and fragmented identities, paralleling the novel's themes of multiplicity and fractured selves. Their awareness of sex and its consequences contrasts with their powerlessness and the mysteries surrounding birth, life, and death. The motif also connects with the novel's larger exploration of dreams, illusions, and altered states of consciousness. The children's premature knowledge is part of a distorted reality, where what is known and unknown, real and unreal, is blurred. Their sexual awareness is part of the complex interplay between truth and illusion that defines the novel's atmosphere. By highlighting the plight of children burdened with adult knowledge, the novel implicitly critiques the social hypocrisies surrounding sex, marriage, and reproduction. It questions the societal failure to provide clear, honest guidance and protection, instead leaving children to navigate complex, often harmful realities alone. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- "She had been abused by her schoolmates": Esther Longtree endured significant bullying from her schoolmates and other children during her childhood. She was nicknamed "Little Jackass" because of her stubborn, awkward nature and physical deformities, including a deformed foot and crossed eyes. The children made fun of her for these traits as well as for her "streaming hair" and her mulish head, which she was always sticking into old wasps' nests, a behavior her mother had criticized as well. Esther was often stung and worried by wasps, bees, and flies, which added to her distress. Her physical awkwardness and accidents (she was always falling, her knees scarred, and her body black and blue) made her a target for ridicule. The children's cruelty was compounded by Esther's own suffering and her mother's lack of understanding or protection, leaving her lonely and often crying in the dark. The bullying was not just verbal but tied to Esther's physical and emotional isolation, making her childhood unhappy and lonely.
- "She was the red, red rose": "O my Luve's like a red, red rose, / That's newly sprung in June" (Robert Burns, 1794). See Roses and Flowers and Romantic Poets.
- "Poor Little Jackass, stinging inside": See Balaam's ass and the barren mule in the Chapter 72 resources. See Horses and Carriages.
- "stealing the food out of the icebox": An icebox is a compact non-mechanical refrigerator which was a common early-twentieth-century kitchen appliance before the development of safely powered refrigeration devices. Before the development of electric refrigerators, iceboxes were referred to by the public as refrigerators. The terms icebox and refrigerator were used interchangeably in advertising as long ago as 1848.
    - Esther Longtree's lack of food is described as a persistent and painful condition that has been part of her life even before she was pregnant. She is characterized by an empty stomach because she could not eat enough to give her strength. The chapter notes that even before pregnancy, Esther was always hungry and resorted to stealing food from the icebox when her mother wasn't looking. This chronic hunger is part of her broader suffering and physical weakness, contributing to her difficult existence marked by accidents, bruises, and a crippled foot. Esther's experience of

hunger and deprivation can be seen as a personal reflection of broader themes of scarcity and struggle that many individuals have faced historically. The narrative situates Esther's hunger within a familial and emotional context of neglect, poverty, and hardship as her mother's household is described as small and fragile, with delicate objects easily broken, and her father as a passive policeman with little home life, suggesting an environment of limited resources and emotional deprivation. The history of child hunger in the U.S. includes its public "discovery" in the late 1960s, which led to the creation of federal programs like the Special Food Service Program (now the Summer Food Service Program) and the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). The 1980s saw the development of metrics like "food insecurity" to better measure the problem, and despite fluctuations, child hunger remains a significant issue, with families of color and single-parent households disproportionately affected. The federal programs and the 1980s measures postdate 1964.

- "Her mother used to tie her by a rope": Vera narrates the harsh and painful parental abuse Esther Longtree endured from a very early age. Esther's mother is portrayed as a cold, narrow-hearted woman who blamed Esther for the death of her twin sister, Rosemary, even before Esther was born. Her mother repeatedly accused her of having "killed a little child before she was ever born," labeling her guilty of infanticide in the womb, which created a deep sense of shame and guilt in Esther throughout her life. This accusation was a source of constant reproach and emotional cruelty, with her mother both laughing and crying as she reminded Esther of this supposed crime. The mother also expressed disappointment and resentment toward Esther, comparing her unfavorably to the lost twin, Rosemary, who was idealized as perfect, delicate, and the daughter her mother wished she had. This kept Esther in a state of embarrassment and alienation, burdened by the shadow of the lost child and her mother's cold judgment. Esther's mother physically abused her as a child, exemplified when she once hit Esther for screaming about a bee that had flown up her skirts, not believing her and dismissing her cries. Esther was also tied by a rope in the yard under a tree by her mother, indicating neglect and harsh treatment. The mother is described as childish in mentality and size, living in a house too small for both her and Esther, filled with fragile objects that seemed to symbolize the fragile and oppressive environment Esther was subjected to. The emotional abuse extended to lack of nurturing; Esther's mother never nursed her at the narrow breasts or stayed to comfort her tears. She also mocked Esther's awkwardness, physical deformities, and stubborn nature, further isolating her emotionally. The mother's coldness was a constant presence, leaving Esther to grow up lonely and unloved, intensifying her suffering. Esther's maternal abuse was a complex mixture of emotional cruelty, neglect, physical punishment, and harsh judgment rooted in the tragic loss of her twin and her mother's inability to love her fully, which deeply affected Esther's sense of self and her life trajectory. See Esther's Mother.
- "partly Irish and partly Indian and maybe even had a Negro streak": Indiana outlawed marriage between white and Black people for most of its history and repealed the ban

only in 1965, two years before Loving v. Virginia (1967) ended such laws everywhere. See Society, Class, and Race and Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.

- “She would turn, bend, spill a baby”: A precipitate labor, three hours or less from the first contractions to birth, can deliver a baby before the mother has time to lie down. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- “that needle’s eye through which the camel shall not pass”: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matthew 19:24, KJV). See also the Chapter 72 resources. See The Bible.
- “the swaddling clothes which she had buried”: “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger” (Luke 2:7, KJV). See The Bible.
- “pallid descendant of George Washington’s sister”: Esther says her mother is a “pallid descendant of George Washington’s sister.” This may refer to Betty Washington Lewis who was the younger sister of George Washington and the only sister that survived childhood. Betty Washington was born into the Washington Family as the first daughter of Augustine Washington and Mary Ball Washington.
    - Elizabeth “Betty” Washington Lewis (1733-1797) was George Washington’s only sister to survive to adulthood and a dedicated patriot. She managed the family estate, Kenmore, in Fredericksburg, Virginia, while her husband, Fielding Lewis, supported the Revolution. She faced financial hardships and managed the household after her husband’s death.
- “kicking against them all, against the traces”: “It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks” (Acts 9:5, KJV), said of Saul, the persecutor, before he became Paul; the pricks are the goads that drive an ox. See The Bible.
- “She was not born innocent and stainless”: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5, KJV). Augustine, in the first book of his Confessions, saw sin even in the jealous infant at the breast; the doctrine of original sin holds that every child is born guilty. See The Bible and Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “Poor, poor little thing, poor little other one who would have loved her mother so much, Rosemary”: “There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance; pray, love, remember” (Ophelia, Hamlet, 4.5). Esther’s mother remembers Rosemary all her life. See Rosemary, Shakespeare, and Twins and Doubles.
- “flesh of her flesh”: “This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:23, KJV). See Genesis.
- “Her mother had accused her of murder”: Esther’s mothers behavior is a form of severe emotional abuse with devastating psychological consequences for the surviving child. The parent’s actions are often rooted in their own inability to cope with the trauma, grief, and feelings of helplessness surrounding the death. Individuals with narcissistic or antisocial traits may lack empathy and view their children as objects to

be used to regulate their own emotions. In this context, blaming the child can serve the parent's emotional needs rather than the child's. See Esther's Mother.

- "her having killed somebody without shedding of blood": "And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission" (Hebrews 9:22, KJV). See The Bible and Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.

Vocabulary

Amplitude

Largeness; fullness of size or extent.

Bluejay

A loud, crested blue bird of North America.

Burden

The refrain of a song; also a load.

Elocution

The art of clear, expressive public speaking, once taught as a lesson.

Equable

Even-tempered; not easily disturbed.

Featherweight

In boxing, the class just above bantamweight, long limited to 126 pounds; anything very light.

Furtive

Secretive; sly.

Haw

The red berry of the hawthorn.

Hopscotch

A children's game of hopping through squares chalked on the ground.

Icebox

A cabinet cooled by a block of ice; an early refrigerator.

Infanticide

The killing of an infant.

Ingratitude

Lack of thankfulness.

Lumbering

Moving heavily and clumsily.

Myrrh

A fragrant resin used in incense and embalming.

Pallid

Pale; lacking color or life.

Premature

Born or happening too early.

Swaddling clothes

Strips of cloth wrapped snugly around a newborn.

Teething ring

A ring for a baby to bite on while cutting teeth.

Thimble

A small cap worn on the finger to push the needle in sewing.

Torpid

Sluggish; inactive.

Traces

The straps by which a horse pulls a wagon; to kick against the traces is to resist restraint.

Undifferentiated

Not told apart; all alike.

Wake

A watch kept over the dead before burial.

Chapter 79

Content note: *The Esther Longtree chapters (72 to 81) deal with stillbirth and pregnancy loss, rape, infanticide, racist violence including lynching, and cruelty to children. This chapter describes Esther's conception with a silver spoon carried by a go-between, the go-between's rape of Esther's mother, the mother's attempt to get rid of the pregnancy, and her cruelty to her child.*

Summary

Esther's parents, the huge passive policeman and his tiny child-bride, never consummated their marriage. For seven years a large, dark, foreign woman in a man's hat, coat, and shoes came at night to their kitchen, carrying a tiny silver spoon between husband and wife while the policeman read old baseball scores behind the stove, until Esther and Rosemary were conceived. When the mother went alone to the go-between's mule farm to show her the pregnancy, the go-between took her into bed and held her down, and in that minute the mother saw that it was a man; afterward she tried and failed to get rid of the child. Esther's uncle, a pugilist, told her the story, laughing. On her seventh birthday her mother, dressed in her old bridal clothes, led her all day through briers and marshes to the old mule farm, where the go-between lay dying and blind on a bed of chicken feathers, with Esther's own crooked nose and dimpled chin: her father. Ever since, every day has been her birthday, and she has died with every moth.

Characters present

Esther Longtree · Esther's Mother · Esther's Father · Rosemary

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Identity and the Self · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Society, Class, and Race · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Birds · Clocks and Watches · Clouds and Storms · Horses and Carriages · Moon and Stars · Roses and Flowers · Shadows · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Augustine and Christian Theology · Spiritualism and the Occult

Allusions: American Religious Movements · Ancient Egypt · Don Quixote · Fairy Tales and Folklore · Genesis · Greek Mythology · Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest · Judaism · Music and Composers · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · Shakespeare · The Bible

Key passages

From the research

- Esther is described as “illusive,” a natural woman born of barren parents who never consummated their marriage. Her conception was not ordinary but happened “across distance,” involving a third person, an “old concubine” or “other woman,” who carried a silver spoon used to impregnate her mother. Her parents’ marriage was arid, with no conjugal love, and Esther’s existence itself is framed as a “terrible joke” on nature.
- The “other woman,” a large, dark, and somewhat menacing figure, acted as a go-between for Esther’s parents who could not physically unite. She carried the silver spoon, and her presence is shadowy and powerful. The chapter notes that this took place over many years, with the “other woman” visiting regularly, setting an alarm clock, and performing ritualistic acts to ensure the conception would succeed.
- Esther’s mother’s feelings of fear, pain, and hopelessness during the prolonged and unnatural conception are described in detail. The husband’s passive role contrasts sharply with the other woman’s active involvement. The mother’s suffering is emphasized, including her physical pain and emotional torment. Esther is born kicking and afraid, a product of a “long honeymoon” that never became a true marriage night. The birth is marked by difficulty and instruments. When the pregnant mother went to the mule farm, the go-between took her into bed and held her “pinioned,” “stilled her screaming,” and in that minute the mother saw “that it was a man.”
- Esther’s mother repeatedly reminds her of the stillborn child (Rosemary), whom Esther is supposed to have “killed” in the womb with her “big feet.” Esther’s innocence is corrupted early by the family’s dark secrets and the community’s scorn. She is called “Little Jackass” by her father and teased by her uncle. The tragedy of Rosemary’s stillbirth and Esther’s survival is a source of lifelong guilt and alienation.
- On Esther’s seventh birthday, she and her mother make a difficult journey to visit the other woman, who had helped bring Esther into the world. The other woman is found dying, blind, and monstrous, yet still the “father” figure in Esther’s story.
- The chapter closes with a poignant meditation on Esther’s gradual death. Despite her physical presence and vitality, Esther is portrayed as a “happy dead,” burdened by the weight of her origins and the absence of natural love.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “The times were out of joint and she the dead.” What does Esther borrow from Hamlet?
- “Live, oh, happy dead!” What does Esther envy in the dead?

- “She had been brought into this arid, barren world without any love but her father’s kiss upon her mother’s brow.” What does such a beginning do to a child?

Characters

- The go-between was “more wonderful, more beautiful than either of her parents.” Why would Esther think so?
- The policeman sits behind the stove reading old baseball scores. “At best, what was the man’s role in life?”
- At the mule farm the mother saw “that it was a man who had taken her away from her husband.” Who, then, is Esther’s father?

Connections

- Esther claims “her own was the virgin birth.” How is her conception a dark mirror of the Annunciation?
- The go-between had “the great chin, dimpled like Esther Longtree’s.” What else does Esther inherit?
- Esther expected “a golden palace in a garden of talking birds and silver fountains” and found the old mule farm. Where else in the novel does a promised palace turn out to be a ruin?

Reflection

- “Perhaps every parent was a stranger, Esther sometimes thought.” Is that true?
- “From that day, her seventh birthday, she had trusted no one.” What was broken that day?
- “Her innocency had been spoiled by men, women, children.” Can a child’s innocence be spoiled before she understands anything?

Research: Characters

Esther Longtree

- The protagonist, described as a large, muscular, and natural woman, yet burdened by the unnaturalness of her conception and birth. She embodies both physical strength and emotional vulnerability.
- She is “illusive,” caught between life and eternity, haunted by the shadow of her stillborn twin Rosemary.
- Known as “Little Jackass,” a nickname signifying her struggle with identity and acceptance.
- She experiences loneliness and rejection but has a deep maternal heart.

- Esther’s internal conflict is central, revealing layers of shame, defiance, and longing.

Esther’s Mother

- A small, delicate, and fragile woman who yearned for a child but was unable to conceive naturally.
- She endured the long, torturous process of conception mediated by the “other woman.”
- Often blames Esther for the barren landscape of their lives and the shadow of Rosemary.
- Her contradictory feelings of desire, regret, and hope illustrate the emotional complexity of motherhood under duress.
- At the go-between’s mule farm she was held “pinioned” and saw “that it was a man”; afterward she tried, and failed, to get rid of the child. She tied Esther by a rope (“She still bore the marks of the rope”), left her “out-of-doors when it rained,” and on Esther’s birthdays, which were also Rosemary’s, baked two cakes or none.

Esther’s Father (The Policeman)

- A large, distant man who never consummated the marriage.
- He “had been good and kind and had forgiven her everything imaginable, even her birth,” calling Esther his Little Jackass and saying she smelled of wild flowers, though he also pinched her black and blue.
- He is passive, absorbed in his own interests, such as reading old baseball scores.
- His relationship with Esther’s mother is marked by distance and lack of physical union.

The Other Woman (The Go-Between / The Concubine)

- The “other woman” who assists with Esther Longtree’s conception is a complex and symbolically rich character, embodying themes of alienation, unnatural intervention, and the blurring of gender and human roles.
- The other woman is portrayed as a large, dark, and somewhat grotesque figure, physically contrasting with Esther’s small, delicate mother. She is described as immense and misshapen, with a dimpled chin like Esther’s, yet her body smells of manure and old tulip bulbs rotted by rain, evoking an earthy, almost animalistic presence. She wears men’s shoes, a man’s hat, and coat, casting a shadow “like a man’s shadow” on the wall, blurring gender lines and emphasizing her liminal status between man and woman.
- She functions as a go-between or intermediary in the conception process: carrying a tiny silver spoon, the instrument used to impregnate Esther’s mother. The process is slow, torturous, and prolonged, spanning seven years of visits, during which the other woman comes at night, sometimes knocking or whistling to announce her arrival. She is methodical, patient, and calm, yet possesses a “slow anger.” Her presence is both

cruel and necessary, a facilitator of life born out of barrenness and absence of conjugal love.

- Her wearing of men's clothes and casting a male shadow suggests a hybrid or ambiguous gender identity, symbolizing the breakdown of conventional roles. She holds power over the creation of life, yet is an outsider, "a foreigner, someone who spoke with a strange accent," possibly exiled or carrying a "crime," which adds a sense of otherness and ostracism.
- She is associated with both life-giving and ominous death imagery, such as carrying a funeral wreath and walking among frozen boughs and songless birds. Her hands are described as large, flat, and dark, capable of warming Esther's mother but also marking the child with the shadow of her intervention.
- While she is described as cruel "as a child," she is also "more wonderful, more beautiful than either of her parents," suggesting a mysterious, inscrutable depth beneath her harsh exterior. She slaps and pinches Esther's mother, and at the mule farm she holds her "pinioned" in bed and stills her screaming; in that minute the mother sees that the go-between is a man.
- The other woman operates in secrecy, moving "back and forth" between Esther's parents, whose marriage is unconsummated.
- The other woman's intervention results in Esther's conception, an event described as unnatural and painful, but also miraculous in producing a child with a "big heart" and intense life force despite the barrenness of her parents' union. Esther's identity is deeply shaped by this conception, as she is "the child of the unnatural mating," simultaneously mulish and vulnerable, burdened by loneliness and the weight of her origins.

Rosemary

- Esther's stillborn twin, whose spirit and memory haunt Esther.
- Symbolizes what might have been and the loss that shadows Esther's life.

Esther's Uncle

- The uncle is portrayed as a complex and somewhat enigmatic figure within the narrative of Esther Longtree's conception and family history. He is described as a pugilist who died of cancer and left his estate to an old spiritualist medium, a tall, thin-cheeked man in contact with astral forces, star bodies, and influences.
- His role in Esther's life is marked by a peculiar mix of cruelty and candor. He mockingly informs Esther that her conception was "unnatural" and that she was called "Little Jackass" by her father because of this unnaturalness. His laughter until his face turned purple while telling her this indicates a harsh and mocking attitude, perhaps reflecting the family's broader discomfort or denial regarding the circumstances of Esther's birth. The nickname "Little Jackass" itself is symbolic: implying stubbornness, mule-like qualities, and an outsider status that Esther internalizes as part of her identity.

Research: Themes

Unnatural Conception and Birth

See: Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth

- Esther's birth is the result of an unnatural process involving a silver spoon, a third person, and years of effort without conjugal love or union.
- The story contrasts the natural processes of life and love with a barren, mechanical, and painful conception.
- This theme explores the impact of artificiality on identity and human connection.

Loneliness and Isolation

See: Isolation and Connection

- Esther lives a life marked by emotional and physical isolation, born from a marriage devoid of love.
- She is described as "mulish," resisting all constraints but trapped by her origins.
- Loneliness pervades her family and her own experience.

Identity and Acceptance

See: Identity and the Self

- Esther struggles with her identity, labeled "Little Jackass" and burdened by the legacy of her birth.
- Her physical and emotional differences set her apart, and she grapples with feelings of shame, rejection, and the desire for love.
- The story probes how origins influence self-perception and social acceptance.

Nature and Symbolism

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- Nature imagery (clouds, stars, flowers, birds) contrasts with the barren and mechanical nature of Esther's conception.
- Esther's heart is described as "starlight, wind, water," suggesting a connection to natural forces despite her unnatural birth.
- The passage uses symbolism to reflect emotional states and existential questions.

Memory and Trauma

See: Memory and the Past · Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- The narrative shows how trauma from birth and family secrets shapes Esther's life.

- The long seven-year process of conception and the presence of the other woman haunt the family.
- Esther’s mother’s feelings of guilt and regret color their relationship.

Death and Life

See: Death and Mortality

- The birth of Rosemary (stillborn) alongside Esther highlights the proximity of life and death.
- Esther’s life is described as a slow death, a gradual fading even as she lives.
- The passage reflects on mortality, loss, and the fragility of existence.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Silver Spoon

- Symbolizes the unnatural means of conception, coldness, and mechanical intervention.
- Represents the emotional barrenness and distance in the parents’ relationship.

The Other Woman

- Embodies the intrusion of unnatural forces, the shadow of death and life intertwined.
- Her dual nature (wearing men’s clothes, having a shadow like a man) symbolizes gender ambiguity and the breaking of natural roles.

The Fence

- A metaphor for the boundary between life and eternity, natural and unnatural existence.
- Esther stands “arms akimbo, legs astraddle” at this fence, caught between worlds.

Nature (Clouds, Stars, Flowers)

See: Moon and Stars · Roses and Flowers · Clouds and Storms

- Contrasts with the harshness of Esther’s birth, representing purity, innocence, and the natural cycle of life.
- The “clouds filled with holes” evoke fragility and vulnerability.

The Shadow

See: Shadows

- Rosemary’s presence as a shadow symbolizes loss and absence.

- Esther’s own shadow represents the duality of her existence.

Social Commentary

- The passage critiques societal expectations of marriage, conception, and family.
- It exposes the cruelty of imposed roles and the stigma of non-traditional origins.

Symbolic Use of Time

See: Clocks and Watches

- The seven-year conception period symbolizes prolonged suffering and anticipation.
- The anniversary visit to the other woman reflects attempts to reconcile past trauma.

Interpersonal Relationships

See: The Sea and Water

- The coldness between Esther’s parents contrasts with the strange intimacy involving the other woman.
- Esther’s relationship with her parents is fraught with misunderstanding and blame.

Research: Resources

- “Esther Longtree was illusive”: Esther Longtree is a deeply tragic and complex figure, embodying themes of unnatural conception, loneliness, maternal suffering, and existential isolation. Her characterization is rich with symbolism and psychological depth, revealing a woman who is both physically imposing and emotionally vulnerable. Esther is described as a large, muscular, wind-burned woman with dark skin and crossed eyes that reflect a dazzling inner light where there is no actual light. Her body is often swollen due to pregnancy, yet she carries a profound sadness and a sense of being out of place in the world. She is mulish, stubborn, and somewhat vulgar, traits that stem from her difficult origins and emotional turmoil. Despite her toughness, her heart is described as “big and leaking,” full of regrets, expectations, and memories, highlighting her emotional complexity and capacity for deep feeling. Esther’s origins are central to her character. She was conceived in a way that defies the natural order, her parents never consummated their marriage physically, and instead, a third person, an “old concubine,” using a silver spoon, facilitated her conception across a great emotional and physical distance between her parents. This unusual conception symbolizes the emotional barrenness and alienation in her family. Her parents’ marriage is described as arid and loveless, lacking the fundamental union of flesh and soul. Esther’s conception is painful, slow, and unnatural, taking seven years and involving this mysterious third woman who serves as a go-between. The figure of the “other woman,” the old concubine who carries the silver spoon and physically intervenes in the conception, is a haunting presence in Esther’s story. This woman is

physically and symbolically powerful and described as large, dark, and foreign, with masculine traits. She embodies the harsh reality and cruelty of Esther's conception and birth. She is portrayed as both cruel and strangely beautiful in an inner, invisible way, representing an essential but unsettling force in Esther's life and origin. Esther was born kicking and afraid, a difficult birth requiring instruments. She is the only one to survive; her twin, Rosemary, was stillborn. This loss haunts Esther, who is burdened by her mother's guilt and neglect, and by a sense of having caused harm. She carries the memory and presence of Rosemary as a kind of shadow or ghost, which deepens her loneliness and feeling of being an unnatural offspring. Esther's relationship with her parents is fraught with pain and misunderstanding. Her mother is distant, delicate, and childlike herself (never truly matured or fulfilled) and she often blames Esther for the darkness and barrenness of their world. Her father is large, passive, and somewhat detached, calling Esther "Little Jackass," a nickname that reflects both affection and cruelty. Both parents are emotionally unavailable, and Esther is left to navigate the world as an awkward, oversized child of a loveless union. Esther stands as a symbol of isolation born of a union that never was, a child who bridges eternity and life but belongs fully to neither. She is "cloud-like," "illusive," and driven to the edge of existence, a creature shaped by absence and distance. Her physical largeness contrasts with the emotional barrenness around her, making her a living paradox and a figure of existential struggle. Despite her tragic origins and the neglect she suffers, Esther has a "maternal heart" and a deep desire for love and motherhood. Yet she repeatedly experiences loss (stillbirths, shadows, unborn children) and carries the burden of these losses within her. She is a woman perpetually pregnant with doubtfulness and sorrow, embodying both fertility and barrenness simultaneously. On her seventh birthday, Esther and her mother undertake a difficult journey to visit the "other woman," the go-between who had helped conceive Esther. This journey is symbolic, marked by hardship, loss of clothing, and the harshness of the natural and social world. The visit reveals the death and decay underlying Esther's origin: the go-between is dying, blind, and stained by darkness, and Esther perceives her as a kind of paternal figure despite her appearance and gender. Esther is caught between life and death, reality and shadow, natural and unnatural. Her death is "gradual," tied to her continuous experience of loss and alienation. She tries to be good despite the hatred and misunderstanding she faces, and she is marked by a profound loneliness that aligns her with the natural world's shadows and ghosts. Her character embodies the tragic consequences of emotional and physical disconnection within a family and society. Esther Longtree in this chapter is a richly drawn figure representing the painful intersection of unnatural conception, family dysfunction, loneliness, maternal longing, and existential grief. She is a living paradox: large yet vulnerable, natural yet unnatural, maternal yet burdened by loss. Her story is woven with symbolism and mythic resonance. See Esther Longtree.

- Esther Longtree symbolizes a deeply troubled and complex history of barrenness, failed unions, and unnatural origins that can be read as a metaphor for certain aspects of American history, especially related to its cultural and social foundations. Her life story is marked by the unnatural conception and barren marriage of her

parents, who never consummated their union in the usual way. Instead, Esther was conceived through an intermediary, a dark, fierce go-between woman who carried a silver spoon between her parents over many years of painful, slow attempts at conception. This act was carried out without love, intimacy, or unity between the parents, symbolizing a broken or forced foundation rather than a natural, loving creation. Esther herself is born kicking, burdened by the shadow of a stillborn twin, Rosemary, representing loss, failure, and the cost of this unnatural origin. Symbolically, Esther's story reflects a history of disconnection, loneliness, and suffering born from a society or culture that lacks genuine union and affection at its core. The barren marriage, the long and cruel struggle to bring life into being without real love, and the presence of the mysterious third figure (the go-between woman) who acts almost like a dark force intervening between the natural order, all suggest themes of alienation and forced creation. Esther's immense physical presence, her repeated pregnancies of stillborn children, and her ultimate loneliness and marginalization reflect the burdens of a history that is both prolific and deeply wounded. Esther Longtree can be seen as symbolizing the nation's own troubled birth and development: a land born of separateness and conflict, of broken promises and harsh realities underneath the surface of prosperity and growth. Her story recalls the suffering of those who have been marginalized, neglected, or burdened by the consequences of historical injustices and the failures of foundational relationships, whether racial, cultural, or familial. Esther Longtree embodies the tragic history of a people born out of a fractured union, carrying within them the scars of that origin and the weight of unfulfilled hopes and lost futures. Her life's anguish and resilience mirror the broader American narrative of creation through suffering, alienation, and the struggle for identity and belonging.

- "Cupid had never feasted in her parents' house": In classical mythology, Cupid is the god of desire, erotic love, attraction and affection. He is often portrayed as the son of the love goddess Venus and the god of war Mars. See Cupid in the Chapter 76 resources. See Greek Mythology.
- "a Cupid draped in black and mourning with a funeral wreath hanging from his navel": The mud baby wears the same wreath, "hanging from its navel," in the Chapter 75 resources.
- "Her parents had never consummated their marriage but had only dreamed": Purity culture is a movement emphasizing abstinence until heterosexual marriage, strict gender roles, and modesty, often creating intense sexual shame and anxiety. It uses rituals like purity balls, rings, and pledges to control sexual expression, placing the burden of sexual responsibility on women and girls to prevent male lust. Many raised in this culture report anxiety, fear, and difficulties with intimacy, even after marrying. There is a growing movement of former adherents who are deconstructing these teachings and addressing the trauma caused by them. Its influence persists through different ministries and a continued focus on "biblical womanhood." Purity culture, with its rings and pledges, arose in the 1990s. See Women, Gender, and Marriage.

- “the times were out of joint and she the dead”: “The time is out of joint: O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right!” (Hamlet, 1.5). See Shakespeare.
- “like one which lives only twenty-four hours”: See the mayfly, “Ephemeral all die at sunset,” in the Chapter 73 resources.
- “Some, she knew, were born with silver spoons in their mouths”: The idiom, to be born with a silver spoon in their mouth, means someone born into a wealthy family or someone who has a prosperous background or is of a well-to-do family environment, often with the connotation that the person does not fully realize or appreciate the value of his or her advantage, its having been inherited rather than earned. It first appeared in print in English as early as 1719, in the translation of the novel Don Quixote. (Wikipedia) See Don Quixote.
- “a spoon having been used as the instrument to impregnate her mother”: Artificial insemination is the deliberate introduction of sperm into a female’s cervix or uterine cavity for the purpose of achieving a pregnancy through in vivo fertilization by means other than sexual intercourse or in vitro fertilisation. It is a fertility treatment for humans, and is common practice in animal breeding. The first recorded case of artificial insemination was John Hunter in 1790, who helped impregnate a linen draper’s wife. The first reported case of artificial insemination by a donor occurred in 1884 when William H. Pancoast, a professor in Philadelphia, took sperm from a handsome student in his class to inseminate an anesthetized woman without her knowledge. The incident was not published until twenty-five years later in a medical journal. The sperm bank was developed in Iowa starting in the 1950s in research conducted by University of Iowa medical school researchers Jerome Sherman and Raymond Bunge. In the United Kingdom, the British obstetrician Mary Barton founded one of the first fertility clinics to offer donor insemination in the 1930s. Mary Barton and her first husband were medical missionaries in pre-partition India, then still ruled by Britain. She witnessed the way in which women would be punished or even killed for being childless. At the time, it was taboo to suggest that it might be the husband, and not the wife, who was infertile, not only on the Indian subcontinent but also in the United Kingdom. Barton understood that both men and women could be infertile and in 1943 was the lead author on an article for the British Medical Journal. It was signed by many of the researchers active in the field in Great Britain at that time. With her second husband, Bertold Wiesner, Mary Barton successfully inseminated an estimated 1500 women, the majority with sperm provided from Wiesner, some 100-200 from neuroscientist Derek Richter as well as an unknown number from as yet unidentified donors. It is estimated that Wiesner is the biological father of around 600 children born following these procedures, although some believe this figure could be as high as 1000. When Barton and Wiesner published their paper on the procedure it was publicly condemned by the Pope who called it a sin, and the Archbishop of Canterbury who called for the British parliament to make human artificial insemination illegal. Although it was not criminalized it was not legalized either and therefore the status of artificial insemination was ambiguous. Consequently, the activities of Barton and Wiesner at the fertility clinic were conducted in secrecy and all inseminated women were instructed to

tell nobody about it. (Wikipedia) See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery and Iowa, Indiana, and the Midwest.

    - In vitro fertilization was not successful in humans until 1977. Prior to the development of IVF in humans, a physician and professor was doing research on reproduction in animals in 1891. In 1934, IVF was tried on rabbits. In 1948, research was expanded on IVF. In 1958, mouse embryos were grown in vitro and transferred into female mice. In 1959, research proved fertilization in vitro was capable of producing a live birth of a rabbit. This postdates 1964.

- “in the dim light of a gas jet”: Gas jets, or gasoliers, provided prominent indoor and outdoor lighting in the US from the early 19th century until being largely replaced by electric light, with remnants existing in specialized, theatrical, or rural settings. These systems utilized coal gas, manufactured gas, or, by the late 19th century, acetylene and natural gas to provide bright, steady illumination via burners, often employing mantles for increased efficiency.
- “an old spiritualist medium”: Modern Spiritualism is widely considered to have begun in March 1848 in Hydesville, New York, following the claims of the Fox sisters, Margaret and Kate, who reported hearing mysterious rappings that they believed were spirit messages. The movement originated in an area of upstate New York known as the “Burned-over District,” which was already a center for religious fervor and movements like Millerism and Mormonism during the Second Great Awakening. The movement quickly spread, with early adherents seeking direct communication with the spirits of the deceased. By the 1850s, it had spread across the country and internationally. In the 1850s, the movement attracted the attention of scientists who began investigating the reported supernatural occurrences. The credibility of the movement was challenged, especially in 1888 when the Fox sisters confessed to faking the original rappings. However, many believers continued their faith, and the movement adapted. Influential figures like Emma Hardinge Britten, a medium and lecturer, used the platform of Spiritualism to advocate for social causes like women’s rights and temperance. Spiritualism experienced a major revival after World War I, as many people sought to connect with loved ones who had died in the war. The movement continued to develop organizations and gather followers, with communities like Cassadaga, Florida, becoming known as centers for spiritualist activities. Throughout the mid-20th century, Spiritualism persisted, adapting to new generations and social changes, and leaving a lasting impact on American religious and cultural history. See Spiritualism and the Occult and American Religious Movements.
    - Spiritualism is the metaphysical school of thought opposing physicalism and also is the category of all spiritual beliefs from ancient to modern. They believe that spirit mediums are gifted to carry on such communication, but that anyone may become a medium through study and practice. They believe that spirits are capable of growth and perfection, progressing through higher spheres or planes, and that the afterlife is not a static state, but one in which spirits evolve. The two beliefs, that contact with spirits is possible, and that spirits may dwell on a higher plane, lead to a third belief, that spirits can provide knowledge about moral and ethical issues, as well as about

God and the afterlife. Many believers speak of spirit guides or specific spirits, often contacted, and relied upon for worldly and spiritual guidance. According to Spiritualists, anyone may receive spirit messages, but formal communication sessions are held by mediums, who claim thereby to receive information about the afterlife. Spiritualism developed and reached its peak growth in membership from the 1840s to the 1920s, especially in English-speaking countries. By 1897, spiritualism was said to have more than eight million followers in the United States and Europe, mostly drawn from the middle and upper classes.

- “had promised her a pair of golden gloves”: The Golden Gloves, amateur boxing tournaments for young fighters, began in New York in 1927 and in Chicago in 1928, sponsored by the city newspapers.
- “this old concubine walking between her parents”: Concubinage in the U.S. was primarily defined by the sexual exploitation of enslaved Black women by white owners, alongside localized systems like plaçage in Louisiana. These coerced, non-marital relationships were driven by power imbalances, racial prohibitions on marriage (anti-miscegenation laws), and the economic value of offspring. See Society, Class, and Race and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “this large-fisted, ugly woman who had brought the life and the shadow”: The intermediary woman who facilitated Esther Longtree’s conception is a complex and symbolically potent figure whose role resonates deeply when analyzed alongside the historical context of Black Americans’ civil rights struggles in the United States. This woman is described vividly and somewhat grotesquely as a large, dark, misshapen figure with broad, earth-stained hands, wearing men’s shoes, a man’s hat, and coat. She is a foreigner, someone with a strange accent, and carries an aura of mystery and hardship, possibly linked to an old crime or exile. She is neither kind nor gentle but is methodical, fierce, and patient, walking back and forth between Esther’s parents with a silver spoon, the instrument used to impregnate Esther’s mother over the course of seven years. This woman embodies a liminal, almost mythic figure: part man, part woman, part shadow crossing boundaries between genders, generations, and roles. She is the “go-between” in a domestic and biological triangle that is itself fractured and barren, symbolizing the failure of natural union and the intrusion of a painful, unnatural process. The intermediary woman’s outsider status (foreign, dark, and stigmatized) can be read as emblematic of the marginalized Black American figure during the civil rights era. Like the go-between, Black Americans were often seen as “other,” standing apart from the mainstream, burdened by historical injustices and systemic exclusion. Yet, this figure is also crucial to the creation of life, a bearer of possibility and transformation despite the cruelty and hardship she embodies. Similarly, Black Americans’ struggle was against a backdrop of oppression but also one of profound resilience and the potential to create new social realities. Esther’s conception through an intermediary and a silver spoon, rather than through a natural marital union, parallels the forced and unnatural social conditions imposed upon Black Americans (segregation, disenfranchisement, and systemic violence) that distorted natural human relations and family structures. The intermediary’s role in bridging a distance or barrier

between two barren parents mirrors the social barriers (legal, racial, and cultural) that Black Americans sought to overcome in their fight for civil rights. The intermediary woman's presence between Esther's parents and her shadow-like figure evoke the heavy legacy of slavery, segregation, and historical trauma that Black Americans carried. Esther herself, born of this unnatural and painful process, embodies the complex identity born from a fractured past. The intermediary's shadow, her "darkness," and the violence implicit in the conception process reflect the historical violence and the pain of inheritance that civil rights activism sought to confront and transcend. The intermediary woman subverts traditional gender and familial roles by acting as the agent of conception in an unconventional way. This subversion can be seen as analogous to the civil rights movement's challenge to established power structures and norms. The movement demanded recognition and redefinition of identity, agency, and rights, much as the intermediary woman's presence disrupts the conventional narrative of family and birth. The intermediary is simultaneously a figure of cruelty and care, oppression and agency. She is paid for her role, yet wields a strange power over the life created. This duality reflects the complex dynamics in civil rights struggles, where oppressed communities both suffered under systemic injustice and exercised profound agency in shaping their destinies. The intermediary woman in Esther Longtree's conception is a richly layered symbol and explores themes of alienation, unnaturalness, and painful mediation that resonate powerfully with the historical and social conditions of Black Americans fighting for civil rights. She embodies the barriers to natural unity imposed by history and society, yet also the endurance and complexity of life born from hardship and estrangement. Her figure invites reflection on the intersections of race, gender, power, and identity in a fractured world. See Society, Class, and Race.

- "a gramophone was playing": The gramophone, invented by Emil Berliner in 1887, is an early, mechanical, analog sound reproduction device that plays flat, spirally-grooved discs (shellac records). It uses a stylus and horn to amplify sound mechanically, without electricity. As a precursor to the modern turntable, it revolutionized music by allowing mass production of recordings, distinguishing itself from cylinder-based phonographs. See Music and Composers.
- "she was not a virgin eating green cherries": Green, unripe cherries were a byword for a child's bellyache; Esther means a girl too young to know better. "green cherries" have been a part of candied fruit recipes for generations.
- "After all, her own was the virgin birth": The Immaculate Conception is the belief that the Virgin Mary was free of original sin from the moment of her conception. Original sin is the Christian doctrine that holds that humans, through the fact of birth, inherit a tainted nature in need of regeneration and a proclivity to sinful conduct. According to Christian apocryphal and Islamic tradition, Saint Anne was the mother of Mary and the maternal grandmother of Jesus. Saint Anne appears as the mother of Mary in the late 2nd-century Gospel of James. Saint Anne and her husband, Joachim, are infertile, but God hears their prayers and Mary is conceived. The conception is claimed to occur without sexual intercourse between Saint Anne and Joachim, which fits well with the

Gospel of James' persistent emphasis on Mary's sacred purity, but the story does not advance the idea of an immaculate conception. The Orthodox Church claims that Mary was conceived by her parents in the same way everyone is conceived. Anne (Hannah in Arabic) is recognized as a highly spiritual woman and as the mother of Mary. In the Quran she is described as childless until her old age. One day, Hannah saw a bird feeding its young while sitting in the shade of a tree, which awakened her desire to have children of her own. She prayed for a child and eventually conceived. Joachim (Imran in Arabic) died before the child was born. Expecting the child to be male, Hannah vowed to dedicate him to isolation and service in the Second Temple. However, Hannah bore a daughter instead, and named her Mary. Her words upon delivering Mary reflect her status as a great mystic, realizing that while she had wanted a son, this daughter was God's gift to her. She said: "My Lord! Truly, I brought her forth, a female. And God is greater in knowledge of what she brought forth. And the male is not like the female" (Quran 3:36). So her Lord received her with the very best acceptance. And her bringing forth caused the very best to develop in her. Joachim was a rich and pious man, who regularly gave to the poor. At the temple, Joachim's sacrifice was rejected, so the couple's childlessness was interpreted as a sign of divine displeasure. Joachim consequently withdrew to the desert, where he fasted and did penance for 40 days. Angels then appeared to both Joachim and Anne to promise them a child. Joachim later returned to Jerusalem and embraced Anne at the city gate, located in the Walls of Jerusalem. An ancient belief held that a child born of an elderly mother who had given up hope of having offspring was destined for great things. Joachim is named as the patron saint of fathers, grandfathers, grandparents, married couples, cabinet makers, and linen traders. "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee" (Luke 1:35, KJV). See The Bible and Augustine and Christian Theology.

- "she was Jesus Christ or anybody holy": Esther Longtree claims she is Jesus Christ as part of her complex self-perception, intertwined with her tragic and sorrowful life marked by endless pregnancies and stillbirths. She is a character burdened by a profound sense of loss and unfulfilled motherhood, feeling perpetually pregnant with children who never fully came to life. This identification with Jesus Christ seems to symbolize her own suffering, sacrifice, and bearing of pain, much like the figure of Christ who endured suffering for humanity. Esther's claim is connected to her experience of being "always pregnant," carrying the weight of loss, sorrow, and the burden of unrealized hopes. Her life is marked by a sense of being different, isolated, and carrying an immense internal burden: a "pregnancy which was more than the memory provided for." She is aware of her uniqueness and the vastness of her suffering, and by likening herself to Jesus Christ, she expresses the depth of her endurance and the sacrifice implicit in her condition. Esther's self-identification with Christ also reflects her feeling of being misunderstood and unrecognized, much like the biblical Christ who was often rejected and not understood by those around him. She is conscious of her pain and her role as a bearer of suffering, and this claim may be a manifestation of her grappling with her identity and the meaning of her life amidst her hardships.

- “A dove of God, she had read somewhere, impregnated Mary”: According to Christian theology, Mary was not impregnated by a literal bird like a dove, but rather conceived Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit. While artistic depictions sometimes show a dove (a symbol of the Holy Spirit) during the Annunciation, this is a symbolic representation. At Christ’s baptism the Spirit descended “like a dove” (Matthew 3:16, KJV). See The Bible.
- “that Christ was the youngest brother”: The Gospels make Jesus the eldest: “Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and Joses, and of Juda, and Simon? and are not his sisters here with us?” (Mark 6:3, KJV). See The Bible.
- “that would be a treacling mill”: A mule walking in an endless circle turned the rollers of a cane mill, pressing sorghum or sugar cane for molasses, or treacle; a merry-go-round of mules would be such a mill. See Horses and Carriages.
    - A treacling mill may refer to treacle mining which is a joke about mining of black treacle or molasses in a raw form similar to coal. The subject purports to be serious but is an attempt to test credulity. Thick black treacle makes the deception plausible. The topic has been a joke in British humor since the mid-19th century.
- “This third person, this dark woman”: A “dark woman” who assisted with births may refer to the following: 1) the Biblical midwife Shiphrah, one of the “Hebrew midwives” of Exodus 1:15, though some readers have taken her and Puah for Egyptians. Shiphrah, along with her colleague Puah, defied the Pharaoh’s order to kill newborn Hebrew males. 2) Biddy Mason, who was born into slavery, was a midwife and advocate for other enslaved people in 19th-century California. After gaining her freedom, she became a successful entrepreneur and philanthropist. 3) Margaret Charles Smith was an African American midwife in Alabama who delivered over 3,000 babies during a career spanning over 30 years, often in rural areas with limited healthcare access. 4) Mary Francis Hill Coley was a midwife from Georgia who delivered over 3,000 babies during her career. Her work was featured in the 1952 documentary, All My Babies. 5) Susie Carey was a third-generation midwife featured in a photograph at the National Museum of African American History and Culture. 6) Sarah Hudson Grant was a Black Southern midwife whose work is remembered today. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery, Society, Class, and Race, Judaism, and Ancient Egypt.
- “an old coat made of old fruit bags”: “an old coat made of old fruit bags” likely refers to garments created from repurposed cotton mesh citrus bags (orange, grapefruit, or lemon sacks), or more commonly, patterned cotton flour/feed sacks used for clothing during the Great Depression and World War II, which often featured bright, fruit-themed, or floral prints.
- “pinching her cheeks until they were pink as rosebuds”: Women historically pinched their cheeks and bit their lips to induce a natural, rosy flush of color, particularly during the Victorian era (19th century) and the Elizabethan era (16th century). This practice was used to enhance beauty without the stigma of wearing obvious makeup, which was often considered improper, associated with actresses, or linked to low morals.

- “in the twinkling of an eye”: See the Chapter 72 resources. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump” (1 Corinthians 15:52, KJV). See The Bible.
- “the other woman carrying candle, book, bell, funeral wreath”: The phrase “bell, book, and candle” refers to a Latin Christian method of excommunication by anathema, imposed on a person who had committed an exceptionally grievous sin. Evidently introduced by Pope Zachary around the middle of the 8th century, the rite was once used by the Latin Church. This form of excommunication was inflicted on Robert II of France by Pope Gregory V for his marriage to Bertha of Burgundy in the year 996, because Bertha was his second cousin. He was later reconciled with the Church after negotiations with Gregory’s successor Pope Silvester II. (Wikipedia) See Augustine and Christian Theology.
- “of ladders to heaven”: “And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven” (Genesis 28:12, KJV). See Genesis.
- “the birth of Esther was hard, requiring instruments”: Instruments to assist with childbirth have evolved from rudimentary tools for destructive purposes in antiquity to sophisticated instruments like forceps and vacuum extractors today. Early interventions included destructive tools for delivering stillborn fetuses and instruments for procedures like symphysiotomy, a painful procedure to widen the pelvis. Modern forceps, introduced by the Chamberlen family in the 16th century, were a breakthrough for delivering living infants, and their use, along with vacuum extractors, remains a vital part of modern obstetrics. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
- “the grey hen crowing on the bed-post”: A crowing hen was an omen of ill luck: “A whistling woman and a crowing hen / Are neither fit for God nor men.” See Fairy Tales and Folklore and Birds.
- “like the sexton beetle digging with its little foot”: Sexton beetles, commonly known as burying beetles, are large, orange-and-black insects that act as nature’s undertakers by burying small, dead animals (like mice or birds) to feed their larvae. They are among the few insects that display active parental care, with both parents preparing the carcass, removing hair, and feeding their young.
- “Her innocency had been spoiled by men, women, children”: “I will wash mine hands in innocency” (Psalm 26:6, KJV); innocency is the King James word. See The Bible.
- “The bleeding hand of a dead child, lifting, might testify against her”: By the old ordeal of the bier, a murdered body was believed to bleed afresh when its murderer came near. In Richard III, Henry VI’s corpse bleeds before Gloucester: “Dead Henry’s wounds / Open their congeal’d mouths and bleed afresh!” (1.2). See Shakespeare and Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.
- “something old, something new, something blue”: “Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue,” the old wedding rhyme; the mother leaves out the borrowed. See Women, Gender, and Marriage and Fairy Tales and Folklore.
- “a golden palace in a garden of talking birds and silver fountains”: In the Arabian Nights tale “The Talking Bird, the Singing Tree, and the Golden Water,” three children seek a

bird that speaks, a tree that sings, and a fountain of golden water. See Fairy Tales and Folklore.

- “So every day was thus her birthday”: Vera’s birthday and Esther Longtree’s birthday are portrayed with contrasting atmospheres and underlying thematic significance, reflecting their differing life circumstances and symbolic roles.
  - Vera’s birthday, her fourteenth, is described with a sense of ritual and expectation, though tinged with loneliness and unrealized celebration. Vera receives a formal party dress, a filmy white creation, somewhat too mature for her, chosen by Mr. Spitzer in a moment of abstraction linked to the memory of Vera’s mother. Despite the preparation, there are no guests, no grand party, and only Miss MacIntosh, her nursemaid, and Vera herself are present. The absence of guests and the muted atmosphere emphasize Vera’s isolation and the unrealized joys of childhood. Miss MacIntosh insists on simplicity and adherence to routine, asking Vera to take care of her duties, underscoring the austere and disciplined environment Vera inhabits. Vera is caught between the innocence and hope of youth and the harsh, confining realities imposed by her surroundings and caretakers. The birthday marks a threshold of maturity but also a loss of innocence, as Vera is trained for domesticity and marriage, and the celebration itself becomes a subdued, private event rather than a joyous public occasion. The birthday is also symbolic of Vera’s gradual awakening to the complexities and burdens of life. It is described as a moment on the edge of life’s “beginning of the end,” a turning point where the dreams and illusions of childhood begin to confront reality. The party dress and the preparations seem almost a costume for a role Vera must play rather than an expression of genuine celebration. The atmosphere is one of quiet resignation and subdued hope, with Vera realizing she has “but one” life and must face the responsibilities and limitations of her social role.
  - Esther’s seventh birthday is her mother’s anniversary: dressed in her old bridal clothes, the mother leads her all day through briers and marshes to the old mule farm to see the dying go-between, who is Esther’s father. On other birthdays, which were also Rosemary’s, her mother baked two cakes or none. See Rosemary.
  - Vera’s birthday is marked by a subdued, almost melancholic celebration within a structured, disciplined environment, while Esther’s birthday is enveloped in sorrow, mystery, and the physical and emotional weight of repeated loss. Vera’s day is a threshold into maturity, Esther’s a reflection of enduring struggle.
  - Vera’s birthday symbolizes the fragile transition from innocence to experience, the imposition of societal expectations, and the tension between dreams and reality. Esther’s birthday symbolizes endurance, maternal sacrifice, and the haunting presence of loss and unfulfilled potential.
  - Vera’s birthday occurs within the protective but confining care of Miss MacIntosh, reflecting themes of control, preparation for societal roles, and the looming responsibilities of adulthood. Esther’s birthday reflects marginalization, survival

amid hardship, and the complexities of maternal identity in a world shaped by absence and loss.

- Vera’s birthday carries a quiet hope and the bittersweet nature of growing up alone. Esther’s birthday carries a profound sense of isolation, struggle, and the interplay of hope and despair.

Vocabulary

Akimbo

With hands on hips and elbows turned out.

Astraddle

With one leg on each side; astride.

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Bemused

Puzzled and lost in thought.

Bluejay

A loud, crested blue bird of North America.

Burlap

Coarse cloth of jute or hemp, used for sacks.

Burnished

Polished until shining.

Concubine

A woman who lives with a man as a mate without being his wife.

Conjugal

Of marriage, especially the sexual relation between husband and wife.

Consummation

The completion or fulfillment of something.

Deflowered

Robbed of virginity.

Elixir

A medicine sold as a cure-all.

Featherweight

In boxing, the class just above bantamweight, long limited to 126 pounds; anything very light.

Flinty

Hard and unyielding, like flint.

Fore and aft

From front to back, as on a ship.

Garter

A band worn around the leg to hold up a stocking.

Go-between

A person who carries messages or deals between two others.

Gossamer

A fine film of cobweb; anything light and delicate.

Gramophone

An early record player with a horn.

Hobnailed

Studded with short nails on the sole.

Imperceptibly

So slowly or slightly as to go unnoticed.

Impregnable

Unable to be captured or broken into.

Larkspur

A garden and wild flower with spurred blue or purple blossoms.

Layette

A set of clothing and linens for a newborn.

Linoleum

A floor covering of linseed oil and cork on canvas.

Morsel

A small piece, especially of food.

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Nettle

A plant with stinging hairs.

Oblique

Indirect; slanting.

Parasol

A light umbrella carried for shade from the sun.

Pendulum

A weight that swings back and forth, as in a clock.

Pinioned

Held or bound fast, especially by the arms.

Posterior

The buttocks; at the back.

Premature

Born or happening too early.

Pugilist

A boxer.

Quicksilver

Mercury, the liquid metal; anything quick and shining.

Recessive

Tending to recede; hidden or held back.

Sardonic

Grimly mocking.

Scrupulous

Very careful to do what is right.

Sexton

A church officer who looks after the building and churchyard and often digs the graves.

Spiritualist

One who believes the living can speak with the spirits of the dead.

Striated

Marked with thin parallel lines or bands.

Stubble

The short stalks left after a harvest.

Transact

To carry out or carry through. Young uses it for crossing a distance, as in “transacted the gulf between two worlds.”

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Treacle

Molasses; dark syrup from sugar cane.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Chapter 80

Content note: *The Esther Longtree chapters (72 to 81) deal with stillbirth and pregnancy loss, rape, infanticide, racist violence including lynching, and cruelty to children. This chapter describes an infanticide, a man fleeing a lynching, and a stranger who has sex with Esther, then a young girl, while she sleeps.*

Summary

On a rainy afternoon in the dark restaurant, Esther tells Vera about Walter, her first-born. When she was a young girl, a stranger found her asleep in the summer fields, and she woke with him already inside her; at dawn she saw that he was a Black man, his face scarred where a white mob in the South had tried to hang him because he smiled at a white old maid's rooster. He fled north for fear the white people would kill him. Hardly knowing what was happening to her body, she hid the pregnancy, went south, and gave birth alone in a dirty hotel room, where she pressed her thumb on the newborn's throat, wrapped him in a sporting page, left him in a dresser drawer, and fled by train and bus. Yet she believes Walter lives, a Boy Scout taken away by "kind people" and going to school "with the white children," and he follows her everywhere, asking why she killed him and where his father is. She sets out crumbs for the spirits, knits with invisible thread, and waits for the little shadow boxer to make up for the first.

Characters present

Esther Longtree · Walter

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Faith, God, and the Supernatural · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Identity and the Self · Memory and the Past · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth · Society, Class, and Race · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Horses and Carriages

Philosophy: Freud and Jung · Spiritualism and the Occult

Allusions: American Religious Movements · Greek Mythology · Lynching and Racial Violence · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · The Bible · The Civil War

Key passages

From the research

- Esther is deeply affected by the presence of spirits and the memory of her dead children. She engages in rituals like making little clothes for no one, setting out bread crumbs for spirits, and building a little house of straw in a tree for the spirit to come

home to. This shows her ongoing connection to the lost children and her attempt to reconcile with the past.

- Esther discusses her impending marriage but insists she will not marry until the child comes. She contemplates the future of her progeny, hoping for strength and happiness despite her doubts.
- A central and deeply moving passage details Esther's first-born, Walter, who she believes she "killed" but who lives on in some form, haunting her conscience and mind. Walter represents both her guilt and her love, a child she tried to kill at birth by pressing her thumb on his throat and then abandoned, yet whose presence continues to torment her.
- Walter accuses Esther of killing him and questions her about his father. Esther's guilt is palpable as she tries to reconcile her actions with her love for Walter, describing him as a "black mystery" and acknowledging the painful burden he places on her.
- Esther distinguishes Walter from her many stillborn children, emphasizing that he was born alive and continues to grow.
- The chapter provides a detailed narrative of how Walter was conceived by a "stranger," a Black man, in a night of love and how Esther was unprepared and frightened by the pregnancy. This passage is important as it contextualizes Esther's fear, shame, and the social consequences she faced, especially regarding race and societal judgment.
- Throughout the chapter, Esther is described as perpetually pregnant, symbolizing her ongoing burden of guilt, loss, and hope. This "everlasting pregnancy" is a metaphor for her emotional state: caught between life and death, hope and despair.
- Esther admits to having pressed her thumb to still Walter's birth cry, effectively killing him, but not without enduring lifelong remorse. She also recounts how she hid the body and fled to avoid detection. This revelation is crucial as it underlines the secret that haunts her and explains her psychological torment.
- The chapter closes with Esther reflecting on her many miscarriages and stillborn children, the idea that life is filled with loss and unfinished stories. Despite everything, she clings to the memory of Walter.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- "Who murdered me? Who married me?" Why does Esther put the two together?
- "Some might have put on mourning after such loss. She had put on pregnancy." What does she mean?
- "Where is black white—where is white black—where is the dead child living—where is the live child dead?" Can these questions be answered?

Characters

- Esther says Walter's father "had awakened her with his body already in hers," yet she calls that night "the snowy peak of her existence." How can both be true?
- The white mob tried to hang Walter's father, though he "had only smiled at a white old maid's white rooster." What does Young expose here?
- Walter tells her, "mother, I go to a fine school with the white children now!" Why does Esther imagine him raised white?

Connections

- "Hee, haw, my darling," Esther cries. Where else do we hear "my darling"?
- Walter is "my black mystery whom the white detective will not find." How does this answer Chapter 77?
- Walter confuses her "much like a limb that hurts after the limb is cut away." What is he to her?

Reflection

- "Truly, she was guilty, but she was not guilty of what people thought." Of what is she guilty?
- "Could she have killed him for his difference?"
- "In life, we always must lose something of ourselves, long before we die." Do you agree?

Research: Characters

Esther Longtree

- Esther is complex, embodying resilience, confusion, sorrow, and hope.
- She is aware of her societal marginalization and her own perceived "madness" but embraces her unique perspective.
- Her character oscillates between despair and defiance, as she laughs at her barrenness and mourns her losses simultaneously.
- Her first-born child, Walter, both haunts and defines her. He symbolizes her greatest loss and source of emotional torment.
- Walter's Father is a black man whose identity and fate are shrouded in mystery and racial tension.
- Many transient men appear in her life, symbolizing fleeting connections and failed attempts at establishing lasting family bonds.

Walter

- Walter is a profoundly complex and symbolic character. He is Esther Longtree's first-born child, a figure who embodies both literal and metaphorical dimensions of life, death, guilt, and memory.
- Walter is described as a child whom Esther had "killed," yet paradoxically, he "lived." Esther hears his cries, feels his accusations, and wrestles with the burden of her guilt and regret that he represents. Walter's persistent questioning, "Mother, why have you killed me?" and "Where is my father?," haunts Esther's conscience.
- Walter acts as a relentless accuser who confronts Esther with her past actions and their consequences. His presence keeps her working ("He keeps me working"), making her scrub floors and endure long hours in the restaurant. His accusations are unanswerable, and he seems to have a cruel, hard heart, adding to Esther's suffering.
- Walter is portrayed with specific physical features, "black as my true love, black as my heart," reflecting his mixed racial heritage, which complicates Esther's feelings toward him. His blackness symbolizes difference and alienation, as well as the social challenges unresolved in Esther's life. The fact that his father was black and a "prince of Africa" adds layers to Walter's identity, evoking themes of race, social stigma, and forbidden love.
- Walter represents the "beloved obstacle" to Esther's life and future. His existence and the guilt attached to him prevent her from fully embracing motherhood and happiness. Esther's many stillborn children and miscarriages contrast with Walter's unique status as the one child who lived but remained emotionally inaccessible. Walter is both the cause of her endless pregnancies and the reason for her emotional isolation.
- Walter is inseparable from Esther's memories, a persistent shadow in her mind.
- Walter is not merely a character but a symbolic force representing Esther's guilt, lost motherhood, racial complexity, and the unresolved past that haunts her. He is a living accusation and a ghostly memory, a child who should have died but has instead become an eternal presence in Esther's life, shaping her identity and destiny.

Walter's father

- The white people of his Southern town tried to hang him "from a white-blossoming tree," though he "had only smiled at a white old maid's white rooster"; the rope broke, and he walked away from the scene of his own death and stumbled on Esther asleep in the fields. He "had awakened her with his body already in hers."
- Walter's father is portrayed primarily through Esther Longtree's memories, feelings, and the symbolic weight he carries rather than through direct characterization or actions.
- Walter's father is described as a black man, "as black as the ace of spades," a "Negro, a Negro, a Negro," who came into Esther's life unexpectedly and left an indelible mark upon her. He is portrayed as a "stranger," a "poor fellow," "a tramp," "a fugitive," or

even a “prince,” which indicates Esther’s ambivalence and the mystique surrounding him. This man came into her life in the darkness of a summer night, in an act that was “half of sleeping and half of waking,” suggesting a blend of innocence, confusion, and inevitability in their union.

- His blackness is significant in the narrative: Esther did not initially realize the racial difference at the moment of conception because “his face had been white” in the moonlight, and only “at dawn... she had seen that he was black.” This racial difference introduces a complex dynamic of love, fear, and societal judgment. Esther’s heart turns “black with the years,” and she recognizes her bond to him as something that makes her a “slave to his memory.” His departure is framed not as Esther leaving him, but as him fleeing “for fear the white people would see him and kill him,” underscoring the racial tensions and dangers of the time.
- Walter’s father is not depicted as a traditional or nurturing figure in Esther’s life. He is absent after the conception, and Esther carries the burden of his memory, the pregnancy, and the consequences largely alone. Despite this absence, his presence haunts Esther, symbolizing both the origin of her deepest grief and the source of a love she treasured but could not fully realize. His identity as a black man in a racially divided society adds a layer of tragedy and alienation to the story.
- Walter’s father is a mysterious, absent figure whose racial identity and sudden disappearance shape Esther’s life and psyche profoundly. He embodies the forces of love, loss, societal exclusion, and the lingering pain of an unfinished past that Esther cannot escape.

Research: Themes

Motherhood and Pregnancy

See: Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth

- Esther is perpetually pregnant, both literally and metaphorically. Her body swells with pregnancies that often end in stillbirths or miscarriages, yet she carries an enduring hope for a living child.
- The physical and emotional toll of her pregnancies is immense; she experiences nausea, swelling, and an overwhelming sense of waiting and expectation.
- Pregnancy is symbolic of life, death, and the cyclical nature of existence. It is her “widow’s weeds,” representing loss and continual renewal.

Guilt and Redemption

See: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice

- Esther harbors deep guilt over her first-born son, Walter, whom she believes she “killed” by pressing her thumb on his throat at birth and abandoning him.

- Despite her guilt, Walter is alive in her memories and visions, accusing her of her sins and questioning her about his father.
- Her attempts to redeem herself manifest in her ongoing pregnancies and her hope that the new child will compensate for the past losses.

Race and Identity

See: Identity and the Self · Society, Class, and Race

- Walter's father was a black man, described metaphorically as "the prince of Africa" and "as black as the ace of spades."
- Esther's shock and societal stigma over this interracial relationship and child profoundly impact her life.
- Walter's blackness is a symbolic and literal source of conflict, shame, love, and fear for Esther, reflecting broader themes of racial tension and identity.

Life, Death, and the Supernatural

See: Death and Mortality · Faith, God, and the Supernatural

- The narrative blurs boundaries between life and death, as Esther communicates with spirits and imagines an "other world" parallel to this one.
- Her miscarriages and stillborn children are depicted as ghostly presences and delicate entities like moths, feathers, and snowflakes.
- Walter exists both as a living child and a spectral presence haunting her conscience.

Memory and Time

See: Memory and the Past · Time

- Esther's memory is fragmented, cyclical, and tinged with confusion as she recalls her past pregnancies, loves, and losses.
- Time is fluid; events from years ago feel present and immediate, especially as she contemplates the "unfinished murder" of Walter.
- The narrative explores how memory shapes identity and the persistence of past trauma.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

- Pregnancy is a central symbol representing creation, hope, and the possibility of life. However, in Esther's case, it also symbolizes loss, failure, and the burden of guilt, as she has experienced many stillbirths and miscarriages. Her "everlasting pregnancy" is not just physical but metaphysical, carrying the memory and shadow of her first child who died but also "lived" in a spiritual or haunting way. This duality of birth and death

intertwined in her pregnancy reflects her conflicted emotions and the complexity of motherhood.

- Walter, Esther's first-born, is a powerful symbol of both guilt and unresolved trauma. He is described as both dead and alive; he haunts her as a ghostly presence, accusing her of killing him, yet he "lives" and grows outside her. Walter's contradictory existence symbolizes Esther's inner turmoil, remorse, and the inescapable consequences of past actions. His blackness, in contrast to the white imagery surrounding Esther, also symbolizes otherness, racial difference, and social alienation.
- The interplay of black and white is a recurring symbol throughout the chapter. Esther herself is dark-skinned, and her lover and child are black, while many surrounding images are white: white butterflies, white snow, white moonlight, white flowers, and the white detective. This contrast symbolizes racial difference, purity versus guilt, life versus death, and the blending or conflict of identities. The "black as the ace of spades" and white moonlight imagery evokes a sense of fate, mystery, and the intersection of love and tragedy.
- Nature is used extensively to symbolize the cycle of life and death, the presence of spirits, and the passage of time.
- Butterflies and moths symbolize fragile, ephemeral life and transformation.
- Leaves stirring and falling evoke the whispering of spirits and the inevitability of decay.
- Rain and umbrellas suggest cleansing, sorrow, and the connection between this world and the "other world" where spirits reside.
- The moon and stars symbolize mystery, the unconscious, and the eternal presence of life beyond death.
- Esther's connection to nature signifies her role as a "go-between," mediating between life and death, reality and spirit.
- The "Little Shadow Boxer" is a metaphor for the unborn child she carries now, representing hope and continuity but also uncertainty. The child is called a "shadow," indicating something not fully realized or tangible and a continuation of her past mistakes but also a potential for redemption. This image underlines the tension between reality and illusion, life and death.
- Esther is described as "always knitting the invisible," a metaphor for her attempts to create and sustain life out of intangible dreams and memories. This symbolizes her efforts to reconcile with her past and to give form to what has been lost or broken. The invisible thread also suggests the fragile connections between generations, memory, and identity.
- The Chicago Detective and Salesmen recurring characters symbolize societal judgment, surveillance, and the external pressures Esther faces. The white detective's suspicions and the sterile salesmen represent the social forces that have failed to understand or accept her, adding to her isolation and guilt.
- The knocking and Esther's answering represent her confrontation with her past, her guilt, and the spirits of her children; both born and unborn. It symbolizes the

inescapable nature of memory and conscience, and her role as the mediator between the living and the dead.

- Walter is described as the “beloved obstacle” preventing her from moving fully into new relationships or new conceptions. This symbolizes how past trauma and guilt can block future happiness and freedom.
- The “Cloud,” “Shadow,” and “Reflection” images symbolize ambiguity, duality, and the blurred boundaries between reality and imagination, life and death. Esther often reflects on these, questioning where the living and the dead reside, and suggesting her mental state blurs these distinctions.
- The “small brown hand” laid across the womb is a potent symbol of the legacy of her first child’s death and haunting presence. It represents both the physical and psychological obstruction preventing her from fully moving on, and the lasting impact of her guilt and loss.
- The “white bird upon the ice floe” evokes both beauty and isolation, symbolizing the fragile hope and distance between Esther and what she desires or has lost. It suggests the elusiveness of her dreams and the coldness of her reality.

Research: Resources

- “She had answered every knocking”: Modern Spiritualism began with knockings: in 1848 the Fox sisters of Hydesville, New York, said the rappings in their house were spirits answering. See Spiritualism in the Chapter 79 resources. See American Religious Movements and Spiritualism and the Occult.
- “Hee, haw, my darling”: “My darling” is the novel’s own phrase, the call of its title, Miss MacIntosh, My Darling; Esther brays it to herself. See Esther Longtree.
- “But I will not marry him until the child comes”: Esther Longtree is portrayed as a profoundly tragic and complex figure, embodying themes of maternal loss, guilt, and longing. Her character is suffused with a haunting sense of grief that permeates her existence, shaped by repeated pregnancies, stillbirths, and a particularly painful memory of her first-born child, Walter. Physically, Esther is described as a large, cross-eyed waitress who is perpetually pregnant or swollen, a physical manifestation of her inner burden and continuous state of expectation and sorrow. Her pregnancy is not merely biological but symbolic: it represents her ongoing attempt to atone for past mistakes and losses and to reclaim a maternal identity fractured by tragedy. A central aspect of Esther’s character is her relationship with Walter, her first-born, who, despite being “killed” in a sense, has lived on outside her awareness. Walter is both a ghostly presence and a source of endless accusation and sorrow. He haunts her conscience, asking why she killed him and where his father is, embodying Esther’s unresolved guilt and the burden of an unfinished murder. Walter’s existence outside her, his growth and vitality, contrasts sharply with the stillborn children and miscarriages that have otherwise defined her reproductive life. Her narrative reveals a deep, ambivalent love and a tragic recognition of her own limitations and mistakes as a mother, compounded

by her youth, ignorance, and fear at the time of Walter's birth. Esther's story exposes the intersection of race and identity: Walter's father was a black man, a "prince" from Africa, who was a fugitive and victim of racial violence. This adds layers of social and personal complexity to Esther's grief, shame, and isolation. Her memories of this man are filled with shock and surprise, reflecting the racial tensions and prejudices surrounding her. Esther's heart turning black metaphorically expresses her internalization of this complex legacy. Esther is shown as a woman caught between two worlds: the physical, harsh reality of her life as a waitress and the spiritual, shadowy world of her lost and unborn children, as well as the memory of Walter. She acts as a "go-between," navigating the liminal space between life and death, presence and absence, reality and dream. This is symbolized by her making a little house of straw for the spirit to come home to, answering every knocking, and feeding the spirits as if to soothe her conscience. Her repeated pregnancies and stillbirths symbolize not only personal tragedy but also a universal theme of loss and unfulfilled potential. Esther's life is a continual cycle of hope and despair, birth and death, presence and absence. Her laughter, sometimes convulsive or mule-like, reflects a bitter acceptance of her fate, mingled with stubborn resilience. Esther Longtree is a figure of profound maternal suffering and endurance. She is marked by a deep, unresolved guilt and grief linked to her first child, Walter, whose living presence she both mourns and fears. Her story is one of tragic memory, racial and social complexity, and the haunting persistence of loss. She is a living embodiment of the liminal space between life and death, the seen and unseen, the known and the unknowable, and her narrative richly explores themes of motherhood, identity, and redemption within the novel. See Esther Longtree.

- Esther Longtree symbolizes a deep and tragic history of racial and social injustice in the United States, particularly relating to the legacy of slavery, interracial relationships under oppressive conditions, and the ongoing consequences of systemic racism. Her story reflects the painful history of a black father, described as a "Negro, a Negro, a Negro, poor young fellow, black as the black bough, the ace of spades," who was a fugitive, possibly an ex-convict, victimized by white supremacy: "the white people there had tried to kill him because he was black and had wanted to sleep with a white woman... they had tried to hang him from a white-blossoming tree for revenge, but the rope had broken." This narrative evokes the historical reality of lynching and racial violence in the American South. Esther's pregnancy with this black man's child, her subsequent abandonment of the child, and her lifelong torment symbolize the fraught and often violent intersections of race, gender, and power in America. Her child, Walter, who is black and whom she both loved and feared, becomes a haunting presence in her life: a symbol of the legacy of interracial unions condemned and punished by society, and the personal and social consequences of such relationships. The repeated motif of Esther being "always pregnant," carrying the memory and burden of lost or stillborn children, reflects the cycles of trauma and loss imposed on black and mixed-race families by systemic racism and social rejection. Her incarceration in the "Greasy Spoon" restaurant, her social marginalization, and her sense of isolation also symbolize the

economic and social disenfranchisement experienced by many African Americans and women in American history. Esther's struggle with guilt and the haunting presence of her first child, who lives outside her physically but not emotionally, represents the unresolved historical wounds of slavery's legacy: the unacknowledged and hidden suffering passed down through generations. Esther Longtree embodies the history of racial violence, forbidden and punished interracial love, maternal suffering, social exclusion, and the enduring scars of America's racial past. Through her narrative, Young confronts the complexity of identity, memory, and historical trauma in the United States.

- Esther Longtree's character carries symbolic weight that can be interpreted in relation to the abortion debate in the U.S., although the symbolism is complex, multifaceted, and embedded within the novel's rich, dreamlike narrative. Esther Longtree is portrayed as a woman who is "everlastingly pregnant," carrying many stillborn children, miscarriages, and unfulfilled pregnancies over the years. She is described as both "brilliant but dumb," "mulish," "big-footed," and "pregnant with doubtfulness," yet also maternal, loving, and burdened by her mysterious, repeated losses. Her pregnancies are often linked to a haunting mystery involving many absent or sterile fathers and the ambiguous presence of children who are never fully born or recognized. The narrative suggests that Esther has tried repeatedly to give birth to a "child who lived" but is also surrounded by countless stillborn, ghostly children, and shadows: symbolizing loss, grief, and the elusive nature of life and creation. In this light, Esther Longtree can be seen as embodying the tensions surrounding abortion debates: the conflict between life and death, fertility and sterility, birth and loss, hope and despair. Her "everlasting pregnancy" and the repeated miscarriages may symbolize the ongoing societal struggle over reproductive rights, the moral and emotional complexity of abortion, and the societal judgment and silence that often surround it. The ambiguity about the paternity of her children, the legal threats she faces, and her isolation also reflect the politicized and often stigmatized dimensions of abortion in American society. Esther's story touches on themes of bodily autonomy, societal control, guilt, and secrecy. She is pursued by a detective who accuses her of murder, threatened with legal action, and yet she remains evasive, protective of her secret "pregnancies," and burdened by the consequences of societal judgments. This can be interpreted as symbolic of the legal and moral scrutiny women face in abortion debates, where personal agency conflicts with external control and societal norms. The novel frames Esther's experiences within a broader cosmic and existential context, blurring lines between life and death, reality and dream, and individual and universal experiences. This deepens the symbolism, suggesting that the abortion debate is not simply a social or political issue but also a profound human and metaphysical dilemma about creation, destruction, and the meaning of existence. Esther Longtree may symbolize the abortion debate in the U.S., the detailed portrayal of her character's perpetual pregnancies, miscarriages, societal judgment, and emotional complexity strongly suggests an allegorical reflection on the themes central to abortion discourse. Her

story embodies the profound personal and societal conflicts surrounding reproductive rights, loss, and the nature of life itself.

- “But if one takes the first step downward”: “Easy is the descent to Avernus,” the Sibyl tells Aeneas, but to climb back up to the air is the labor (Virgil, Aeneid 6). See Greek Mythology.
- “she had been swallowed by the earth”: “And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up” (Numbers 16:32, KJV); “and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land” (Jonah 2:10, KJV). See The Bible.
- “Now the first would not be the last”: “So the last shall be first, and the first last” (Matthew 20:16, KJV). See The Bible.
- “a Boy Scout and could recite the Declaration of Independence”: The Boy Scouts of America was founded in 1910; a Scout of Walter’s age would have been in grammar school in the 1930s. See Walter.
- “Some sins, if they were sins, had left no stains”: “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow” (Isaiah 1:18, KJV). See The Bible.
- “pregnant only with the yeast of her own dreams”: There are two famous pseudocyesis cases (phantom pregnancies): Mary Tudor, Queen of England, experienced a well-documented false pregnancy, where she showed physical symptoms, and her doctors and court prepared for a birth, even drafting announcement letters with blanks for the date and sex. Anna O, the patient of Freud’s colleague Josef Breuer, experienced a false pregnancy where she believed she was in labor with her therapist’s child. Anna O was Bertha Pappenheim, who went on to found the League of Jewish Women (1904) and fought the trafficking of women. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery and Freud and Jung.
- “much like a limb that hurts after the limb is cut away”: The Philadelphia neurologist Silas Weir Mitchell named the “phantom limb” in 1871, after treating Civil War amputees who still felt pain in the arms and legs they had lost. See The Civil War.
- “the featherweight champion—the bantam, the flyweight”: See Joe Goldberg, the featherweight champion, in the Chapter 73 resources.
- “The thousand nipples, the Milky Way”: In Greek myth the Milky Way is milk spilled from Hera’s breast when she pulled away from the infant Heracles. See Greek Mythology.
- “A bee flying up her skirt had never made such difference”: See the bee that flew up little Esther’s skirt in the Chapter 78 resources.
- “as black as the ace of spades”: “Negro” was the standard, accepted, and often respectful term for people of African descent in the U.S., evolving from slavery-era usage to a self-identifying term supported by leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois. It was used by the U.S. Census from 1950, though it later became associated with Jim Crow, declining in favor of “Black” by the late 1960s. “Negro” was used by the U.S. Census for much of the twentieth century. See Society, Class, and Race.

- “He had fled for fear the white people would see him and kill him”: Interracial marriage in the United States has only been legal since the 1967 U.S. Supreme Court decision Loving v. Virginia that held anti-miscegenation laws were unconstitutional by the 14th Amendment established in 1868. The court’s landmark decision has been commemorated and celebrated every year on the Loving Day, June 12th. The number of interracial marriages in 1967 was three percent. The first interracial marriage in what is today the United States was that of Pocahontas, who married tobacco planter John Rolfe in 1614. The first ever law prohibiting interracial marriage was passed by Maryland in 1691. The Quaker Zephaniah Kingsley married, outside the US, a black enslaved woman that he bought in Cuba. He also had three black common-law enslaved wives. He freed all four. They had to flee Florida for Haiti when it became a US territory. The prospect of black men marrying white women terrified many Americans before the Civil War. It was magnified into the greatest threat to society. The first legal black-white marriage in the United States was that of African-American professor William G. Allen and a white student, Mary King, in 1853. When their plans to marry were announced, Allen narrowly escaped being lynched. Their marriage was secret, and they left the country immediately for England, never to return. In 1957 actor Sammy Davis Jr. faced backlash for his relationship with a white woman, actress Kim Novak. In 1958, Davis briefly married a black woman, actress and dancer Loray White, to protect himself from mob violence. See Society, Class, and Race and Lynching and Racial Violence.
- “He had gone farther North”: In the Great Migration, some six million Black Southerners moved north and west between 1910 and 1970, fleeing lynching and Jim Crow. See Society, Class, and Race and Lynching and Racial Violence.
- “they had tried to hang him from a white-blossoming tree”: Jo Reed was an African American man who was lynched in Nashville, Tennessee, on April 30, 1875, where he was taken by a white mob from the county jail after being arrested for killing a police officer in a confrontation. He was hanged from a suspension bridge but, after the rope broke, Reed survived the attempted lynching, escaped via the river, and left Nashville to go West. A reference to part of the history of lynching in America is included at the end of this chapter. In 1955 the brutal lynching of fourteen year old Emmett Till for allegedly flirting with a white woman was a catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement after his mother permitted an open casket and photographs were published nationwide. See Lynching and Racial Violence.
- “Where is black white”: “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness” (Isaiah 5:20, KJV). See The Bible.
- “mother, I go to a fine school with the white children now”: In Brown v. Board of Education (1954) the Supreme Court struck down segregated public schools; in the 1930s a Black child like Walter was barred from white schools across the South and kept out of many in the North. See Society, Class, and Race.
- “She had gone to the South where the black people were”: In the US the South consists of sixteen states along the bottom part of the country from Texas to Maryland.

- “and she had pressed her thumb because she could not really kill herself”: Esther in admitting to killing or wanting to kill her children is considered infanticide. In most modern societies the practice is considered immoral and criminal. It still takes place in the Western world usually because of the parent’s mental illness or violent behavior, in addition to some poor countries as a form of population control, sometimes with tacit societal acceptance. Female infanticide, a form of sex-selective infanticide, is more common than the killing of male offspring, especially in cultures where male children are more desirable. In the book Genome, Matt Ridley explains that there may be a genetic factor involved as well. The book Genome was published in 1999. See Guilt, Innocence, and Justice.
    - Esther fits the pattern later called neonaticide: a young, unmarried mother who does not recognize or denies her pregnancy, gives birth alone, and kills the newborn in panic within the first day. The psychiatrist Phillip Resnick named it in 1970. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “an old sporting page that had to do with the Kentucky race-horses”: “Kentucky racehorses” Horse racing in Kentucky predates statehood (1792), with organized racing occurring in Louisville as early as 1783. All Kentucky thoroughbreds trace their lineage back to three foundation sires: the Darley Arabian, the Godolphin Arabian, and the Byerly Turk. On May 17, 1875, the first Kentucky Derby was held at Churchill Downs (then the Louisville Jockey Club). It was won by Aristides, trained by Ansel Williamson and ridden by Black jockey Oliver Lewis. In the first 28 runnings of the Derby, Black jockeys won 15 times. Notable jockeys included Isaac Murphy (three-time winner) and the aforementioned Oliver Lewis. Key winners included Vagrant (1876), the first gelding winner, and Hindoo (1881). In 1902, a syndicate led by Col. Matt Winn took over Churchill Downs, transforming it into a premier racing venue. In 1919, Sir Barton became the first horse to win the Kentucky Derby, Preakness, and Belmont Stakes, though the term “Triple Crown” was not commonly used until 1930 with Gallant Fox. Exterminator (1918) was a fan favorite who won despite being a last-minute substitute. Calumet Farm became the dominant force in American racing, with winners like Whirlaway (1941), Pensive (1944), Ponder (1949), and Hill Gail (1952). Often considered one of the greatest horses of all time, Citation won the Triple Crown and became the first horse to win $1 million. See Horses and Carriages.
    - Black jockeys were driven from the track after 1900; Jimmy Winkfield, who won the Derby in 1901 and 1902, was the last Black jockey to win it. See Society, Class, and Race.

Vocabulary

Akimbo

With hands on hips and elbows turned out.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Bole

The trunk of a tree.

Burden

The refrain of a song; also a load.

Census taker

A person who goes door to door counting people for the census.

Conformation

The shape and proportions of an animal’s body, especially a horse’s.

Convulsive

Shaking in violent spasms.

Disgorged

Thrown up; poured out.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Effaced

Erased; wiped out.

Embryo

An unborn creature in its earliest stage.

Featherweight

In boxing, the class just above bantamweight, long limited to 126 pounds; anything very light.

Fishmoth

A silverfish, the small wingless insect that eats paper and starch.

Go-between

A person who carries messages or deals between two others.

Gossamer

A fine film of cobweb; anything light and delicate.

Haw

The red berry of the hawthorn.

Heir apparent

The heir whose right cannot be set aside.

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Ill repute

A bad reputation.

Jack-in-the-pulpit

A woodland plant whose flower spike stands under a hooded leaf, like a preacher in a pulpit.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Mealy-mouthed

Afraid to speak plainly.

Mitts

Fingerless gloves.

Muffler

A scarf worn around the neck for warmth.

Nocturnal

Of or happening in the night.

Obtrude

To push in where one is not wanted.

Palpitation

A rapid, pounding heartbeat.

Pendulous

Hanging loosely.

Progeny

Offspring.

Remorseless

Without pity; relentless.

Reticence

Reserve; a habit of keeping silent.

Retribution

Punishment given in return for a wrong.

Reverberation

An echo; a sound that rolls back and forth.

Sieve

A strainer with fine holes.

Slate

A small board of slate that schoolchildren wrote on with chalk.

Stovepipe

A tall silk hat; also the metal pipe that carries smoke from a stove.

Teething ring

A ring for a baby to bite on while cutting teeth.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Widow’s weeds

The black mourning clothes of a widow.

Chapter 81

Content note: *The Esther Longtree chapters (72 to 81) deal with stillbirth and pregnancy loss, rape, infanticide, racist violence including lynching, and cruelty to children. This chapter contains the little toy salesman's antisemitic raving about a "Jewish conspiracy," and describes a shipwreck in which women and children drown while he survives.*

Summary

On a dark, rainy day Esther tells of the man she has chosen to be the legal father of the little shadow boxer: the little toy salesman, bandy-legged and pot-bellied, with three soft teeth, no tear ducts, and no taste buds, who drinks warm milk from a baby bottle and asks her to rock him to sleep. His mother, a world-famous beauty and spy, stole him from his father, a windowpeeper, and put him to sleep in dresser drawers. He tells her he is a murderer of women and little children because he alone survived a great storm at sea, rocking in a rubber life boat while the German captain conducted with his withered arm and everyone else drowned. Adrift in the calm, a dead child's hand wearing a gold ring like his clung to his sleeve, a white shark that looked like his mother circled him, and he raved that the sea, the sky, and God were a Jewish conspiracy. He has not come lately. He whispered that the bad men would blow up the world some day of calm just for fun; if they do, Esther will go on pregnant with her dreams, and maybe the dead loved the dead.

Characters present

Esther Longtree

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Fate and Chance · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Guilt, Innocence, and Justice · Isolation and Connection · Memory and the Past · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth · Society, Class, and Race · Time · Women, Gender, and Marriage

Symbols: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Clouds and Storms · Pregnancy, Birth, and Children · Roses and Flowers · Shadows · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Buddhism · Freud and Jung

Allusions: Deafness and Sign Language · Exploration and the Poles · Gambling and Playing Cards · Genesis · Judaism · Music and Composers · Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery · Revelation and the Apocalypse · Romantic Poets · Shakespeare · Suicide in History and Literature · The Bible · The Civil War

Key passages

From the research

- Esther is described as “always pregnant,” swelling like a dark tide, carrying a “little shadow boxer” under her heart. This pregnancy is not just physical but symbolic of her hope, expectancy, and also her loneliness. Despite her past of “stillborn” children and losses, she remains hopeful that something real and good will come in the future. She imagines marriage and a legal father for her unborn child, the little toy salesman, who is peculiar yet innocent in his own way.
- The little toy salesman is portrayed as a fragile, almost childlike man with physical oddities: “only three teeth,” “pale blue eyes,” “bandy-legged,” and “tearless.” He drinks milk from a baby bottle and seems innocent to a fault. His past is mysterious and tragic: his mother was a world-famous beauty and spy, his father a windowpeeper, and he himself was a “bottle baby,” never knowing maternal love. He flirts with Esther, seeks comfort, and longs for a home and normal childhood, which he never had. Esther feels a mix of pity, nervousness, and a maternal instinct to “teach him” how to behave and live a normal life.
- A pivotal passage reveals that the little toy salesman survived a catastrophic sea storm that drowned all others: captain, crew, women, children, even “the moon, the sun, the stars, the kittens.” He was the “lone survivor,” saved by accident in a rubber life boat. This survival haunts both him and Esther: he is a “murderer” in her eyes for not having drowned with the others, for having lived when so many died. His survival is marked by loss; he has lost memory, taste buds, tear ducts, and reason.
- Throughout his ordeal, the little toy salesman is haunted by a dead child’s ivory-colored hand, “always uplifted from the slow, swelling waters,” wearing a gold ring like his own. This hand tugs at him, clings to him. It represents the children Esther has lost and hidden, as well as the burden carried by the survivor. The hand is described as luminous and moth-like.
- After the storm, he is pursued by a great white shark, which he initially mistakes for a woman but recognizes as a predator. Despite delirium and starvation, he clings to the memory of the dead child’s hand and the tokens he carries: the baby bottle, the withered branch, the rosebud, the mourning band. He returns to America a stranger, physically and mentally altered.
- The chapter closes with Esther’s reflections on the terrible future forewarned by the little toy salesman: a great war, the world blown up, the death of all living things, the end of music, stars, fireflies, and life itself. Yet, in this bleak vision, Esther remains forever “pregnant with her dreams,” nurturing the little shadow boxer, the symbol of hope and continuity. The chapter ends on a note of ambiguous hope and mystery, with Esther wondering who fathered the child and suggesting that “the dead loved the dead” and that this might be how the world goes on.

- Adrift in the calm, the little toy salesman raves that the ocean, the sky, the sunlight, and God himself are Jewish, “a Jewish conspiracy,” and that “the rubber business belonged to the Jews.” Young puts the oldest antisemitic myth in the mouth of a man who survived by watching women and children drown.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “Maybe the dead loved the dead, and that was the way the world went on.” What does Esther mean?
- “There was beauty in the heart of death.” Where in the storm does the little toy salesman find it?
- “What difference would one tear more or less have made in a world of water? All the difference, said Esther Longtree, weeping one tear.” Why does one tear matter?

Characters

- The little toy salesman “had seemed like a dead child that grew.” Who might he be?
- He calls himself “a victim of the Jews” and blames a “Jewish conspiracy” for the sea and the sky. What is Young showing about him?
- Esther calls him a murderer because “he had not drowned when all others drowned.” Is she fair?

Connections

- He “was always put to sleep in a dresser drawer.” Where was Walter left in Chapter 80?
- The dead child’s hand “wore a gold ring like his.” How is this hand like the small brown hand across Esther’s womb?
- The German captain goes down conducting, “his withered arm lifting.” Who might he be?

Reflection

- “The world needed pity.” Does the little toy salesman deserve any?
- “Who could beat a dead child’s hand away?”
- “Great chaos had asked no questions, and great chaos had answered none to man.” What answers does Esther want?

Research: Characters

Esther Longtree

- Everlastingly pregnant, nurturing a “little shadow boxer” inside her.
- Hopeful yet burdened by past losses of stillborn children.
- Seeks marriage and a legal father for her unborn child.
- Compassionate but conflicted; she loves life but is haunted by death and loss.
- Her pregnancy symbolizes both creation and unrealized potential.

Little Toy Salesman

- Small, childlike man with physical peculiarities: three teeth, pale blue eyes, patchy hair, bandy legs.
- Carries symbols of childhood: baby bottle, teddy bears, rubber ducks, toys.
- Survivor of a great storm at sea that killed all others.
- Haunted by memories or lack thereof, burdened with a dead child’s hand that clings to him.
- Represents innocence, survivor’s guilt, and alienation.
- Has lost taste buds, tear ducts, memory, reason, and physical health due to the storm.
- Displays childlike behaviors but embodies deep existential pain.
- He rails that the sea, the sky, and God were a “Jewish conspiracy,” calls himself “a victim of the Jews” and “racially pure as snow-water,” and says he “hated the Jews in every country.”
- “He was always put to sleep in a dresser drawer,” as Walter was left in a dresser drawer in Chapter 80, and he says his mother tried to strangle him; to Esther he “had seemed like a dead child that grew.”

Research: Themes

Motherhood and Loss

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Motherhood, Pregnancy, and Birth

- Esther’s endless pregnancy symbolizes the liminal state between creation and destruction.
- Her history of stillborn children and hidden losses underlines the pain of motherhood.
- The little shadow boxer inside her represents hope and uncertainty.

Innocence and Experience

See: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice

- The toy salesman’s childlike innocence contrasts with the harsh realities he has survived.
- His survival against all odds introduces questions about fate, guilt, and innocence lost.

Survival and Guilt

See: Guilt, Innocence, and Justice

- The salesman is tormented by surviving a disaster where others perished.
- Esther calls him a “murderer” for not drowning with the others, highlighting survivor’s guilt and moral ambiguity.

Death and Memory

See: Death and Mortality · Memory and the Past

- The persistent image of the dead child’s hand symbolizes haunting memory and unresolved grief.
- Memories and identity blur in the salesman’s narrative, emphasizing the fragility of self.

Isolation and Connection

See: Isolation and Connection

- Both characters are isolated: Esther through her pregnancy and dreams, the salesman through his physical and mental state.
- Their tentative relationship suggests a yearning for connection and stability.

Apocalyptic Imagery and Fate

See: Time · Fate and Chance

- The storm at sea is described with cosmic and cataclysmic imagery, suggesting universal destruction and rebirth.
- Prophecies of war and world destruction reflect existential dread.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

Everlasting Pregnancy

See: Pregnancy, Birth, and Children

- Symbolizes ongoing creation, unrealized potential, and the burden of hope.

Little Shadow Boxer

See: Shadows

- Represents the unborn child, hope, and the shadow of past losses.

The Dead Child’s Hand

See: Pregnancy, Birth, and Children

- A haunting symbol of grief, memory, and the inescapable past.

The Storm at Sea

See: The Sea and Water · Clouds and Storms

- A metaphor for chaos, destruction, and the fragility of life.

Toys and Baby Items

See: Pregnancy, Birth, and Children

- Symbolize innocence, childhood, and vulnerability.

Black Mourning Band and Old Rosebud

See: Clothing, Hats, and Skirts · Roses and Flowers

- Symbols of death, mourning, and lost beauty.

Rubber Life Boat

- Represents fragile survival and liminality between life and death.

Research: Resources

- “a little man wearing a bowler hat”: The bowler hat, or “derby” in the US, is a hard felt hat with a, rounded crown and slightly curled brim, originally designed in 1849 by Thomas and William Bowler for British gamekeepers to provide durable, close-fitting head protection. It became an iconic symbol of 19th-century British, and later American Western, style. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- “struck all the silent keys”: See “I am a white piano” in the Chapter 72 resources. See Music and Composers.
- “the little shadow boxer, he crouched under her heart”: Esther Longtree is portrayed as a deeply complex and tragic figure whose identity is heavily shaped by themes of perpetual pregnancy, loss, and loneliness. The narrative presents her as a woman “always pregnant” with a “little shadow boxer” inside her, symbolizing both hope and despair. This endless state of pregnancy is marked by a haunting series of stillbirths and hidden children buried in various secret places, which underscores a profound maternal suffering and grief. Her body is described vividly as swollen and luminous, with breasts marked by small teeth, signifying the physical and emotional scars of her

repeated losses. Esther harbors a desire for a legitimate father for her unborn child, choosing the little toy salesman as the “legal father” not because of love but for the sake of appearance and legality. This man is himself a peculiar and fragile character, described as childish, innocent, and physically weak is an echo of Esther’s own vulnerability. His presence exacerbates her anxiety and sense of fragility, as he is unable to see her obvious pregnancy and the pain it entails. Despite his flaws and oddities, Esther feels maternal towards him and plans to teach him basic emotional responses and social manners, further illustrating her longing for care and order amidst chaos. The little toy salesman is also a symbol of survival and guilt; he is the lone survivor of a great storm at sea in which all others, including children, drowned. Esther’s complex feelings toward him, both pity and accusation, reflect her broader struggle with abandonment, survival, and loss. She calls him a “murderer,” not because of direct harm, but because he survived when others, including many children, did not. His survival represents a painful exception and a haunting reminder of the deaths she has endured. His repeated visits and the spectral presence of a dead child’s hand clinging to him evoke a liminal state between life and death, memory and oblivion. Esther’s inner world is one of continuous tension between hope and despair, reality and dream, maternal love and fatal loss. She imagines a future where she might be married and her child might live, but she remains haunted by the many children who never were. Her relationship with the little toy salesman encapsulates this tension: he is both a source of comfort and a symbol of her grief and unfulfilled desires. The chapter reveals her as a figure caught in an endless cycle of pregnancy and mourning, embodying themes of fertility, death, survival, and the elusive nature of identity and belonging. Esther Longtree is a tragic, almost mythic figure embodying the paradoxes of motherhood: creation shadowed by destruction, hope intertwined with loss within the dreamlike and melancholic atmosphere of the novel. See Esther Longtree.

- Esther Longtree symbolizes a complex and tragic history of maternal suffering, loss, and the burden of unrealized potential in the United States. Her character embodies themes of repeated loss, loneliness, and the haunting presence of stillborn or hidden children, which can be read as a metaphor for the nation’s troubled past, especially concerning the cycles of hope, despair, and unfulfilled promise. Her “everlasting pregnancy” and the many stillborn children she has buried symbolize the countless hopes and dreams that have failed to come to fruition in American history. The repeated motif of her “children” hidden in various natural places (tree stumps, streams, roots of flowers) suggests a hidden, suppressed history of loss and forgotten lives. This can be interpreted as reflecting the historical erasures and silencing of certain groups and tragedies within the nation. The interaction with the little toy salesman who survived a great storm at sea that drowned all others and who appears as a fragile, infantile man with the burden of survivor’s guilt adds a layer of historical allegory. The storm and the drowning of the many except the lone survivor who “should have drowned” but did not, can be seen as symbolizing catastrophic events in American history (such as mass tragedies, wars, or social upheavals) where many perish or are lost, but some survive carrying the weight of memory and guilt. Esther’s sorrow over the little toy salesman’s survival, her bitter

recognition that he is a “murderer” simply because he lived while others died, reflects a historical ambivalence about survival and progress in the US: the idea that some have survived or prospered amid the suffering or destruction of others. Her physical description (large, swollen, always pregnant but marked by small teeth bites on her breasts) further evokes the land or the country itself as fertile yet scarred, nurturing yet wounded, carrying the weight of generations of loss and unrealized futures. Esther Longtree symbolizes the historical experience of America as a land marked by repeated cycles of birth and death, hope and loss, survival and guilt. She embodies the maternal figure of a nation perpetually pregnant with unrealized futures, haunted by its stillborn children, and struggling with the legacy of survival amid widespread tragedy.

- “bandy-legged”: A bandy-legged man has legs that curve outward at the knees, creating a bow-like shape where the knees are farther apart than the ankles when standing straight. Also known as bow-legged or genu varum, this condition often causes the legs to appear arched. The term refers to a physical, often congenital, alignment where the legs bend outward.
- “drank his milk from a baby bottle”: Bottle feeding has existed for thousands of years, with archaeological evidence of clay feeding vessels dating back 7,000 years to the Bronze and Iron Ages. Early methods used animal horns, clay pots, and, in the 19th century, dangerous “tube bottles” that often caused fatal bacterial infections. Modern, safer materials like glass and rubber nipples emerged in the late 19th/20th century.
- “She had been a world spy”: Mata Hari is the most famous female spy in history, known as a WWI-era Dutch exotic dancer accused of passing secrets. Other notable agents include WWII heroes Virginia Hall (Allied spy), Noor Inayat Khan (SOE wireless operator), and Nancy Wake (“The White Mouse”), alongside American Civil War scout Harriet Tubman. See The Civil War and Women, Gender, and Marriage.
- “he would rather spy upon a woman”: Peeping Tom, the windowpeeper struck blind for looking at Lady Godiva, is in the Chapter 75 resources.
- “Until the world blew up”: This mirrors Mr. Bonebreaker who is also looking forward to the end of the world. This also may refer to the development of the atomic bomb and its use during WWII. See Mr. Titus Bonebreaker.
- “bald bays”: “bald bays” Bald spots (or patches) are localized areas on the scalp or body, such as the beard or eyebrows, that have little to no hair growth. Often caused by conditions like alopecia areata (an autoimmune disorder) or stress, these patches can appear suddenly, resulting in small, round, bare areas.
- “a cold pigeon, a stool pigeon, a fence, a shadow, a dead duck”: “a stool pigeon” is a police informer.
    - “a fence” deals with stolen goods.
    - “a dead duck” means a person or thing that has no chance of success.
- “had been in the Gobi Desert and in Arabia”: The Gobi Desert is a vast, arid region in northern China and southern Mongolia. It’s known for its dunes, mountains and rare

animals such as snow leopards and Bactrian camels. In the Gobi Gurvansaikhan National Park, the Khongoryn Els sand dunes are said to sing when the wind blows. The park also features the deep ice field of Yolyn Am canyon. Dinosaur fossils have been found at the red “Flaming Cliffs” of Bayanzag.

    - The Arabian Peninsula, or Arabia, is a vast, arid region in Southwest Asia, bordered by the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and Arabian Sea. As the birthplace of Islam and Arab culture, it comprises Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Oman, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, and Bahrain. The region is historically known for its nomadic Bedouin traditions, significant oil resources, and rapid 20th-century urbanization.

- “to speak only the English language”: The “English-only” movement in the US was characterized by waves of nativism and forced Americanization, peaking around World War I to target immigrants and minority languages. While English was the dominant language, it was not legally official, but rather enforced through laws, school policies, and cultural assimilation, aiming to eliminate bilingual education and marginalize non-English speakers, particularly German speakers. Although English predominated, early America was multilingual. However, English was established as the primary language of political, economic, and social life. Following a surge in immigration, former President Theodore Roosevelt wrote, in a letter of January 3, 1919, that immigrants should become Americans, not “dwellers in a polyglot boarding house.” World War I sparked intense hostility against German-Americans, leading many states to ban German in public spaces, schools, and even conversations. By 1919, 15 states mandated English as the sole language of instruction. Restrictions extended to foreign-language newspapers and, in some areas, required non-citizens to pay special taxes. By the 1940s, bilingual education had been virtually eliminated due to policies focused on rapid, forced assimilation. Explicit English-only policies were used to systematically eliminate indigenous languages in government-run boarding schools.
- “he could flash the money, even the Chinese money”: Chinese money evolved from ancient cowrie shells to the world’s first paper currency (7th-15th centuries) and a dual system of copper “cash” and silver. Key developments included the Song dynasty’s invention of paper money, the Yuan dynasty’s reliance on paper notes, and later, the Qing dynasty’s shift toward silver, culminating in modern currency reforms in the early 20th century, culminating in the Renminbi’s emergence.
- “had been in Bathsheba selling earrings”: Bathsheba is a woman, not a place; he means Beersheba, the desert town of the Negev, where Abraham dug his well (Genesis 21:31). See Genesis.
    - Bathsheba was an Israelite queen consort. According to the Hebrew Bible, she was the wife of Uriah the Hittite and later of David, with whom she had all of her five children. Her status as the mother of Solomon, who succeeded David as monarch, made her the Gebirah of the Kingdom of Israel.
- “had been in Siberia selling lace table cloths”: Siberia is a massive region covering over 5.2 million square miles (13.5 million square km) across Northern Asia, constituting about three-quarters of Russia’s total territory. Known for its extreme, long,

and cold winters, it features vast tundra, coniferous forests (taiga), and major mountain ranges, including the Ural and Altai. It contains Lake Baikal, the world's deepest lake, and is resource-rich, while being sparsely populated and historically significant for its indigenous communities and Russian expansion.

- "had been in the Holy Land selling holy water": The Holy Land is a sacred region in the Southern Levant, primarily located within modern-day Israel and Palestine. It is revered by Jews, Christians, and Muslims as the setting for key biblical events, including the life, ministry, and death of Jesus Christ, as well as the birthplace of the Jewish people.
- "the whole world turned into salt": "But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt" (Genesis 19:26, KJV). See Genesis.
    - This could be a reference to the atomic bomb which was dropped on Japan during WWII.
    - The whole human race "turned into smoke" may also call up the crematoria of the death camps, where six million Jews were murdered. See Judaism.
- "He would be driving along in the Baby Austen": Baby Austen may refer to Austin 7 which was an economy car that was produced from 1923 until 1939 in the United Kingdom by Austin. It was nicknamed the Baby Austin and was at that time one of the most popular cars produced for the British market and sold well abroad.
    - In America the American Austin Car Company built its own version of the little car in Butler, Pennsylvania, from 1930.
- "a cargo of toys and kewpie dolls": Kewpie is a brand of dolls and figurines that were conceived as comic strip characters by American cartoonist Rose O'Neill. The illustrated cartoons, appearing as baby cupid characters, began to gain popularity after the publication of O'Neill's comic strips in 1909, and O'Neill began to illustrate and sell paper doll versions of the Kewpies. The characters were first produced as bisque dolls in Waltershausen, Germany, beginning in 1912, and became extremely popular in the early 20th century. See the kewpie dolls in the Chapter 72 resources.
- "gently rocking in the vasty deep": "I can call spirits from the vasty deep. / Why, so can I, or so can any man; / But will they come when you do call for them?" (Henry IV, Part 1, 3.1). See Shakespeare.
- "under his rain-streaked ulster": An ulster is a long, loose overcoat, often with a cape, first made of rough Irish frieze in Belfast and named for the province. Ulster is one of the four historical provinces of Ireland, located in the north of the island. It traditionally comprises nine counties: six form Northern Ireland (Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone), which is part of the United Kingdom, while three (Cavan, Donegal, and Monaghan) are part of the Republic of Ireland. See Clothing, Hats, and Skirts.
- "a wild, raging storm between the cracking Poles": The shipwreck described in this chapter is a powerful and symbolic event that carries deep thematic weight. The shipwreck is recounted primarily through the perspective of the little toy salesman, who is portrayed as the lone survivor of a catastrophic maritime disaster during a fierce

storm at sea. See The Sea and Water, Revelation and the Apocalypse, and Exploration and the Poles.

- The storm and subsequent sinking of the ship represent a cosmic upheaval, described as “a wild, raging storm between the cracking Poles,” with the sea rising “in billows to the dark heavens hammering,” and the moon and stars falling like sparks and rain of blood. This imagery evokes an apocalyptic vision of the world’s end, suggesting the collapse of order and the overwhelming power of nature and fate.
- The little toy salesman survives the wreck, sitting alone in a rubber life boat while all others perish, including the captain, crew, women, children, and even celestial bodies like the moon and stars. His survival is depicted ambiguously; he is both pitied and condemned as a “murderer” because he did not drown with the others and thereby “killed” them by surviving. His survival seems almost accidental or unwilling; he “had wanted to do so,” but was upheld by “swollen bladders” and “heaving breasts.”
- After the storm, the salesman experiences a prolonged “calm” that is described as worse than the storm itself, filled with loneliness, disorientation, and existential dread. He is surrounded by floating debris and bloated bodies, with a haunting “dead child’s hand” that clings to him, symbolizing his inescapable connection to death and loss. This hand, which wears a gold ring like his own, is a spectral reminder of the dead children and the burden of survival.
- The little toy salesman loses his memory, taste buds, tear ducts, and reason during the storm and the aftermath, which symbolizes a loss of self and disconnection from reality. His mind “cracking” and being “lost between the Poles like a leaf falling nowhere” reflects the disintegration of identity and the fragility of human existence in the face of overwhelming catastrophe.
- The narrative critiques human selfishness and cruelty during the disaster: the old German sea captain orders men to jump into the sea while women and children take the lifeboats, reflecting societal and gendered survival biases. The passengers are described as conceited and snobbish, oblivious to their impending doom. The little toy salesman’s survival contrasts with the collective fate, emphasizing themes of exclusion and difference.
- The shipwreck is accompanied by powerful, almost liturgical imagery: “leaden church bells,” “mourning bands,” “a golden flood of music more beautiful than Bach, Beethoven, or Brahms,” and the captain conducting as he goes down with the ship. This suggests the shipwreck as a kind of requiem or cosmic ritual. The black mourning band in the sky spanning horizon to horizon intensifies the sense of universal mourning.
- The little toy salesman’s story parallels Esther Longtree’s ongoing “everlasting pregnancy” with the “little shadow boxer,” symbolizing themes of birth, death, and hope amidst despair. The shipwreck and the salesman’s survival underscore

Esther’s loneliness and the burden of nurturing life in a world shadowed by loss and uncertainty.

- “It was all the old German sea captain’s fault”: The little toy salesman blamed the German sea captain because he thought there were more lifeboats when there was only one. This resembles the lifeboat situation on the Titanic. See The Sea and Water.
  - The German sea captain went down with the ship looking up “...bright with rage and love as if he had realized his strength, at last, his weakness.” There was a Gustav Schroder that tried to take 937 German Jews in 1939 to Havana, Cuba to save them from the Nazis. They were turned away from Cuba, Canada and the United States and returned to Europe.
- “there was only one”: The Titanic (1912) carried lifeboats for only about half of the 2,224 people aboard, and more than 1,500 died; “women and children first” was the order of the night. See The Sea and Water.
- “The captain was crazy, too”: The captain’s withered arm points to Kaiser Wilhelm II, the German emperor born in 1859 with a withered left arm, who led Germany into the First World War.
  - It may also refer to Wilhelm Furtwängler, a renowned German conductor. Furtwängler was known for his intense and passionate conducting style, though, unlike the captain, he had no withered arm. He was considered one of the greatest conductors of his time. The novel’s reference to him as a “German captain” could also subtly allude to his controversial position during World War II, when he remained in Germany under the Nazi regime.
- “There were also four ugly gamblers”: May refer to the “Big Four” Allied powers during World War II, who led the fight against the Axis, were the United States, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union (USSR), and China. These nations formed the core of the alliance, with China fighting Japan since 1937 and the others joining later. See Gambling and Playing Cards.
  - May refer to France who was also a major Allied power, particularly before its occupation and later during liberation.
- “Saturn stood still in the glassy heavens”: “Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon” (Joshua 10:12, KJV). See The Bible.
- “ten thousand Niagaras”: See Niagara Falls in the Chapter 65 resources.
- “more beautiful than Bach, Beethoven, or Brahms”: Johann Sebastian Bach was a German composer and musician of the late Baroque period. He is known for his prolific output across a variety of instruments and forms, including the orchestral Brandenburg Concertos; solo instrumental works such as the cello suites and sonatas and partitas for solo violin; keyboard works such as the Goldberg Variations and The Well-Tempered Clavier; organ works such as the Schübler Chorales and the Toccata and Fugue in D minor; and choral works such as the St Matthew Passion and the Mass in B minor. He is known for his mastery of counterpoint, as heard in The Musical Offering and The Art of Fugue. Felix Mendelssohn precipitated the Bach Revival with a

performance of the St. Matthew Passion in 1829. Ever since, Bach has been known as one of the greatest composers of classical music. See Music and Composers.

    - Ludwig van Beethoven was a German composer and pianist. One of the most revered figures in the history of Western music, his works rank among the most performed of the classical music repertoire and span the transition from the Classical to the Romantic era. Beethoven's early period, during which he forged his craft, is typically considered to have lasted until 1802. From 1802 to around 1812, his middle period showed an individual development from the styles of Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and is sometimes characterised as heroic. During this time, Beethoven began to grow increasingly deaf. In his late period, from 1812 to 1827, he extended his innovations in musical form and expression. See Deafness and Sign Language.
    - Johannes Brahms was a German composer, virtuoso pianist, and conductor of the mid-Romantic period. His music is noted for its rhythmic vitality and freer treatment of dissonance, often set within studied yet expressive contrapuntal textures. He adapted the traditional structures and techniques of a wide historical range of earlier composers. His œuvre includes four symphonies, four concertos, a Requiem, much chamber music, and hundreds of folk-song arrangements and Lieder, among other works for symphony orchestra, piano, organ, and choir.

- "his withered arm lifting": "the German captain went down with the ship" Captain Hans Langsdorff is the most famous German captain who went down with his ship metaphorically in WW2. After ordering his ship, the pocket battleship Admiral Graf Spee, to be scuttled in Montevideo on December 17, 1939, to save his crew, he died by suicide on December 20, 1939, in Buenos Aires. Hans Langsdorff chose to take his own life to prove that he acted with honor, ensuring his crew's safety after the Graf Spee was trapped by British cruisers. He is often cited for his moral courage and for prioritizing the lives of his crew over the strict, often suicidal, orders of the Nazi regime. See Suicide in History and Literature.
- "with antiphon between the antipodes": An antiphon is a short, often scriptural chant or verse sung as a refrain in Christian liturgy, particularly within Catholic Mass (Entrance, Offertory, Communion) and the Liturgy of the Hours (Lauds, Vespers). It acts as a thematic focal point for a specific day or season, usually accompanying psalms or canticles. Historically rooted in early Christian worship and favored by St. Ambrose, they were originally performed in a call-and-response style between two choirs.
    - Antipodes are points on Earth diametrically opposite to one another, representing the maximum distance apart on the globe. Most landmasses have their opposite point in the ocean, as 70% of Earth is water. The US mainland aligns with the Indian Ocean, Australia with the North Atlantic, and New Zealand with Spain/Portugal.
- "nimbus, aureole": Nimbus primarily refers to a dark gray rain-bearing cloud (often associated with nimbostratus) or, traditionally, a luminous cloud/halo surrounding a deity or saint. Derived from Latin for "cloud," it represents an aura, atmosphere, or a specialized cloud type that produces rain.

    - Aureole is a circle of light or brightness surrounding something, especially as depicted in art around the head or body of a person represented as holy.
- “a victim of the Jews”: May refer to Arthur Miller’s play Death of a Salesman. The play features a character, Willy Loman, who is a failing salesman. While Arthur Miller was Jewish, the play itself is often considered a universal American tragedy about the failure of the American Dream, and Willy’s Jewish identity is a long-debated topic among literary critics. Some productions and analyses have framed Willy as a Jewish character whose assimilation makes him vulnerable to societal pressures. The rubber hose that Willy hides by the gas heater, planning suicide, is a key symbol in the play; in the end he dies in his car. This is also a representation of the character’s antisemitism, prejudiced and paranoid worldview within the fictional narrative. The play opened in 1949.
    - The concept of a “Jewish conspiracy” is an antisemitic myth with roots in medieval Europe that became the foundation for modern political antisemitism. These conspiracy theories falsely allege that Jewish people secretly manipulate institutions, banks, the media, and governments for malevolent purposes, such as achieving world domination. It is a dangerous and debunked fiction used throughout history to justify discrimination, persecution, and violence against Jews. In the Middle Ages, hostility toward Jews was often rooted in religious prejudice and false accusations, which served as a basis for later conspiracy myths. The antisemitic myth of blood libel emerged in the 12th century with the story of William of Norwich. It falsely claimed that Jews ritually murdered Christian children to use their blood for religious rituals, particularly for Passover matzah. This accusation frequently led to violent massacres and expulsions of Jewish communities. During the Black Death in the mid-14th century, Jews were used as scapegoats and falsely accused of poisoning wells to cause the plague. This led to the destruction of hundreds of Jewish communities across Europe. Due to restrictions that prevented Jews from owning land or joining certain trades, many worked as moneylenders. This created resentment and gave rise to stereotypes of Jews as greedy and obsessed with money, which later fueled secular conspiracy theories about Jewish wealth and control. In the 19th century, antisemitic ideas evolved from religious prejudice into modern political and racial theories of antisemitism, giving rise to more elaborate conspiracy narratives. German novelist Hermann Goedsche published Biarritz, which featured a fictional scene of a secret rabbinical cabal meeting in a Jewish cemetery to discuss a plot for world domination. This work was a commercial success and was later plagiarized to create The Protocols of the Elders of Zion (circa 1903), this fabricated document is the most infamous antisemitic text. It was a forgery created by the Russian secret police to stir up antisemitism and deflect from public discontent with the Tsarist regime. The Protocols claim to be the minutes of secret meetings held by Jewish leaders outlining a plan to take over the world. Though repeatedly exposed as a hoax, it continues to circulate and influence conspiracy theories to this day. Antisemitic conspiracy myths played a central role in the rise of Nazism and the Holocaust. Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party adopted the Protocols as proof of a “Jewish world conspiracy.” They used it to justify their

persecution and extermination of six million Jews. They falsely claimed that Jews were behind communism, capitalism, and Germany's loss in World War I. The American industrialist Henry Ford distributed massive quantities of antisemitic material, including articles based on the Protocols, through his newspaper, The Dearborn Independent. He later retracted and apologized for his publications following a lawsuit, but the damage was already done. Following the Russian Revolution, an antisemitic conspiracy theory known as "Jewish Bolshevism" or Żydokomuna claimed that Jews controlled the Soviet Union and international communist movements. This false notion was promoted by anti-communist factions and heavily used by Nazi propaganda. In the modern era, antisemitic conspiracy theories have adapted to contemporary fears and platforms, continuing to spread hatred. "ZOG" theory (Zionist Occupation Government) theory, promoted by some white nationalists, claims that Jews secretly control Western governments. "Great Replacement" theory is a white nationalist conspiracy theory, which has influenced mass shootings, and claims that Jews are orchestrating a demographic "replacement" of white people through immigration. At the 2017 Charlottesville rally, participants chanted "Jews will not replace us." The internet and social media have facilitated the widespread dissemination of antisemitic conspiracy theories, with groups like QAnon promoting versions of the myth. These online forums and platforms amplify old lies and connect them to new global events, continuing the cycle of prejudice and misinformation. Antisemitism remains part of American life. On October 27, 2018, a gunman who blamed Jews for immigration killed eleven worshipers at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, the deadliest attack on Jews in American history; another killed a worshiper at the Chabad of Poway synagogue in California in 2019, and in 2022 a gunman held a rabbi and three congregants hostage in Colleyville, Texas. The Anti-Defamation League, which has tracked incidents since 1979, counted a record 9,354 antisemitic incidents in 2024 and 6,274 in 2025, when assaults rose to 203. That year two staff members of the Israeli embassy were shot dead outside the Capital Jewish Museum in Washington, D.C. (May 21, 2025); a firebombing in Boulder, Colorado, killed an 82-year-old woman; and an arsonist set fire to Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro's residence on the first night of Passover. The FBI counted 1,528 anti-Jewish hate crimes in 2025, 63 percent of all religion-based hate crimes, though Jews are about two percent of the population. Like many forms of prejudice and bigotry in the United States, antisemitism is still being reckoned with. Flag: after 1964, the events from 2017 to 2025. See Judaism.
    - The history of the Jewish rubber business is marked by individual entrepreneurial success, particularly in products like condoms, alongside the forced seizure of Jewish-owned businesses during the Nazi era. A prominent example is Julius Fromm, a Polish-German chemist who developed a way of making seamless rubber condoms and founded a successful rubber products company, only to have his factory stolen by the Nazis before he fled to England in 1939.
- "old Mongolians churning in the waters": Mongolians are an East Asian ethnic group native to Mongolia, China (primarily Inner Mongolia), and parts of Russia, numbering

around 10 million in total. Known for a historical, enduring, and nomadic pastoralist tradition, they are closely linked to the Mongol Empire founded by Genghis Khan. They primarily speak Mongolian languages and practice Tibetan Buddhism and shamanism. See Buddhism.

- “In death, all persons were black as Negroes on slabs”: His contempt reaches past the Jews: even the drowned are, to him, “black as Negroes on slabs.” See Society, Class, and Race.
- “The burning sunlight was blackening his skin”: “The burning sunlight was blackening his skin” may refer to the damage done by a nuclear bomb.
- “He had dreamed in an everlasting silence”: “He had dreamed in an everlasting silence. He had thought that his mother had killed him…” in the desert. This echoes stories about Cousin Hannah’s travels in desert countries. See Cousin Hannah.
- “When he recovered consciousness again, he was lying on a shore”: When the stranger, identified as the little toy salesman, recovers consciousness on the shore, the items he sees symbolize America as a landscape of accumulated detritus, lost potential, and the complex interplay of natural decay and human impact.
    - Purple oyster sponges, crab shells, jellyfish like glass, and bones of dead fish: These natural elements represent the raw, indifferent cycles of nature, where life and death are constantly intertwined. The “glassy” jellyfish can also hint at the blurred lines between reality and illusion that permeate. This aspect of America is ancient, untamed, and a vast receptacle for the remnants of countless lives, both human and non-human.
    - “little carcasses of other little children”: This deeply tragic image symbolizes the profound loss of innocence and unfulfilled potential within the American experience. It resonates with Esther Longtree’s story of stillbirth fantasies and lost children, suggesting a hidden sorrow or the casualties of a harsh reality that often goes unacknowledged.
    - “playing cards”: Playing cards in the novel are often associated with chance, fate, and the illusions of control, as seen in scenes with gamblers. Their presence on the shore suggests America as a place where fortunes are gambled, where outcomes are subject to unpredictable forces, and where the remnants of failed risks are left behind.
    - “old junk”: This broad category signifies the accumulation of discarded material, reflecting a society of consumption and the inevitable detritus of progress. It speaks to America as a land that produces and discards, where forgotten objects bear witness to past lives and aspirations.
    - “rubber tires”: As specific man-made discards, rubber tires represent the waste product of modern industry and transportation. They highlight the impact of human activity on the natural landscape, suggesting a departure from a pristine wilderness towards an environment marked by the remnants of ceaseless movement and consumption. This also connects to the little toy salesman’s later identity as a “rubber salesman.”

    - “birth control devices”: The inclusion of these items is particularly striking, pointing to themes of sexuality, control over reproduction, and perhaps the anxieties or deliberate choices related to creating or preventing life. In a novel deeply concerned with motherhood, loss, and the nature of existence, these devices symbolize attempts to manage or deny natural processes, or the consequences of such interventions in the American context. See Pregnancy, Abortion, and Midwifery.
    - Collectively, these items portray America not as a land of simple, idealized dreams, but as a complex, often melancholy landscape where the natural world is inextricably mixed with human-made refuse and the poignant echoes of lives lived and lost. It is a place of stark reality, littered with the tangible evidence of decay, chance, and the profound, sometimes tragic, consequences of human existence, leaving the returning “stranger” with a sense of alienation and a confrontation with a less glamorous truth.
- “a voice saying to jump from the high places”: “If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee” (Matthew 4:6, KJV), the devil’s temptation on the pinnacle of the temple. See The Bible.
- “He whispered into her ear that there would be a great war”: Everything would be poisoned and disappear forever. This may refer to the proliferation of nuclear weapons during the Cold War. The Cold War saw a rapid nuclear arms race that saw the U.S. and Soviet Union build massive arsenals, which fueled the proliferation of nuclear weapons to other nations like the UK, France, and China. This escalation was driven by mutual suspicion and doctrines like Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), but was tempered by arms control efforts such as the Partial Test Ban Treaty and the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The period is also marked by dangerous standoffs, such as the Cuban Missile Crisis, which underscored the need to prevent nuclear conflict. Little Boy was the codename for the type of atomic bomb dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima on 6 August 1945 during World War II. It was the first nuclear weapon used in warfare. Carl Jung had visions and dreams about carnage and thought he was going insane. From his journals it is considered a premonition of World War I. See Freud and Jung.
    - “there would be a great war and that the bad men would blow up the world some day of calm just for fun” may refer to the Cold War. The Cold War was a period of international geopolitical rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies, the capitalist Western Bloc and communist Eastern Bloc, which began in the aftermath of the Second World War and ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Cold War outlasted 1964.
- “the star, bright star”: “Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art” (Keats, 1819). See Romantic Poets.
- “and the red haw”: “red haw” most commonly refers to the Red Hawthorn, a small, thorny deciduous tree or shrub native to North America known for its white spring flowers and bright red fruits. It is also referred to as Downy Hawthorn or Scarlet Hawthorn.

Vocabulary

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Afterbirth

The placenta and membranes expelled after a birth.

Antiphon

A verse sung in turn by two choirs.

Antipodes

Places on exactly opposite sides of the earth.

Aureole

A ring or field of radiant light around a sacred figure.

Bandy-legged

Bow-legged.

Beclouded

Clouded over; confused.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Billows

Great waves.

Bowler

A hard felt hat with a rounded crown, called a derby in America; also one who bowls.

Cowl

A hood; also a hooded cap on a chimney that turns with the wind.

Crow’s-nest

A lookout platform high on a ship’s mast.

Curdled

Thickened into lumps, like soured milk.

Deluge

A great flood or downpour. The Deluge is Noah’s flood.

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Featherweight

In boxing, the class just above bantamweight, long limited to 126 pounds; anything very light.

Fence

A dealer in stolen goods.

Flotsam

Wreckage or goods found floating on the sea.

Foetus

An unborn child.

Forebodings

Feelings that something bad is about to happen.

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Haw

The red berry of the hawthorn.

Hoar-frost

White frost formed as feathery ice crystals.

Kewpie

A plump, wide-eyed baby doll.

Limpid

Clear and transparent.

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Lucid

Clear; clear-headed.

Luminous

Giving off light.

Nimbus

A halo or glow of light.

Oculist

An eye doctor.

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Ossified

Turned to bone; hardened.

Patent leather

Leather with a hard, glossy finish.

Perambulations

Walks or strolls, especially leisurely ones.

Porous

Full of tiny holes that let water through.

Premature

Born or happening too early.

Pugnacious

Eager to fight.

Retort

A glass vessel with a long bent neck, used by alchemists for distilling.

Saffron

Orange-yellow, the color of the spice.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Sepulchral

Of the tomb; gloomy and deathly.

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard. Spar is also the name for certain shiny, easily split crystalline minerals, such as Iceland spar.

Spectral

Ghostly.

Squall

A sudden, violent gust of wind, often with rain or snow.

Stool pigeon

A police informer.

Teething ring

A ring for a baby to bite on while cutting teeth.

Thimble

A small cap worn on the finger to push the needle in sewing.

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Tumult

A loud, confused uproar.

Turgid

Swollen; also, pompous in style.

Ulster

A long, loose overcoat, often with a cape.

Waistcoat

A vest.

Windowpeeper

A peeping Tom.

Wraith

A ghost; a faint, pale shape.

Chapter 82

Content note: *Vera's mother, Catherine Cartwheel, dies after a lifetime of opium addiction.*

Summary

Vera thinks of all she could have confessed to Esther. Her mother is dead. Weaned at last from her drugs, Catherine rose from her bed and walked, and suddenly she was old, so changed that no one would have known her. Riding with her in the old surrey at the sea's edge, Mr. Spitzer declared his long love and told her he was really Peron, and that it was Joachim who had died, but she had died before he spoke. A great storm then swept away the house with its golden towers and drowned the old clam-digger, leaving chandeliers strewn along the shore; only the string of pearls Vera wears remains. Vera sees Miss MacIntosh anew, "Whatever is average is the dream. Whatever is hidden is the revealed," and remembers her singing the psalms and hymns of her childhood over the ironing board. At the Tavern Vera hears a man shouting all night to Lucie Bell, a girl who had already left him, and at dawn she meets him, a stone deaf man, deaf since he was fourteen. They become lovers, he whispers that their child will be their ear, and they plan to marry and invite everyone, the flowers and the birds and Esther Longtree, "for she was also our love, all our loves." "Esther Longtree would come." She would hang a sign in the restaurant window: "Owt to luntsch. Bee bak in a whale."

Characters present

Vera Cartwheel · Esther Longtree · Joachim Spitzer · Catherine Cartwheel · The Old Clam-Digger · The Stone Deaf Man · Lucie Bell

Concepts present

Themes: Death and Mortality · Grief, Loss, and Mourning · Illusion and Reality · Love · Music, Sound, and Silence · Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos · Society, Class, and Race · Time

Symbols: Birds · Dogs · Eyes and Blindness · Fog and Mist · Horses and Carriages · Lamps, Candles, and Light · Moon and Stars · Music and Instruments · Pearls and Jewels · Silence and Deafness · The Sea and Water

Philosophy: Marguerite Young on Her Craft

Allusions: Angels and Archangels · Astronomy · Deafness and Sign Language · Exploration and the Poles · Greek Mythology · Homer's Epics · Romantic Poets · The Bible · The History of Opium

Key passages

From the research

- Early in the chapter, Vera reflects on the death of her mother, Catherine, the destruction of the house with its golden turrets and towers by the sea, and the scattering of chandeliers along the shore. The only remaining possession is a string of pearls worn by Vera. Vera mourns “three deaths” and is “in love with an older love than memory provided.”
- A significant section meditates on the experience of deafness. Vera compares the deaf to marble statues who perceive much but miss the vital auditory dimension of reality. The silence is described as a cold, alien world, yet it also holds a unique, possibly more beautiful mode of communication beyond speech. Even those who hear do not perceive everything, while the deaf may be haunted by imagined sounds or the absence of words.
- The narrative details Catherine’s gradual return from a drug-induced dreamlike state to a fragile awareness before her death. Mr. Spitzer, who had loved Catherine secretly and faithfully, waited for a moment to confess his love, which ultimately came too late. Mr. Spitzer holds Catherine in his arms in the old surrey at the sea’s edge, speaking of his long-buried love as the sea and nature respond around them. But Catherine “had died at the beginning of his whispers,” in fact “had died before he could speak.”
- Mr. Spitzer declares that he is Peron, not the dead brother Joachim, though Young said that he himself does not know which brother he is (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). His grief over Catherine’s death and the loss of the old clam-digger valet is profound. The old clam-digger, a loyal companion, drowned in the storm.
- The descriptions of the old clam-digger’s habits (burying himself in the sand, being mistaken for part of the landscape, developing nervous tics) serve as a metaphor for the human condition in the face of time and loss. Despite physical preservation, there is a spiritual or intellectual departure, resulting in a “living corpse.” This passage contemplates the nature of life, death, and decay in a subtle, haunting way.
- Toward the end of the chapter, Vera hears the voice of a stone deaf man who, though unable to hear, speaks and sings in a world of silence. His voice, full of longing, loss, and fragmented thoughts, expresses the paradox of communication without sound. Vera falls in love with this silent traveler.
- Throughout the chapter, there is a recurring motif of life as a dream, of love preceding words, and of silence having its own language. Vera and the stone deaf man imagine a wedding attended by wildflowers, birds, and nature itself, a symbolic union beyond earthly conventions. The chapter closes on a note of tender acceptance and mystery, with Vera embracing love and silence as intertwined realities.

Questions and observations

Reading closely

- “Whatever is average is the dream. Whatever is hidden is the revealed.” What has Vera learned about Miss MacIntosh?
- “My beginning was my end, and my end was my beginning.” How does the novel end where it began?
- “Perhaps there is always a sense missing, that sense which would make the world real.” What sense is missing in Vera?

Characters

- Mr. Spitzer tells Catherine he is Peron, but “she was dead, had died at the beginning of his whispers.” Why must the confession come too late?
- Vera loves the stone deaf man “as a mother might love a child” and as a woman loves a man. Why both?
- Of Miss MacIntosh: “Her doubt was her own wound.” What else did she keep hidden?

Connections

- “Esther Longtree would come.” Why is Esther, the mother of the stillborn, the last guest named for Vera’s wedding?
- Esther’s sign reads “Owt to luntsch. Bee bak in a whale.” Why end the novel with a misspelling?
- The old horse turns into “the golden mare.” Where else has the novel shown one thing passing for another?

Reflection

- “There are ways more beautiful than the ear, the eye.” What are they?
- “Life is imaginary, and this be an imaginary world.” Do you agree?
- The lovers “would invite everybody to our wedding,” the flowers, the birds, the old mule, and Esther. Who would be at yours?

Research: Characters

Vera

- Reflective and deeply emotional, Vera grapples with mourning, love, and the nature of existence.

Esther Longtree

- Mentioned as someone Vera might have confided in but who perhaps would not fully understand or be interested. Represents a contrasting perspective on loss and endurance.

Mr. Spitzer

- A complex figure who reveals his true identity as Peron, the brother of Joachim. He has waited years to confess his love and to close a chapter on the past. His grief is profound, encompassing the loss of Catherine, the old clam-digger, and his own illusions.

Catherine

- Once beautiful and dreamlike, she lived in a state between life and death, sustained by drugs and illusions. Her death and the destruction of her home symbolize the dissolution of a dream or an era.

The Old Clam-Digger (Valet)

- A loyal servant and companion to Mr. Spitzer, embodying endurance and the passage of time. His disappearance in the storm represents another loss for Mr. Spitzer.

The Stone Deaf Man

- A poignant figure who cannot hear but communicates and experiences the world through other senses. He has a profound inner life and love beyond words. Young said that “the deaf are normal in every way” and that those who lack a sense “develop a hypersensitivity in every other way” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). His lost love is Lucie Bell, who “had left him before I ever came”; Vera never saw her.

Lucie Bell

- Lucie Bell is the deaf man’s lost love, gone before Vera came, so Vera never sees or hears her. He calls her “a little bird girl with such a small, pecking face and such long, thin legs,” fickle, loving a jukebox or a “tired marathon skater” more than him: “You make too much noise. I am going to leave you. Man loves a silent woman.” He hears with his eyes and fingers and longs for a silent love, and Vera comes to love him “for all the tongues of silence speaking the name of love.”

Research: Themes

Loss and Mourning

See: Grief, Loss, and Mourning

- Vera mourns not only Catherine but also the loss of a dreamlike past, the family estate, and symbolic “pearls.” Mr. Spitzer’s layered grief includes his brother Joachim, Catherine, and the old clam-digger.

Illusion and Reality

See: Illusion and Reality

- Catherine’s life was sustained by dreams and drugs, blurring the line between waking life and sleep, life and death. Vera questions what is real and what is dream.

Silence and Communication

See: Music, Sound, and Silence

- Extensive meditation on deafness, silence, and the limitations and beauty of communication beyond words. The stone deaf man represents the world of silence yet full of inner sound and love.

Time and Timelessness

See: Time

- Time is experienced unevenly, accelerating at moments and suspended in others. Catherine’s slow death, Mr. Spitzer’s long wait, and the clam-digger’s timeless endurance reflect different relationships with time.

Love Beyond Death

See: Death and Mortality · Love

- Mr. Spitzer’s confession of being Peron and his love for Catherine after her death touches on eternal love transcending mortality.

Nature and the Sea

See: Nature, the Sea, and the Cosmos

- The sea is a powerful force of destruction and transformation, symbolic of change, loss, and perhaps renewal. It carries away the house and treasures but also represents the boundary between worlds.

Research: Symbols and Imagery

The Sea

See: The Sea and Water

- Represents overwhelming change, the passage of time, and the erasure of the past. It is both nurturing and destructive.

Pearls

See: Pearls and Jewels

- The only remaining inheritance of Vera after the storm. Symbolize lost treasures, memories, or purity.

The Old White Horse and Surrey

See: Horses and Carriages

- Symbolize the passage toward death and the journey between worlds. The horse turning into silver, blue, green, and gold hints at transformation and transcendence.

The Silent Dog and Barking

See: Dogs · Silence and Deafness

- Represent intuition and knowledge beyond human perception, especially about death.

Music and Silence

See: Music and Instruments · Silence and Deafness

- Mr. Spitzer’s identity as Peron and his music represent communication beyond words and the connection between the living and the dead.

The Stone Deaf Man

See: Silence and Deafness

- Symbolizes alternate perception and the power of love and inner sound beyond physical hearing.

Fog and Moonlight

See: Fog and Mist · Moon and Stars · Lamps, Candles, and Light

- Indicate ambiguity, the boundary between clarity and obscurity, life and death, dream and reality.

Further notes from the text

- Vera’s mourning begins with the house: the sea has swept over the opium paradise, the divan upheld by dolphins dreams under the flood, and no lawyer will be needed for the estate, because nothing is left to administer.
- Catherine’s last hours are framed as a paradox Mr. Spitzer understood: she would die if her enchantment continued, and she would die if she rose and walked again. She rises, takes a few steps, and dies.
- Mr. Spitzer’s declaration, that he was really Peron, comes with his usual rolling periods, as if to assure himself that what he says is true, or not quite true. Vera does not decide which.
- The old clam-digger, Mr. Spitzer’s valet, used to bury himself in the sand with only a hole for his mouth and nose, so that the herring gulls mistook him for a moss animal or a rock. The storm takes him with the house.
- Left alone like an old barnacled boat, Mr. Spitzer asks how he will pass his time, and the novel turns to Miss MacIntosh’s creed of the average and the middle way, which Vera now sees anew.
- The songs and hymns of the chapter gather the book’s images, the Rock of Ages, the lighthouse beam for the wanderer, the waters that have gone over the soul, and repeat its oldest line: my beginning was my end, and my end was my beginning.
- The stone deaf man’s ears are in his fingertips. His former love, Lucie Bell, left him before Vera came. Vera loves him “as a mother might love a child” and as a woman loves a man, and they plan a wedding to which everyone is invited, Esther Longtree included.

Research: Resources

- “how my mother, after many years of sleeping, arose from her bed and walked”: So did Weissenbach. She “had been able to get out of bed after many, many years, but this is what killed her, so that she turned old overnight. She had never shown the mark of time.” She died in 1943 in New York, and Young, who kept writing to her, learned of it months later from her daughter: “as long as you kept writing to Mother and I read your letters, I felt as if my mother was somehow alive” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). See Catherine Cartwheel, Marguerite Young on Her Craft, and The History of Opium.
- “With Braille, he teaches”: Louis Braille, blinded as a child, published his raised-dot alphabet in 1829. The Seeing Eye, the first American school for guide dogs, was founded in 1929 by Dorothy Harrison Eustis. See Eyes and Blindness.
- “One drop more of nepenthe”: Nepenthe is a mythical, ancient Greek potion or drug used to induce forgetfulness of pain, sorrow, or grief. In Homer’s Odyssey (Book 4), Helen had it as a gift from Polydamna of Egypt and mixed it into the wine to ease the grief of Menelaus and his guests. See Greek Mythology and Homer’s Epics.

- “seeming to be scaling like the moon”: Here “scaling” means flaking off in scales, as old paint or skin does: the old white horse is “streaked with grey and scaling, flaking like the moon.” See Horses and Carriages.
    - Scaling refers to the adjustment of size, scope, or intensity, with meanings ranging from enlarging/reducing dimensions in mathematics and design to increasing business operations, or removing deposits from teeth. It fundamentally involves changing the scale of a subject.
- “if he did not speak now, he might never speak”: Young took the scene from the death of the poet Elinor Wylie (December 16, 1928) as she remembered it: William Rose Benét explained his feelings to her at length, “and then he realized that she was sitting there dead and had never heard a word. She missed his confession” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). See Joachim Spitzer and Catherine Cartwheel.
- “the reason no one had heard his music since Peron’s death was that he was Peron”: Young compared Mr. Spitzer’s “great impersonation in this life” to “the Titchborn claimant” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965), Arthur Orton, who claimed in 1866 to be the lost heir Roger Tichborne and was convicted of perjury in 1874. In her first draft “Mr. Spitzer knew that he was really Peyron the gambler,” which “seemed so tricky to me” that she rewrote it so that he does not know (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). See Joachim Spitzer, Marguerite Young on Her Craft, and Peron Spitzer.
- “the old nag turning into the golden mare”: Young read about racehorse “ringers” painted to race under false colors: “I read of one marvelous case at Saratoga Springs when it was a rain storm in the midst of the race, and people with absolute horror looked out to see the old nag turning into the speeder, losing the mottled coat.” She also read lives of John W. “Bet-a-Million” Gates and Diamond Jim Brady (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See Joachim Spitzer and Horses and Carriages.
- “for hers would be an urn burial”: Sir Thomas Browne’s Urne-Buriall (1658), a meditation on ancient burial urns, ends: “Man is a Noble Animal, splendid in ashes, and pompous in the grave.” See Death and Mortality.
- “like a jackdaw picking up sticks”: A jackdaw is a small, highly social bird in the crow family, known for its striking pale-gray eyes and a distinctive silver-gray “shawl” on the back of its head. It is commonly found in urban areas, farmland, and woodlands across Europe, Asia, and North Africa. See Birds.
- “tatterdemalions”: Tatterdemalion describes a person wearing ragged, torn, or disreputable clothing, or refers to something in a state of decay, filth, or disrepair. Originating in the early 1600s, this term often used for a “ragamuffin” implies a shabby, unkempt appearance. As an adjective, it means ragged or dilapidated.
- “Snow-breasted gannets and Arctic terns”: Gannets are seabirds, closely related to boobies. They are known as ‘solan’ or ‘solan goose’ in Scotland. A common

misconception is that the Scottish name is ‘guga’ but this is the Gaelic name referring to the chicks only. (Wikipedia) See Birds.

    - The Arctic tern is a tern in the family Laridae. This bird has a circumpolar breeding distribution covering the Arctic and sub-Arctic regions of Europe, Asia, and North America. (Wikipedia) See Exploration and the Poles.
- “beach plum bushes and beach cherry”: On the Atlantic coast the beach plum (Prunus maritima) and the sand cherry (Prunus pumila) grow wild in the dunes.
    - “beach cherry” Eugenia reinwardtiana is a shrub to small tree in the family Myrtaceae. Native to tropical forests in Indonesia, the Australian state of Queensland, and many Pacific Islands, its common names include Cedar Bay cherry, beach cherry, Australian beach cherry, mountain stopper, nīoi, and a’abang. (Wikipedia) This tropical beach cherry does not grow on the Atlantic shore.
    - “eel grass” Zostera is a small genus of widely distributed seagrasses, commonly called marine eelgrass, or simply seagrass or eelgrass. The genus Zostera contains 15 species. (Wikipedia)
- “Map-makers of the heavenly bodies”: In 1930 the International Astronomical Union adopted the constellation boundaries drawn by Eugène Delporte, dividing the whole sky among 88 constellations so that no star falls outside. See Astronomy.
- “as if this were the coast of Charon”: Charon ferried the dead across the river Styx into Hades, for a coin laid in the mouth. See Greek Mythology and Death and Mortality.
- “golden chanticleer”: Chauntecleer is the proud rooster of Chaucer’s “Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” nearly carried off by the fox. See Birds.
- “Thou hast wrapped me in Thy fleece”: The hymns Miss MacIntosh sings reveal a profound spiritual dimension to her character. While she keeps her doubt to herself (“Her doubt was her own wound”) and will not be “the stumbling block in another’s path,” these songs from her childhood represent an enduring, if conflicted, faith. They expose her inner struggles with vulnerability, physical and emotional wounds, and the existential human condition of being lost and in need of guidance. These moments of singing, even as she performs mundane tasks, highlight the tension between her practical life and her deep, unarticulated spiritual longings, demonstrating that her common sense and brusqueness are often a defense against profound personal suffering and a search for meaning in a chaotic world. See Miss MacIntosh and The Bible.
    - “Lo, she would lift her eyes to the hills from whence cometh help.” This references Psalm 121, often the basis of hymns about looking to the hills for help. “I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help” (Psalm 121:1, KJV).
    - “Thou didst turn Thy face from me, and I was troubled” echoes Psalm 30:7: “thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled” (KJV).
    - “For Thou art my strong rock and my castle, so also be my guide.” This refers to God as a “strong rock and castle,” a common biblical metaphor used in hymns. In the psalter of the Book of Common Prayer (Coverdale’s translation), Psalm 31:3

reads, “For thou art my strong rock, and my castle: be thou also my guide,” nearly Miss MacIntosh’s very words.

    - “Thou hast covered me, and Thou hast numbered the hairs of my head, and Thou hast closed the wound of my side. Thou hast plucked out the arrows.” These lines evoke biblical imagery associated with God’s protection and healing, reminiscent of hymns about divine care and salvation. “The very hairs of your head are all numbered” (Matthew 10:30); “thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb” (Psalm 139:13); “one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side” (John 19:34); “thine arrows stick fast in me” (Psalm 38:2, KJV).
    - “Song of the shepherd who would lead all sheep home, losing none in narrow defiles” alludes to the Good Shepherd theme common in Christian hymns. “I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep” (John 10:11, KJV).
    - “Song of the Rock of Ages cleft for me” directly mentions the famous hymn “Rock of Ages.” Augustus Toplady’s hymn (published 1775): “Rock of Ages, cleft for me, / Let me hide myself in thee.”
    - “Songs of the Rugged Cross” refers to the hymn “The Old Rugged Cross,” focused on the crucifixion. George Bennard wrote it in 1912.
    - Songs “of the shaded valley, of the still stream” evoke traditional hymn imagery of peaceful pastoral scenes symbolizing God’s care. “He leadeth me beside the still waters” (Psalm 23:2, KJV); “As the hart panteth after the water brooks” (Psalm 42:1, KJV).
    - “Songs of those who reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man, of the lost soul, of the pinioned wings” suggest hymns that address human frailty, being lost, and spiritual struggle. “They reel to and fro, and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wit’s end” (Psalm 107:27, KJV).
    - Songs “of the lighthouse beam which lights the way to the poor wanderer tossed upon the rolling waves far from any harbor” is a metaphor often used in hymns about guidance and salvation.
    - “Awake, thou lute and harp, she sang. I myself will awake right early.” This is Psalm 57 in the psalter of the Book of Common Prayer: “awake, lute and harp: I myself will awake right early.” The King James has “awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early” (Psalm 57:8).
    - “The waters have drowned us. The stream has gone over our soul.” is Psalm 124 in the psalter of the Book of Common Prayer: “Yea, the waters had drowned us: and the stream had gone over our soul.”
- “My beginning was my end, and my end was my beginning”: Mary, Queen of Scots, embroidered the motto “En ma fin gît mon commencement” (“In my end is my beginning”); T. S. Eliot’s “East Coker” (1940) opens “In my beginning is my end” and closes “In my end is my beginning.” See Miss MacIntosh.
- “Little boidies don’t have no tits”: The stone-deaf man was Young’s friend Howard Mitcham, a deaf painter in Greenwich Village. “He used to love to sing this, little

boydies don’t have no tits. Little boydies don’t have no umbilical cords,” and “he knew that I was putting him in” (Marguerite Young, interview with Kay Bonetti, American Audio Prose Library, May 1983). For a magazine article on the deaf she interviewed deaf leaders in New York and heard the Lord’s Prayer in sign language at St. Mark’s (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See The Stone Deaf Man, Deafness and Sign Language, and Marguerite Young on Her Craft.

- “Man loves a silent woman”: In Ben Jonson’s comedy Epicoene, or The Silent Woman (1609), Morose, who cannot bear noise, marries a bride for her silence; once wed, she talks without stopping. See Love.
- “A hand was arisen on the road and spelled out a name for me”: “That was a dream, actual dream of a deaf friend I knew that he solved. He thought he solved a mystery down in Louisiana by the hand speaking to him in a dream” (Marguerite Young, interview with Studs Terkel, WFMT radio, 1965). See The Stone Deaf Man.
- “like an albatross”: The sailor who shot the albatross wears it around his neck: “Instead of the cross, the Albatross / About my neck was hung” (Coleridge, The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, 1798). See Romantic Poets and Birds.
- “When the white girls turned their faces away from him”: This sudden inclusion of a Negro woman plays into the Magical Negro trope in cinema, television, and literature. The character often has no past but simply appears one day to help the white protagonist. They usually have some sort of vague magical power. The character is patient and wise, often dispensing various words of wisdom. Racism historians Francisco Bethencourt and John Beusterien trace the trope to the Spanish comedias de negros of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The Magical Negro stereotype serves as a plot device to help the white protagonist get out of trouble, typically through helping the white character recognize his own faults, overcome them and teaching him to be a better person. Although the character may have magical powers, their magic is used to help and enlighten a white male character. (Wikipedia) See Society, Class, and Race.
- “when Gabriel blew his horn”: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, KJV); The Bible does not name the angel who sounds the last trump; the spiritual “Blow Your Trumpet, Gabriel,” printed in Slave Songs of the United States (1867), gives it to Gabriel. See Angels and Archangels and The Bible.
- “Esther Longtree would come”: In the last pages, Vera and the stone deaf man plan to “invite everybody to our wedding,” the wild flowers and the birds and the waters and the stars, “and the old mule that leaned over the fence and Esther Longtree, for she was also our love, all our loves, and she was the mother of the stillborn clapping their hands in clouds, and she loved us all and all things hurt or silent or broken or dead or living, and we were all so much like her little children that we might have been the children of her dreams.” Then Esther gets a line of her own: “Esther Longtree would come.” The chapter opens with Esther as the woman Vera could have confessed to, “if she had been as much interested in my confessions as I had been in hers,” and it

closes with Esther as the last guest named. The mother of the stillborn is welcomed as a mother to everyone at the wedding, just as Vera has conceived a child of her own: “I do not know the night in which I conceived as I do not know the night in which I was conceived.” Esther does not change to fit the occasion. She comes as she is, and she would hang her misspelled sign in the restaurant window: “Owt to luntsch. Bee bak in a whale.” See Esther Longtree and Vera Cartwheel.

- Vera comes to terms with the other adults in her life:
- Catherine: Vera’s view of her mother changes drastically by the end of the novel. While Vera used to see her mother as a beautiful lady sleeping in her swan boat, Vera comes to terms with her mother’s death and sees her mother as poor, as if she had been evicted from her house long before she died and wandered like a beggar through the streets. This is vastly different from the beautiful woman Vera once idolized. See Catherine Cartwheel.
- Mr. Spitzer: Vera learns the truth about Mr. Spitzer’s identity, that he was Peron, not Joachim, and that his life had been a “celestial joke.” She understands his love for her mother, a love hidden and unfulfilled for many years. Vera sees him as someone who has lost everything and is living in the past. She sees that his grief over the loss of the old clam-digger “had seemed far greater than when my mother died.” See Joachim Spitzer.
- Miss MacIntosh: Vera acknowledges that her love for Miss MacIntosh came late, only when she saw beyond the surface of her character. Vera realizes that Miss MacIntosh’s apparent mediocrity hid a phantasmagoric dream. Vera understands that despite Miss MacIntosh’s seemingly sensible nature, she was drawn to the ocean’s depths and eventually drowned. See Miss MacIntosh.
- The final chapter marks a significant shift in Vera’s narrative. After recounting the stories of Esther Longtree, Miss MacIntosh, Mr. Spitzer and her mother, Vera turns her attention to her own experiences and a newfound love with a stone deaf man. This signals a move towards personal redemption and finding meaning amidst the chaos and illusions that permeate the novel.
- Vera’s relationship with the stone deaf man highlights the theme of communication beyond conventional means. Since he cannot hear, their connection relies on visual cues, touch, and unspoken understanding. This echoes the novel’s broader exploration of how people connect despite their individual limitations and the illusory nature of reality.
- The stone deaf man’s perspective offers a unique insight into the world of silence. He claims that all the waters of creation had smashed against his ears, leaving him stone deaf. He is bombarded by loud noises in his mind, but it is a silent world. Silence allows Vera and her lover to connect on a deeper level, transcending the superficiality of spoken words. The silence also seems to be a way for him to be closer to death.
- The stone deaf man’s experiences also emphasize the importance of imagination. Having lost his hearing at fourteen, he lives in a world where sounds are memories

or creations of his mind. This reinforces the novel's recurring motif of the power of imagination to shape reality and find beauty in the face of adversity.

  - The relationship between Vera and the stone deaf man shows an acceptance for one another. He accepts that she can hear and she accepts that he cannot. This can be compared to the acceptance that Miss MacIntosh has for death and Vera has for her mother's opium addiction.
  - The final chapter returns to the novel's recurring themes.
  - The line between illusion and reality continues to blur in this chapter. The stone deaf man's perception of the world is shaped by his unique sensory experience, highlighting the subjective nature of reality. He says that life is imaginary and this is an imaginary world.
  - Vera's loss of everything but the string of pearls she wears symbolizes the shedding of material possessions and the pursuit of deeper meaning. Her relationship with the stone deaf man offers a path towards redemption, as she finds love and connection in unexpected circumstances.
  - The chapter explores different facets of love: maternal love, romantic love, and universal love. Vera's love for the stone deaf man transcends physical limitations and societal norms, representing a pure and unconditional form of affection. She feels elegiac even before her love arrives.
  - The thought of death, especially Vera's death, is brought up many times. The stone deaf man cannot hear the silent horn that Gabriel will blow.
  - Some concluding thoughts on the ending follow.
  - The ending remains ambiguous, leaving the reader to ponder the ultimate meaning of Vera's journey. The novel does not offer easy answers but instead celebrates the complexities and contradictions of human existence.
  - The final chapter reinforces the novel's celebration of the unconventional and the marginalized. Vera's choice to embrace a relationship with a stone deaf man challenges societal expectations and highlights the beauty of finding love in unexpected places.
  - The final chapter suggests that the power of imagination and the capacity for love can transcend the limitations of reality. Despite the losses and disillusionments Vera has experienced, she finds solace and meaning in her connection with the stone deaf man, embracing a world where silence speaks volumes and love knows no bounds.
  - Vera and the stone deaf man plan to get married, and they plan to invite everyone. The stone deaf man believes that their procreation will provide life that can transcend his limits. There is hope because the next generation will lead the way.
- "Owt to luntsch": The last line was a friend's idea, about ten years before Young finished: a painter told her to have Esther "hang up a sign in the restaurant window, out to lunch," "And I said, I'll do exactly that" (Marguerite Young, interview with Duncan MacDonald, Observation Point, 1965). See Esther Longtree.

Vocabulary

Acclimatized

Grown used to a new climate, place, or situation.

Ambivalence

Mixed or contradictory feelings.

Ambivalently

With mixed or contradictory feelings or meanings.

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Belligerently

In a hostile, quarrelsome way.

Bluejay

A loud, crested blue bird of North America.

Bobolink

A North American songbird of meadows.

Bookie

A bookmaker, who takes bets and pays off the winners.

Braille

A system of raised dots read by touch.

Cabana

A small beach hut or shelter.

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Chanticleer

A name for a rooster, from the medieval beast fables.

Clairvoyance

The supposed power of seeing what is hidden or yet to come.

Cockle

A small saltwater clam with a ribbed, heart-shaped shell. A cockleshell boat is a small, flimsy one.

Codfish

A large food fish of cold northern seas.

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Cornice

A decorative molding that runs along the top of a wall or building.

Cortege

A funeral procession.

Defile

A narrow pass between mountains.

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Dubious

Doubtful.

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Facade

The front of a building; a false front.

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Flotsam

Wreckage or goods found floating on the sea.

Gannet

A large white seabird that dives for fish.

Harebell

A wildflower with nodding blue bell-shaped flowers.

Hart

A male deer.

Hulk

The body of an old ship; a big, clumsy person or thing.

Imperceptibly

So slowly or slightly as to go unnoticed.

Inarticulate

Unable to express oneself clearly.

Jack-in-the-pulpit

A woodland plant whose flower spike stands under a hooded leaf, like a preacher in a pulpit.

Jackdaw

A small crow known for picking up bright objects and sticks.

Lagoon

A stretch of shallow water separated from the sea by a reef or sandbar.

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Mediocrity

The state of being ordinary or second-rate.

Metronome

A device that clicks a steady beat to keep musical time.

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Nag

An old or worn-out horse.

Nautilus

A sea creature with a spiral shell. The paper nautilus is a small octopus whose female makes a thin, papery shell.

Nepenthe

In Homer’s Odyssey, a drug from Egypt that Helen puts in the wine to banish grief and sorrow. Anything that brings forgetfulness of pain. See On Nepenthe (Ch 82).

Nimbus

A halo or glow of light.

Obdurate

Stubborn, unyielding.

Obfuscation

The act of making something unclear or obscure.

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Persian

A person of Persia, now Iran.

Phaeton

A light, open, four-wheeled carriage; also a name for some seashells.

Phantasmagoric

Like a phantasmagoria, a shifting series of dreamlike or nightmarish images. A phantasmagoria was an eighteenth-century magic-lantern ghost show.

Pinioned

Held or bound fast, especially by the arms.

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Punctilious

Exact in matters of etiquette and detail.

Reverberation

An echo; a sound that rolls back and forth.

Rhapsodic

Full of rapturous feeling.

Sandpiper

A small wading shorebird that runs along the tide line.

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Seine

To fish with a large hanging net.

Slate

A small board of slate that schoolchildren wrote on with chalk.

Slumberous

Sleepy; inducing sleep.

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Sonorous

Deep and full in sound.

Spindrift

Spray blown from the tops of waves.

Spurious

False.

Squall

A sudden, violent gust of wind, often with rain or snow.

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Surrey

A light four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with two seats, often with a fringed canopy on top.

Taciturn

Habitually silent; saying little.

Tatterdemalion

A ragged person; tattered.

Tern

A slender, fork-tailed seabird.

Titmouse

A small songbird; a tit.

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists' dream of turning base metal into gold.

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Waterproof

An old word for a raincoat, as in Miss MacIntosh's "plaid, faded waterproof."

Whelk

A large sea snail with a spiral shell.

Dictionary of Miss MacIntosh, My Darling

A

Abacus

A frame with beads on wires, used for counting.

Found in chapters 57, 58, 62, 72

Abaft

Toward the stern of a ship; behind.

Found in chapter 3

Aberration

A departure from what is normal or expected.

Found in chapters 8, 22, 23

Abeyance

A state of temporary suspension.

Found in chapter 32

Abject

Wretched; downcast.

Found in chapters 2, 37

Abjure

To renounce or reject solemnly.

Found in chapter 3

Abortionist

One who performs abortions.

Found in chapters 69, 74, 77

Abscond

To leave secretly and in a hurry, often to escape the law or to make off with something.

Found in chapter 2

Abstruse

Hard to understand; obscure.

Found in chapters 2, 27

Abyss

A bottomless pit or chasm.

Found in chapters 14, 17, 18, 25, 36, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 58, 62, 63, 65, 74, 76, 81

Acanthus

A Mediterranean plant whose deeply cut leaves are carved as ornament, especially on Corinthian columns.

Found in chapters 19, 22

Acclimatized

Grown used to a new climate, place, or situation.

Found in chapters 43, 82

Accolade

An award or praise; once the touch of a sword that made a knight.

Found in chapter 44

Accoutered

Dressed and equipped, especially for a special occasion.

Found in chapter 56

Acme

The highest point of something; the peak.

Found in chapters 31, 43, 46, 63, 65

Acolyte

An attendant or follower; in church, one who assists the priest.

Found in chapter 45

Acquiescence

Quiet acceptance; going along without protest.

Found in chapter 14

Acrid

Sharp and bitter to taste or smell.

Found in chapters 25, 36, 68

Acumen

Keen insight or shrewdness.

Found in chapter 41

Adagio

In music, a slow, leisurely tempo, or a piece played that way.

Found in chapter 2

Adamantine

Unbreakable; hard as diamond.

Found in chapter 34

Addenda

Things added; plural of addendum.

Found in chapter 44

Adipose

Fatty.

Found in chapter 42

Adventitious

Happening by chance; not essential or built in.

Found in chapters 2, 43, 44, 49, 54, 55, 59, 60

Aerie

An eagle’s nest on a height.

Found in chapter 31

Affable

Friendly and easy to talk to.

Found in chapter 6

Affrighted

Frightened.

Found in chapter 35

Afterbirth

The placenta and membranes expelled after a birth.

Found in chapters 76, 81

Aggrandized

Made greater.

Found in chapter 36

Aggregate

A whole formed by combining parts.

Found in chapter 27

Aggrievedly

With a sense of being wronged.

Found in chapter 31

Ague

A fever with fits of shivering.

Found in chapter 58

Akimbo

With hands on hips and elbows turned out.

Found in chapters 72, 79, 80

Alabaster

A fine, smooth, white stone used for carving.

Found in chapters 19, 42, 52

Alacrity

Cheerful eagerness.

Found in chapter 20

Alarum

An old word for alarm, a call to arms.

Found in chapters 34, 45

Albumen

Egg white; the protein found in it.

Found in chapter 7

Alder

A tree of wet ground, of the birch family.

Found in chapter 76

Alderman

A member of a city council.

Found in chapters 29, 47, 51

Allay

To ease or quiet.

Found in chapters 26, 39

Allée

A walk or path lined with trees or tall hedges. Young writes “allees.”

Found in chapters 1, 16

Allegro

In music, lively and quick.

Found in chapter 61

Aloes

A fragrant resin or wood used in perfume.

Found in chapter 22

Aloof

Distant; not friendly or involved.

Found in chapters 6, 33

Alpenglow

The rosy light on high peaks just after sunset or before sunrise.

Found in chapter 46

Alpenhorn

A long wooden horn of the Alps.

Found in chapters 30, 31, 46

Altitudinous

Lofty.

Found in chapter 40

Altruist

One who acts for the good of others rather than for oneself.

Found in chapter 55

Amalgam

A mixture or blend.

Found in chapter 34

Amalgamation

A blending into one.

Found in chapter 29

Ambient

Surrounding.

Found in chapters 29, 30, 32, 39, 50

Ambivalence

Mixed or contradictory feelings.

Found in chapters 3, 32, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 52, 53, 82

Ambivalently

With mixed or contradictory feelings or meanings.

Found in chapters 2, 44, 45, 47, 49, 52, 54, 61, 82

Ambrosial

Divinely fragrant or delicious. From ambrosia, the food of the Greek gods, which gave them immortality.

Found in chapter 43

Amok

In a wild, uncontrolled frenzy.

Found in chapter 8

Amorphous

Without a clear shape or form.

Found in chapters 1, 5, 6, 8, 12, 13, 18, 29, 31, 35, 37, 41, 43, 45, 49, 50, 53, 54, 56, 58, 70, 82

Amphitheatre

A round or oval open-air arena with rising tiers of seats around a central space, used in ancient Rome for gladiator contests and public spectacles.

Found in chapter 43

Amphora

A tall two-handled jar of ancient Greece and Rome.

Found in chapter 51

Amplitude

Largeness; fullness of size or extent.

Found in chapters 38, 51, 61, 72, 74, 75, 78

Amulet

A charm worn against evil.

Found in chapters 35, 38, 48, 52

Anarchic

Without order or control; lawless.

Found in chapters 1, 70

Anathema

A thing or person hated; a curse.

Found in chapter 63

Anchorite

A hermit who lives shut away from the world for religious reasons.

Found in chapters 44, 47

Ancien régime

The old order; the French monarchy before the Revolution of 1789.

Found in chapter 54

Anesthesia

Loss of feeling or sensation, natural or induced.

Found in chapters 17, 77

Antagonist

An opponent; one who struggles against another.

Found in chapters 18, 41

Antediluvian

Before the Flood; very old.

Found in chapters 20, 22

Anteroom

A small room leading into a larger one.

Found in chapter 71

Anthracite

Hard coal that burns with little smoke.

Found in chapter 66

Antidote

A remedy that counteracts a poison.

Found in chapters 8, 41

Antimasque

A grotesque or comic dance performed before the stately masque at court.

Found in chapter 13

Antinomy

A contradiction between two conclusions that both seem true.

Found in chapter 14

Antiphon

A verse sung in turn by two choirs.

Found in chapters 3, 62, 81

Antiphony

Singing or playing in alternation between two groups, as of a divided choir.

Found in chapters 60, 61

Antipodes

Places on exactly opposite sides of the earth.

Found in chapters 22, 29, 81

Anvil

The heavy iron block on which a blacksmith hammers hot metal into shape.

Found in chapters 18, 32, 42, 43, 62

Aperture

An opening.

Found in chapters 29, 47, 49, 52, 54, 61

Aphorism

A short, pointed saying that states a general truth.

Found in chapter 15

Apivorous

Bee-eating.

Found in chapter 62

Aplomb

Self-assurance, poise.

Found in chapters 40, 45

Apocryphal

Of doubtful truth.

Found in chapters 29, 42, 50

Apogee

The point in an orbit farthest from the earth.

Found in chapter 62

Apoplectic

Red-faced and shaking with rage, as if about to have a stroke.

Found in chapter 53

Apoplexy

A sudden fit or stroke; a fit of rage.

Found in chapter 58

Apostate

One who abandons a faith or cause.

Found in chapter 41

Apparition

A ghost, or a ghostlike image of a person.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 14, 17, 27, 29, 32, 34, 36, 41, 42, 43, 48, 54, 56, 59, 65, 70

Appoggiatura

A grace note that leans on the main note before resolving to it.

Found in chapter 62

Apprised

Informed.

Found in chapters 14, 30, 70

Aqua regia

A mixture of nitric and hydrochloric acids that dissolves gold and platinum.

Found in chapter 7

Aquiline

Hooked like an eagle’s beak.

Found in chapter 34

Arabesque

An ornament of intertwined flowing lines, leaves, and tendrils.

Found in chapters 2, 61, 65

Arcana

Secrets; mysteries known only to the initiated.

Found in chapter 51

Arcanum

A mysterious or specialized knowledge, language, or information accessible or possessed only by the initiate. From the Latin arcanus, hidden or closed. Plural: arcana.

Found in chapters 43, 47

Archaic

Very old; belonging to a much earlier time.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 47, 49, 54, 55

Archipelago

A group of islands.

Found in chapters 9, 61

Argosy

A large merchant ship, or a fleet of them.

Found in chapters 30, 42, 47, 49, 50

Armorer

A maker or repairer of armor and weapons.

Found in chapters 32, 43

Arroyo

A steep-sided gully cut by water in dry country.

Found in chapter 35

Artifact

An object made by human hands.

Found in chapter 57

Artifice

Clever trickery, or the art of making things seem other than they are.

Found in chapters 6, 27, 31, 43, 47, 49, 61, 63, 66, 70

Ascensionist

One who goes up in a balloon.

Found in chapter 33

Ascertain

To find out for certain.

Found in chapters 2, 7, 14, 16, 35, 42, 45, 46, 53, 55, 56, 61, 70

Ascetic

Severe and self-denying; giving up comfort and pleasure.

Found in chapter 19

Ascot

A broad neck scarf looped under the chin, named for the Ascot races.

Found in chapter 56

Ashes of roses

A grayish pink; also a scent of roses.

Found in chapters 42, 62

Aspersion

A damaging remark; a slur.

Found in chapter 57

Asphodel

A lily-like flower that, in Greek myth, covers the meadows of the underworld where ordinary souls go after death.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 42, 43, 46

Assuage

To ease or soothe.

Found in chapters 37, 54, 72

Astigmatism

A defect of the eye that blurs vision.

Found in chapter 68

Astraddle

With one leg on each side; astride.

Found in chapters 73, 74, 79

Astral

Having to do with the stars.

Found in chapters 22, 23, 28, 35, 38, 42, 43, 45, 46, 49, 52, 54, 55, 70, 79

Astringently

Sharply, severely.

Found in chapter 35

Astrolabe

An old instrument for reckoning the positions of the stars.

Found in chapter 71

Astuteness

Shrewdness; keen judgment.

Found in chapter 66

Atheistic

Denying the existence of God.

Found in chapter 11

Athwart

Across, from side to side; also, against.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 15, 42, 45, 47

Atomizer

A device that sprays liquid as a fine mist.

Found in chapters 29, 70

Attaché case

A slim, hard-sided briefcase.

Found in chapter 2

Attar

A fragrant oil of roses.

Found in chapter 29

Attenuated

Having been reduced in force, effect, or value; thinned out.

Found in chapter 5

Attrition

A wearing away by friction.

Found in chapters 46, 50, 52

Aubade

A morning song or poem, often of lovers parting at dawn.

Found in chapters 46, 62

Augury

A sign or omen of what is to come, or the art of reading such signs.

Found in chapter 2

Auk

A diving seabird of northern seas. The great auk, a large flightless species, became extinct in 1844. More in the Chapter 43 Resources.

Found in chapters 2, 43

Aureole

A ring or field of radiant light around a sacred figure.

Found in chapters 20, 81

Auroral

Of the dawn, or like the dawn; named for Aurora, Roman goddess of the dawn.

Found in chapters 5, 36

Avant-courier

One sent ahead to announce what is coming; a herald (French).

Found in chapter 55

Avant-garde

The vanguard; those who lead in new ideas.

Found in chapter 39

Avarice

Greed for wealth.

Found in chapter 65

Avid

Eager or greedy.

Found in chapters 1, 14, 72

Avoirdupois

The system of weights based on a pound of 16 ounces; humorously, body weight.

Found in chapter 27

Awl

A small pointed tool for piercing leather, used by shoemakers.

Found in chapter 4

Awry

Askew; turned or twisted to one side.

Found in chapters 12, 18

B

Bailiff

An officer of a court who keeps order and serves its writs.

Found in chapter 47

Baize

A coarse green woolen cloth.

Found in chapter 71

Balderdash

Nonsense.

Found in chapters 18, 22, 63

Baleful

Threatening harm; menacing.

Found in chapter 21

Ballast

Heavy material, such as stones, carried low in a ship to keep it steady.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 46, 47, 52, 63

Balloon fish

A pufferfish, which swallows water to swell its body into a spiny ball when threatened.

Found in chapters 2, 39, 43, 70

Banditti

Bandits; the Italian plural.

Found in chapter 41

Bandy-legged

Bow-legged.

Found in chapter 81

Bang-tail

Slang for a racehorse, from the custom of cutting a horse’s tail straight across.

Found in chapter 2

Banshee

In Irish folklore, a spirit whose wail foretells a death.

Found in chapter 29

Bantamweight

In boxing, the class just below featherweight, named for the small bantam chicken.

Found in chapter 73

Barcarolle

A Venetian gondolier’s song, or music in its gentle rocking rhythm.

Found in chapters 49, 62

Bareback

Riding a horse without a saddle.

Found in chapters 9, 16

Bargeman

A man who works on a river barge.

Found in chapter 76

Barmy

Crazy, foolish.

Found in chapter 8

Barnacled

Crusted with barnacles, small shelled sea creatures that cling to rocks, pilings, and the hulls of ships.

Found in chapters 3, 13, 14, 19, 21, 22, 29, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 59, 61, 63, 82

Barometer

An instrument that measures air pressure, used to forecast the weather.

Found in chapters 2, 32, 35

Barouche

A fashionable four-wheeled carriage with a folding half-hood and two seats facing each other. More in the Chapter 43 Resources.

Found in chapters 38, 42, 43, 53, 57

Barque

A sailing ship.

Found in chapters 36, 47

Basso profundo

The deepest bass voice.

Found in chapter 60

Basting

Long, loose temporary stitches.

Found in chapters 9, 56, 70

Battledore

A small paddle used to hit a shuttlecock; also the game itself.

Found in chapter 17

Bayberry

A shrub of the Atlantic coast whose waxy berries were boiled to make fragrant candles.

Found in chapters 15, 22, 23, 63

Bean-shooter

A peashooter or slingshot.

Found in chapters 67, 71

Beau ideal

The perfect type or model.

Found in chapters 40, 41

Beau monde

Fashionable society.

Found in chapter 40

Becalmed

Of a ship: stopped for lack of wind.

Found in chapters 9, 12

Beclouded

Clouded over; confused.

Found in chapters 2, 13, 81

Bedaubed

Smeared with paint or dirt.

Found in chapter 31

Bedouin

A nomadic desert Arab.

Found in chapters 30, 34, 45, 53

Beetling

Jutting out and overhanging, as beetling brows or cliffs.

Found in chapters 3, 34, 35, 63

Begetting

Fathering; producing offspring.

Found in chapters 1, 7, 15, 18, 29, 31, 35, 38, 39, 44, 46, 47, 59, 62, 73, 79, 80, 81, 82

Belfry

A bell tower, or the room in a tower where the bells hang.

Found in chapters 4, 7, 8, 35, 46, 54, 61

Belie

To show to be false.

Found in chapters 14, 28, 63

Belligerence

Hostility; eagerness to fight.

Found in chapters 33, 54

Belligerently

In a hostile, quarrelsome way.

Found in chapters 63, 68, 82

Bellows

A device that blows air when squeezed, as for a fire.

Found in chapters 5, 7, 45, 48, 49, 52, 61, 68, 71, 73, 77

Bellrope

A rope pulled to ring a bell, such as one that summons a servant.

Found in chapters 2, 11, 16, 28, 39, 40, 41, 43, 47, 48, 49, 51, 55, 58, 61, 70

Bellwether

The lead sheep of a flock, which wears a bell.

Found in chapters 22, 45, 49, 50, 58

Bemused

Puzzled and lost in thought.

Found in chapters 11, 20, 25, 53, 62, 65, 70, 71, 77, 79

Benighted

Overtaken by darkness; ignorant.

Found in chapters 8, 63

Benign

Gentle, kindly; of a tumor, not cancerous.

Found in chapters 72, 73, 75

Benumbed

Made numb.

Found in chapters 14, 29, 39

Beseechment

Earnest pleading.

Found in chapter 17

Besmeared

Smeared over.

Found in chapter 31

Bespeak

To show or indicate.

Found in chapters 15, 63

Biceps

The large muscle at the front of the upper arm.

Found in chapters 17, 69, 73

Bier

A stand on which a corpse or coffin is carried.

Found in chapters 41, 52, 66, 77

Bill of lading

A receipt a shipper gives for goods taken on board, listing the cargo.

Found in chapters 61, 62

Billows

Great waves.

Found in chapters 4, 29, 39, 41, 45, 47, 49, 52, 72, 81

Bindlestiff

A hobo who carries his belongings in a bundle.

Found in chapters 29, 48, 61

Bisect

To cut or divide into two parts.

Found in chapters 1, 18, 25, 37, 38, 49, 52, 54, 55

Bittern

A marsh heron with a booming call.

Found in chapters 28, 39, 61

Bivouac

A temporary camp without tents.

Found in chapter 31

Blackamoor

An old term for a Black African or any dark-skinned person, common in European art and in decorative figures of Black servants. It is now considered offensive.

Found in chapters 24, 30, 35, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 50, 52

Blasé

Bored and unimpressed from having seen too much.

Found in chapter 53

Blatant

Loud and showy; obvious.

Found in chapters 27, 53

Bleachers

Cheap, uncovered rows of benches for spectators.

Found in chapters 22, 65, 73

Blear

Dim and watery, as eyes are with age or weeping.

Found in chapters 15, 37, 72

Bloomers

Loose trousers gathered at the knee, worn by women.

Found in chapters 9, 18, 19, 43

Blubber

The fat of whales and seals.

Found in chapter 66

Bluebeard

A man who murders his wives, after Perrault’s tale.

Found in chapter 68

Bluejay

A loud, crested blue bird of North America.

Found in chapters 7, 8, 78, 79, 82

Blunderbuss

A short gun with a flared muzzle.

Found in chapter 30

Bobolink

A North American songbird of meadows.

Found in chapter 82

Bodice

The close-fitting upper part of a dress.

Found in chapter 52

Bole

The trunk of a tree.

Found in chapters 8, 51, 80

Bonanza

A sudden source of great wealth, from a rich vein of ore.

Found in chapter 54

Bone lace

Bobbin lace, made with bobbins once carved from bone.

Found in chapter 60

Bookie

A bookmaker, who takes bets and pays off the winners.

Found in chapters 14, 47, 53, 54, 82

Boreal

Of the north; from Boreas, the north wind.

Found in chapters 46, 61

Boutonniere

A flower worn in a buttonhole.

Found in chapters 54, 55

Bowler

A hard felt hat with a rounded crown, called a derby in America; also one who bowls.

Found in chapters 53, 56, 57, 81

Bracken

A large coarse fern.

Found in chapters 25, 64

Brackish

Of water: slightly salty, as where a river meets the sea.

Found in chapters 4, 14, 16, 74

Braille

A system of raised dots read by touch.

Found in chapters 12, 52, 82

Bravado

A show of boldness.

Found in chapters 14, 27, 54

Breastplate

A piece of armor covering the chest.

Found in chapters 9, 17, 29, 43

Breech

Of a birth, buttocks or feet first.

Found in chapter 72

Breeches

Short trousers fastened at or below the knee.

Found in chapters 12, 21, 56, 61

Breve

A musical note twice the length of a whole note.

Found in chapters 61, 62

Brigand

A bandit of the hills.

Found in chapters 30, 31, 37, 41, 47, 48

Brigantine

A two-masted sailing ship, square-rigged on the foremast.

Found in chapters 53, 61

Brimstone

Sulfur. The brimstone butterfly is named for its sulfur-yellow wings.

Found in chapters 4, 7, 28

Brocade

A rich fabric woven with a raised pattern.

Found in chapter 35

Broncho

An old spelling of bronco, a wild or half-tamed horse of the American West.

Found in chapter 19

Brood mare

A mare kept for breeding.

Found in chapter 13

Brusque

Abrupt and blunt in manner.

Found in chapters 3, 22

Brussels lace

Fine lace made by hand in Brussels, Belgium, from linen thread.

Found in chapter 11

Buccaneer

A pirate.

Found in chapter 42

Bulrush

A tall rush of marshes.

Found in chapters 29, 36, 52, 68

Bulwark

A defensive wall; a protection.

Found in chapters 14, 25

Burden

The refrain of a song; also a load.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 4, 6, 25, 39, 62, 63, 72, 74, 78, 80

Burlap

Coarse cloth of jute or hemp, used for sacks.

Found in chapters 14, 79

Burnished

Polished until shining.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 19, 20, 22, 29, 79

Burnoose

A hooded Arab cloak.

Found in chapters 37, 42

Burro

A small donkey.

Found in chapter 2

Burs

Prickly seed cases that cling to hair and clothing.

Found in chapter 5

Bustle

A pad or frame worn under a skirt to puff out the back.

Found in chapter 57

Buttress

A projecting support built against a wall; a flying buttress arches from a pier to the wall.

Found in chapters 40, 54

C

Cabana

A small beach hut or shelter.

Found in chapter 82

Cabriole

A curved furniture leg shaped like an animal’s leg, from the French for a goat’s leap.

Found in chapter 16

Cacophonous

Harsh and jarring in sound.

Found in chapter 10

Cadaverous

Pale and gaunt, like a corpse.

Found in chapters 41, 59, 62

Caisson

A two-wheeled cart for ammunition, used at military funerals to carry the coffin.

Found in chapter 45

Caitiff

A base, despicable person.

Found in chapter 40

Caliph

The title of the chief Muslim ruler, understood as a successor to the Prophet Muhammad.

Found in chapters 35, 42, 43, 64

Calker

Also caulker. A worker who seals the seams of a wooden ship to make it watertight. More in the Chapter 43 Resources.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 43, 51, 62

Calliope

A keyboard instrument of steam whistles, heard on showboats and at fairs.

Found in chapters 53, 54

Calyx

The ring of sepals that encloses a flower in bud.

Found in chapter 52

Cambric

A fine, thin white linen or cotton cloth.

Found in chapters 9, 65

Cameo

A carved gem or shell with a raised profile, usually a head, set against a background of a different color.

Found in chapter 1

Camisole

A woman’s light undergarment for the upper body. The text has “camesoles.”

Found in chapter 22

Campanile

A bell tower.

Found in chapter 34

Camphor

A strong-smelling white substance from the camphor tree, used in medicines and to keep moths from clothes.

Found in chapter 2

Candelabra

A branched candlestick.

Found in chapters 22, 34, 55, 62

Candor

Frankness; openness.

Found in chapters 12, 14

Canker

A blight or ulcer that eats away at a plant or the body; anything that corrupts from within.

Found in chapters 3, 9, 17, 65, 69

Cannonade

A long bombardment by cannon.

Found in chapters 32, 34, 36, 45

Canter

A horse’s easy three-beat gait, between a trot and a gallop.

Found in chapters 16, 48

Capacious

Roomy; able to hold much.

Found in chapters 14, 20, 25, 28, 48, 55, 59, 70, 73

Caparisoned

Richly decked out, like a horse in ornamental trappings.

Found in chapter 72

Capriole

An upward leap of a trained horse, kicking out its hind legs.

Found in chapter 62

Carapace

The hard upper shell of a turtle.

Found in chapters 9, 20, 21

Carapaced

Covered with a hard shell, like a beetle or a turtle.

Found in chapter 67

Cardiac

Having to do with the heart.

Found in chapter 8

Carousel

A merry-go-round. Earlier, a tournament in which horsemen performed exercises and displays.

Found in chapters 16, 17, 43, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 59

Carrozza

Italian for a carriage.

Found in chapter 2

Cartilaginous

Made of or like cartilage, the tough, flexible tissue of the body.

Found in chapter 59

Cartographer

A maker of maps.

Found in chapter 57

Casehardened

Hardened on the surface; made callous by experience.

Found in chapter 35

Cashiered

Dismissed from the armed forces in disgrace.

Found in chapters 44, 54

Casket

A small, often ornate box for jewels or valuables. In American usage, also a coffin, so Young's "casket containing no jewel" carries both meanings.

Found in chapters 20, 42, 43, 45, 47, 48, 50, 51, 52, 67

Casque

A helmet.

Found in chapter 39

Cassia

A spice bark like cinnamon.

Found in chapter 22

Castanets

Pairs of small wooden shells clicked together in the hand, as in Spanish dance.

Found in chapters 18, 22, 59

Catafalque

A raised platform on which a coffin lies in state.

Found in chapter 42

Cat’s eye

A gemstone, such as chrysoberyl, with a band of light across it like the slit of a cat’s eye.

Found in chapters 2, 4

Cauliflower ear

An ear swollen and misshapen by repeated blows, common among boxers.

Found in chapter 53

Caustic

Biting and sarcastic; also, able to burn.

Found in chapter 12

Cauterize

To burn a wound to stop bleeding or infection.

Found in chapter 7

Cavalcade

A procession on horseback.

Found in chapters 30, 41

Cavalier

A horseman or gallant gentleman; also offhand and disdainful.

Found in chapters 32, 35, 38, 40, 45, 48, 55, 59

Celestial

Heavenly; of the sky.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 3, 6, 14, 20, 24, 32, 33, 35, 37, 41, 42, 43, 47, 49, 51, 54, 55, 58, 59, 62, 63, 82

Celluloid

An early plastic.

Found in chapters 22, 47, 68, 71

Cenotaph

An empty tomb or monument to someone buried elsewhere.

Found in chapter 49

Census taker

A person who goes door to door counting people for the census.

Found in chapters 42, 46, 47, 52, 54, 72, 73, 77, 80

Centaur

In Greek mythology, a creature with the head and upper body of a man and the body and legs of a horse.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 14, 16, 22, 29, 32, 38, 43, 47, 49, 51, 52, 54, 56, 59, 61

Centrifugal

Moving or pulling outward from a center.

Found in chapter 34

Centurion

An officer in the Roman army who commanded about a hundred soldiers.

Found in chapter 43

Cerements

Grave clothes; a shroud.

Found in chapter 61

Certitude

Certainty.

Found in chapters 13, 24, 42, 74

Chagrin

Distress or annoyance at having failed or been humiliated.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 25, 33, 41, 45, 53, 54

Chalet

A wooden Swiss mountain house with wide overhanging eaves.

Found in chapters 30, 52

Chamber pot

A bowl kept under the bed for use as a toilet at night.

Found in chapters 8, 19, 65

Chameleon

A lizard that can change the color of its skin.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 51, 52, 53, 56, 65

Chamois

A goat-antelope of the Alps.

Found in chapters 34, 38, 44

Chancel

The part of a church near the altar, for clergy and choir.

Found in chapter 27

Chancery

A court of equity, as distinct from a court of common law; in England, the Lord Chancellor’s court.

Found in chapters 48, 55

Chandelier

A branched hanging light.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 4, 12, 14, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 29, 34, 36, 37, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 47, 49, 51, 52, 53, 62, 63, 64, 70, 82

Chandler

A dealer in supplies, as a ship chandler; once a candle-maker.

Found in chapter 63

Chanticleer

A name for a rooster, from the medieval beast fables.

Found in chapters 12, 44, 82

Chaplet

A wreath or string of beads worn on the head.

Found in chapter 45

Chasseur

A huntsman; a light infantryman.

Found in chapter 34

Chassis

The frame of a car, on which the body is mounted.

Found in chapters 7, 8, 68

Chastisement

Punishment.

Found in chapter 9

Chattels

Movable possessions.

Found in chapters 22, 51, 52

Checkrein

A rein that keeps a horse from lowering its head.

Found in chapter 62

Cheroot

A cigar cut square at both ends.

Found in chapter 54

Cherubim

Winged angelic beings. In art they are often shown as chubby winged children. The singular is cherub.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 13, 16, 19, 22, 31, 34, 39, 42, 45, 47, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 59, 61, 65, 68, 69, 70, 72, 76

Cheval glass

A tall mirror swung in a frame so that it can be tilted.

Found in chapters 16, 72

Chiffon

A sheer, lightweight fabric of silk or nylon.

Found in chapters 1, 31, 70

Chimera

A monster of Greek myth, part lion, part goat, part serpent; any wild, impossible fancy.

Found in chapters 3, 10, 24, 35, 39, 40, 65

Chimerical

Imaginary, fanciful, or wildly unrealistic. From the Chimera, the fire-breathing monster of Greek myth made of a lion, a goat, and a serpent.

Found in chapters 12, 13, 29, 31, 43

Chinese puzzle

An intricate puzzle, such as a set of interlocking pieces; anything baffling and complicated.

Found in chapter 1

Chippendale

Furniture in the style of the English cabinetmaker Thomas Chippendale (1718-1779).

Found in chapter 16

Chivalry

The code of the medieval knight; courtesy and protection shown by a man toward a woman.

Found in chapters 6, 45, 47, 51

Chronometer

A timepiece of great accuracy, used at sea to find longitude.

Found in chapter 52

Chrysalis

The hard case in which a caterpillar becomes a butterfly or moth.

Found in chapters 29, 47, 52, 53, 55, 59, 61

Circumambient

Surrounding on all sides.

Found in chapter 47

Circumlocution

A roundabout way of saying something.

Found in chapter 59

Circumspect

Careful; wary.

Found in chapters 9, 25

Circumvent

To find a way around.

Found in chapter 34

Cistern

A tank for storing water, often underground.

Found in chapters 4, 63

Citadel

A fortress, usually on high ground, that protects a city.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 31, 35, 36, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 51, 52

Clairvoyance

The supposed power of seeing what is hidden or yet to come.

Found in chapters 65, 82

Clammy

Damp, cold, and sticky.

Found in chapters 6, 12, 21, 72, 75

Clapper

The hanging metal tongue inside a bell that strikes it to make it ring.

Found in chapters 2, 43, 52, 61

Clavichord

An early keyboard instrument with a soft, delicate sound.

Found in chapter 14

Clef

A sign at the start of a staff fixing the pitch of the notes.

Found in chapters 44, 47, 48, 49, 60, 62

Clew line

A rope that hauls the corner of a square sail up to its yard.

Found in chapter 62

Clinch

In boxing, a hold in which the fighters grip each other.

Found in chapters 17, 53

Clothes horse

A wooden frame for drying or airing clothes.

Found in chapter 1

Coalescence

A growing together.

Found in chapter 29

Cobalt

A deep blue.

Found in chapters 6, 21, 25

Cockle

A small saltwater clam with a ribbed, heart-shaped shell. A cockleshell boat is a small, flimsy one.

Found in chapters 5, 12, 29, 43, 52, 55, 59, 82

Cockleshell

The shell of a cockle; a small, frail boat.

Found in chapter 36

Cockscomb

The red crest of a rooster; also a jester’s cap, or a garden flower shaped like a crest.

Found in chapters 50, 61, 64

Codfish

A large food fish of cold northern seas.

Found in chapters 4, 17, 30, 37, 82

Codicil

An amendment added to a will.

Found in chapter 14

Coexistent

Existing at the same time.

Found in chapters 33, 35, 62

Cognizance

Awareness; notice.

Found in chapters 12, 62, 63

Cognomen

A surname; in Rome, a third, family name.

Found in chapter 31

Coif

A close-fitting cap, such as the white headdress a nun wears under her veil.

Found in chapters 52, 55

Coiffured

With the hair carefully styled.

Found in chapters 3, 6, 65

Cold-water flat

A tenement apartment with no hot running water.

Found in chapter 66

Colloquy

A conversation or formal discussion. Young writes “colloquies of angels.”

Found in chapter 2

Colonnade

A row of columns, usually holding up a roof.

Found in chapters 31, 43

Combatant

One who fights.

Found in chapter 17

Combers

A nautical term for long, curling waves that roll in and break on a beach or reef.

Found in chapters 22, 41, 43, 47, 51, 52, 53, 55, 61, 62, 64, 82

Comme il faut

French for “as it should be”; proper, correct.

Found in chapter 24

Commingling

Mixing together.

Found in chapters 12, 39

Commute

To reduce a sentence to a lesser one.

Found in chapter 68

Concatenated

Linked together in a chain.

Found in chapter 47

Concatenation

A linked series.

Found in chapters 24, 51

Concave

Curved inward.

Found in chapters 25, 54

Concavity

A hollow; an inward curve.

Found in chapter 12

Conch

A large sea snail with a spiraled shell that can be blown like a horn. Held to the ear, it seems to hold the sound of the sea.

Found in chapters 15, 18, 24, 29, 37, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 59, 61, 62

Conchologist

One who studies shells.

Found in chapter 61

Conciliatory

Meant to soothe or win someone over.

Found in chapter 5

Concubine

A woman who lives with a man as a mate without being his wife.

Found in chapter 79

Conflagration

A great, destructive fire.

Found in chapter 9

Conformation

The shape and proportions of an animal's body, especially a horse's.

Found in chapters 2, 29, 48, 49, 50, 52, 53, 56, 59, 80

Congealed

Thickened or stiffened, as with cold.

Found in chapters 2, 11, 13, 34, 39, 42, 51, 52, 53, 63

Conjugal

Of marriage, especially the sexual relation between husband and wife.

Found in chapters 34, 79

Connubial

Of marriage.

Found in chapter 65

Conquistador

A Spanish conqueror of the Americas.

Found in chapter 38

Consanguineous

Related by blood, descended from the same ancestor.

Found in chapter 32

Conscientious

Careful to do what is right; thorough.

Found in chapters 3, 20, 25, 26, 47, 54, 55, 59

Constitutional

A walk taken regularly for the sake of one's health.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 9, 13, 14, 18, 21, 22, 63, 64

Consumeth

Archaic for consumes; wastes away.

Found in chapter 10

Consummate

Complete; perfect in its kind.

Found in chapter 27

Consummation

The completion or fulfillment of something.

Found in chapters 43, 74, 79

Contiguous

Touching or next to one another.

Found in chapter 2

Contraband

Forbidden; smuggled.

Found in chapters 9, 20, 42, 48, 52

Contrapuntal

Of counterpoint: two or more independent melodies sounding together.

Found in chapter 53

Contrariety

Opposition; contrariness.

Found in chapters 42, 51

Contrition

Deep sorrow for a wrong one has done.

Found in chapter 74

Convex

Curved outward.

Found in chapters 25, 40, 54

Convulsive

Shaking in violent spasms.

Found in chapter 80

Copestone

The top stone of a wall or building; the crowning touch.

Found in chapter 51

Copulate

To mate.

Found in chapter 69

Cordage

Ropes, especially the rigging of a ship.

Found in chapters 31, 42, 47, 62

Cormorant

A large black diving seabird.

Found in chapter 24

Cornice

A decorative molding that runs along the top of a wall or building.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 19, 71, 82

Corolla

The petals of a flower taken together.

Found in chapter 52

Coronach

A Scottish or Irish funeral lament.

Found in chapter 62

Corporeal

Having a body; physical.

Found in chapters 7, 8, 10, 14, 22, 25, 28, 35, 41, 58, 70

Corpulent

Fat; stout.

Found in chapters 3, 27

Corpus delicti

The proof that a crime was committed.

Found in chapter 68

Corpuscle

A blood cell.

Found in chapter 2

Corpuscular

Made of tiny particles.

Found in chapter 15

Corrugated

Shaped into ridges and furrows.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 17

Corruscating

Young’s spelling of coruscating, flashing or sparkling.

Found in chapters 46, 47

Corsair

A pirate, or a pirate ship.

Found in chapters 41, 47

Corset

A close-fitting undergarment, stiffened with whalebone or steel and laced tight, worn to shape the waist.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 53, 57, 63, 65, 66, 67

Cortege

A funeral procession.

Found in chapters 14, 70, 82

Coruscate

To flash or sparkle.

Found in chapter 59

Coruscated

Sparkled; flashed.

Found in chapters 13, 46, 47

Cosmographer

One who maps or describes the universe or the earth.

Found in chapter 32

Cosmography

A description or map of the whole universe, both heavens and earth.

Found in chapters 36, 37, 41, 43, 45, 54, 59

Countenance

As a verb, to tolerate or approve of. As a noun, the face.

Found in chapters 3, 6, 9, 14, 39

Countermand

An order that cancels an earlier one.

Found in chapter 41

Countermarch

A march back the way one came.

Found in chapter 41

Counterpane

A bedspread.

Found in chapters 2, 22, 35, 51

Counterpart

A person or thing that closely matches another.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 30, 34, 43, 48, 49, 51, 52, 55, 57, 63

Coup de grâce

The final, merciful blow.

Found in chapter 31

Courtesan

A mistress of a rich or noble man.

Found in chapter 38

Courtier

An attendant at a royal court.

Found in chapters 11, 46

Couturier

A designer and maker of fine clothes for women.

Found in chapters 2, 46, 47, 51

Coverlet

A bedspread, usually a light one.

Found in chapter 2

Coverlid

An old form of coverlet, a bedspread.

Found in chapter 19

Covert

Hidden; secret.

Found in chapters 14, 49

Cowl

A hood; also a hooded cap on a chimney that turns with the wind.

Found in chapters 54, 61, 81

Coxcomb

The red crest of a rooster, or the jester’s cap shaped like one; also a vain, foolish man.

Found in chapters 5, 7, 29, 55

Crabbed

Bent and cramped, or bad-tempered.

Found in chapter 6

Cranium

The skull.

Found in chapters 27, 73

Crape

Black crinkled silk worn or hung in mourning.

Found in chapter 7

Craven

Cowardly.

Found in chapter 40

Crazy quilt

A quilt pieced from irregular scraps of fabric.

Found in chapter 15

Crenelated

Having battlements, with gaps along the top of a wall.

Found in chapter 14

Crepuscular

Of twilight; dim.

Found in chapters 2, 49

Crescendo

A gradual increase in loudness.

Found in chapters 53, 54, 62

Crescentic

Shaped like a crescent.

Found in chapter 63

Cretin

A person stunted in body and mind by a lack of iodine from birth; later an insult.

Found in chapters 7, 67, 68

Crinoline

A stiff petticoat or hooped frame worn to spread a skirt.

Found in chapters 41, 42, 45, 49, 52

Crone

A withered old woman.

Found in chapters 49, 53

Crosier

The hooked staff carried by a bishop.

Found in chapters 58, 59

Croupier

The attendant who runs a gambling table.

Found in chapters 28, 55, 56

Crow’s feet

The small wrinkles at the outer corners of the eyes.

Found in chapter 4

Crow’s-nest

A lookout platform high on a ship’s mast.

Found in chapters 5, 29, 35, 43, 47, 81

Crucible

A heat-resistant pot for melting metals. Figuratively, a severe test that changes a person.

Found in chapters 6, 15, 43, 47, 49, 52, 56

Crusader

A soldier in the Crusades, the Christian military campaigns to take the Holy Land, fought between 1096 and 1291.

Found in chapters 30, 31, 34, 35, 36, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 51, 52, 62, 66

Cryptic

Mysterious; hard to make out.

Found in chapters 3, 20, 25

Crystal-gazer

A fortune-teller who looks into a crystal ball to see the future.

Found in chapters 43, 45

Crystal-hunter

A prospector in the Alps who climbs into rock clefts to find quartz crystals.

Found in chapters 38, 40, 43, 45

Crystalline

Clear and sparkling, like crystal.

Found in chapters 13, 23, 27

Crêpe de Chine

A fine, crinkled silk.

Found in chapter 71

Cubit

An ancient measure of length, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger, about eighteen inches.

Found in chapters 2, 20, 34, 39, 52

Cuirass

Armor for the chest and back.

Found in chapters 16, 42

Cuirassed

Armored in a breastplate.

Found in chapter 31

Cul-de-sac

A dead end.

Found in chapters 41, 49

Culmination

The highest point; the final result.

Found in chapter 20

Cup-bearer

A servant who poured and served wine to a king, a position of great trust. Nehemiah was cup-bearer to the Persian king Artaxerxes, and in Greek myth the youth Ganymede was cup-bearer to Zeus.

Found in chapter 43

Cupola

A small dome on a roof.

Found in chapters 35, 47, 54, 57, 72

Curdled

Thickened into lumps, like soured milk.

Found in chapters 1, 8, 22, 49, 52, 81

Curlicue

A fancy twist or curl.

Found in chapter 15

Cusp

A point where two curves meet; a pointed end.

Found in chapter 52

Cuttlefish

A sea creature related to the squid that can change color and squirt ink.

Found in chapters 14, 23

Cyclops

In Greek myth, a one-eyed giant.

Found in chapter 8

D

Daft

Silly or crazy.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 72

Dance of death

Also danse macabre. A medieval image of Death leading people of every rank, from pope and king to child and beggar, in a dance to the grave. See On the danse macabre (Ch 43).

Found in chapter 43

Dank

Unpleasantly damp and cold.

Found in chapters 16, 39

Darning egg

An egg-shaped form slipped into a stocking to darn it.

Found in chapter 9

Day-star

The morning star; also the sun.

Found in chapter 66

Dead-beat

One who does not pay his debts.

Found in chapter 5

Debacle

A sudden collapse or disaster.

Found in chapters 34, 40

Debilitated

Weakened.

Found in chapter 54

Debutante

A young woman making her formal entrance into society.

Found in chapter 4

Deciduous

Falling off at a season, as leaves do.

Found in chapter 34

Declivity

A downward slope.

Found in chapters 34, 35, 42

Decrepitly

In a worn-out, feeble way.

Found in chapter 69

Deference

Polite respect, or yielding to someone else’s wishes or judgment.

Found in chapters 25, 29, 43, 52, 62

Defile

A narrow pass between mountains.

Found in chapters 45, 63, 73, 82

Deflowered

Robbed of virginity.

Found in chapters 6, 18, 47, 73, 74, 79

Defunct

No longer living or in existence.

Found in chapters 2, 51, 54

Deign

To condescend.

Found in chapters 30, 35

Delirium tremens

The trembling delirium of alcohol withdrawal.

Found in chapter 8

Deluge

A great flood or downpour. The Deluge is Noah’s flood.

Found in chapters 3, 5, 8, 52, 55, 65, 72, 81

Delusive

Misleading; giving a false impression.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 13, 22, 28, 42, 49, 65

Demarcation

A boundary line.

Found in chapter 37

Demented

Out of one's mind.

Found in chapters 6, 29, 37, 39, 51, 54, 55, 56, 59, 61, 66

Dementia

Madness; a decline of the mind.

Found in chapter 68

Demoniac

Wild and frenzied, as if possessed by a demon.

Found in chapters 3, 20, 35, 50, 55

Denigrate

To belittle or blacken.

Found in chapter 44

Denizen

An inhabitant of a place.

Found in chapters 2, 31, 49, 63

Denouement

The final outcome of the main complication in a story.

Found in chapters 32, 71

Denudation

The act of stripping bare.

Found in chapter 66

Denuded

Stripped bare.

Found in chapters 1, 22, 64, 65, 72

Denudement

A stripping bare.

Found in chapters 21, 63

Deprivation

The lack or loss of something needed.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 20, 27, 42, 63, 66, 70, 71

Derangement

Disorder, especially of the mind.

Found in chapters 26, 28, 54, 70, 71, 72

Derelict

A person or thing abandoned; a homeless outcast.

Found in chapters 3, 6, 26, 30, 46, 47, 48, 53, 54, 58, 59, 62, 70, 75, 82

Derision

Mockery; scorn.

Found in chapter 27

Dervish

A member of a Sufi order known for whirling in worship.

Found in chapters 3, 10, 23, 29, 40

Déshabillé

The state of being partly dressed.

Found in chapter 70

Despoil

To rob or strip of something valuable.

Found in chapters 3, 74

Despotic

Tyrannical.

Found in chapters 36, 42, 62

Desultory

Done without purpose or plan; halfhearted.

Found in chapter 2

Detonation

An explosion.

Found in chapter 31

Deuce

A playing card or die with two spots.

Found in chapters 14, 19

Devious

Winding; straying from the direct way.

Found in chapters 27, 29, 35, 52, 54

Diadem

A jeweled crown or headband worn as a sign of royalty.

Found in chapters 4, 12, 14, 20, 47

Diaphanous

Delicate and translucent.

Found in chapter 29

Diffident

Shy; lacking confidence.

Found in chapters 35, 36, 54

Diffused

Spread out widely.

Found in chapters 2, 18, 33, 37, 41, 42, 45, 47, 48, 51, 53, 56, 57, 70, 76, 77, 81

Diffusedly

In a scattered, spread-out way.

Found in chapter 10

Dilatory

Slow; given to delay.

Found in chapter 9

Dillydally

To waste time; to dawdle.

Found in chapter 3

Diminuendo

A gradual softening in music.

Found in chapters 29, 54

Dirge

A slow song of mourning.

Found in chapters 6, 8, 14, 22, 27, 39, 42, 45, 47, 49, 50, 54, 55, 58, 59, 61, 62

Discarnate

Without a body.

Found in chapter 35

Discretion

Good judgment; tact in keeping a secret.

Found in chapters 45, 53, 54, 68, 74

Discrown

To take the crown from; to depose a king.

Found in chapter 2

Discursive

Rambling from one subject to another.

Found in chapters 1, 22, 26, 55

Disdain

Scorn; contempt.

Found in chapters 3, 9, 26, 53, 64

Disembodiment

Separation from the body; existing as a spirit without a body.

Found in chapter 43

Disgorged

Thrown up; poured out.

Found in chapter 80

Disincarnate

Without a body.

Found in chapter 59

Dismembered

With the limbs cut off; torn apart.

Found in chapters 1, 71

Disrelation

A lack of relation between things.

Found in chapters 1, 6, 12

Dissembling

Hiding one’s true feelings.

Found in chapters 31, 32, 47

Dissolution

A breaking up; decay; death.

Found in chapters 39, 42, 61, 65, 77

Distaff side

The female side of a family. A distaff is the staff that holds wool for spinning, long women’s work.

Found in chapters 5, 35

Distilled

Purified or concentrated, as by boiling and condensing.

Found in chapters 27, 35, 39, 49

Distraught

Deeply upset.

Found in chapters 18, 36, 39, 42, 55, 58, 63

Divan

A long, low couch without a back or arms.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 16, 35, 36, 39, 41, 47, 48, 51, 52, 56, 61, 82

Divertissement

A diversion or entertainment.

Found in chapter 38

Doge

The elected ruler of Venice.

Found in chapters 16, 18, 54

Domino

A loose hooded cloak worn with a half mask at a masquerade.

Found in chapters 1, 9, 17, 19, 29, 37, 41, 48, 52, 53, 55, 56, 77

Dominoes

A game played with small oblong tiles marked with spots.

Found in chapters 1, 9, 17, 19, 29, 37, 41, 48, 52, 53, 55, 56, 77

Donjon

The great tower or innermost keep of a castle.

Found in chapter 38

Dope sheet

A racing sheet giving information and tips on the horses running.

Found in chapters 2, 22

Dopester

A person who predicts the outcome of horse races, elections, or other contests from inside information, or “dope.”

Found in chapter 43

Dory

A small flat-bottomed fishing boat.

Found in chapter 22

Dour

Stern and gloomy.

Found in chapters 26, 54, 65

Dovecote

A house for doves or pigeons.

Found in chapters 35, 55

Doxology

A short hymn of praise to God.

Found in chapter 71

Drachma

A silver coin of ancient Greece.

Found in chapters 20, 54, 60, 62

Dropsical

Swollen with fluid; suffering from dropsy.

Found in chapter 72

Droshky

A low, open, four-wheeled Russian carriage.

Found in chapter 54

Drouth

Drought.

Found in chapters 9, 15, 22

Drove

A herd or flock driven or moving together.

Found in chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, 14, 15, 23, 29, 45, 51, 53, 62, 63, 68, 70, 71, 72, 74, 80, 82

Drummer

A traveling salesman.

Found in chapters 49, 72

Dry dock

A dock that can be pumped dry so a ship’s hull can be repaired.

Found in chapters 48, 52

Dubiety

Doubt; a feeling of uncertainty.

Found in chapters 48, 49, 73

Dubious

Doubtful.

Found in chapters 2, 10, 14, 42, 43, 45, 47, 49, 50, 61, 70, 82

Ducal

Belonging to a duke.

Found in chapters 1, 29

Dun

A demand for payment of a debt.

Found in chapter 57

Dungarees

Work trousers or overalls of heavy cotton denim.

Found in chapter 1

Dupe

A person who is easily fooled.

Found in chapter 18

Duplicity

Double-dealing.

Found in chapters 30, 36, 47, 52, 53

E

Ear trumpet

A horn-shaped tube held to the ear to help the hard of hearing.

Found in chapter 4

Eaves

The edges of a roof that overhang the walls.

Found in chapters 18, 48, 52, 57, 61

Echoic

Echoing.

Found in chapters 38, 42, 47, 52, 54, 62

Eclat

Brilliance; showy success.

Found in chapters 34, 42

Ectoplasm

The ghostly substance said to flow from a medium in a trance.

Found in chapter 75

Edelweiss

A small alpine plant with woolly white star-shaped flower heads.

Found in chapters 43, 52

Effaced

Erased; wiped out.

Found in chapters 2, 6, 8, 14, 15, 47, 50, 54, 57, 65, 80

Effigy

A sculpture or model of a person, especially one lying on a tomb.

Found in chapters 2, 16, 29, 45, 70

Egotist

One who thinks mainly of oneself.

Found in chapter 55

Egregious

Outstandingly bad; flagrant.

Found in chapters 13, 47, 49

Egregiously

Outstandingly; shockingly.

Found in chapters 2, 9, 13, 25, 42, 47, 49

Elegiac

Mournful, like an elegy, a poem of lament for the dead.

Found in chapters 2, 5, 20, 26, 27, 33, 35, 36, 38, 42, 47, 49, 54, 55, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 82

Elegy

A poem or song of mourning.

Found in chapters 25, 31, 42, 46, 47, 51, 53, 54, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 64, 82

Elephantine

Huge and heavy.

Found in chapters 27, 34

Elicit

To draw out.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 31, 41, 42, 63

Elixir

A medicine sold as a cure-all.

Found in chapters 7, 40, 42, 54, 57, 79

Elocution

The art of clear, expressive public speaking, once taught as a lesson.

Found in chapter 78

Elucidation

A making clear; an explanation.

Found in chapter 58

Emaciated

Wasted away, very thin.

Found in chapters 36, 42, 73

Emanation

Something that flows out from a source.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 29

Emancipated

Set free.

Found in chapters 30, 35

Emblazoned

Decorated conspicuously, as with a coat of arms.

Found in chapters 10, 31, 35

Embryo

An unborn creature in its earliest stage.

Found in chapters 56, 71, 76, 80

Embryonic

In its earliest stage.

Found in chapter 10

Emir

A commander or prince in the Islamic world. More in the Chapter 43 Resources.

Found in chapters 24, 43

Emirate

The realm of an emir.

Found in chapter 35

Emissary

A messenger or agent.

Found in chapters 22, 24, 41

Emmet

An ant.

Found in chapter 50

Emolument

A salary or fee.

Found in chapter 62

Empearled

Adorned with pearls, or having a pearly sheen.

Found in chapters 3, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 51, 62

Empyreal

Of the highest heaven.

Found in chapter 29

Empyrean

The highest heaven, the realm of pure fire or light.

Found in chapters 49, 53

Enamellist

One who works in enamel.

Found in chapter 47

Enceinte

Pregnant.

Found in chapter 49

Enigma

A mystery or puzzle; a person or thing that is hard to understand.

Found in chapters 37, 42, 43, 45, 59, 62

Enigmatic

Mysterious; puzzling.

Found in chapters 26, 43, 44, 53, 54, 58, 63

Ennui

Weariness and boredom from lack of interest.

Found in chapter 54

Ephemera

Things that last a very short time; the mayflies.

Found in chapters 9, 29

Ephemeral

Lasting a very short time.

Found in chapters 2, 18, 28, 34, 47, 54, 59, 62, 73

Epicure

One who takes refined pleasure in food and drink.

Found in chapter 23

Epileptic

Having epilepsy, a disorder that brings seizures.

Found in chapter 77

Epithalamium

A song or poem celebrating a marriage.

Found in chapters 27, 42, 45

Epitome

A perfect example; a summary.

Found in chapter 29

Equable

Even-tempered; not easily disturbed.

Found in chapters 53, 55, 78

Equerry

An officer of a royal household who attends the sovereign.

Found in chapter 54

Equestrian

On horseback.

Found in chapter 36

Equine

A horse; of horses.

Found in chapters 16, 36

Equipoise

A state of balance.

Found in chapter 2

Equivocal

Open to more than one interpretation; deliberately vague.

Found in chapters 3, 47, 59

Equivocation

The use of vague or double-edged words to avoid committing oneself.

Found in chapters 15, 45, 54

Ere

Before.

Found in chapters 5, 6, 52

Ergot

A fungus of rye and grasses, used to hasten childbirth.

Found in chapter 72

Ermine

The white winter fur of the stoat, used to trim the robes of kings and nobles.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 32

Errant

Wandering; straying from the proper course.

Found in chapters 3, 8, 12, 18, 22, 39, 40, 55, 63, 70

Erratically

Unpredictably; irregularly.

Found in chapters 1, 5, 10, 36, 49, 52, 54

Escarpment

A long, steep slope or cliff.

Found in chapters 32, 39, 54, 55

Escrow

Property held by a third party until a condition is met.

Found in chapter 62

Escutcheon

The shield bearing a coat of arms.

Found in chapters 45, 63

Espousal

The taking up of a cause; also marriage.

Found in chapter 38

Esse

Actual existence; being (Latin, “to be”), as in the phrase in esse.

Found in chapter 53

Estuary

The wide mouth of a river, where fresh water meets the tide.

Found in chapters 3, 41, 47, 62

Ethereal

Light, airy, and delicate, as if not of this world; heavenly.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 12, 16, 18, 25, 28, 29, 33, 46, 47, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 61, 70

Etude

A piece of music written to practice a technique.

Found in chapters 52, 53

Euchre

A card game for four players, for which the joker was first added to the deck.

Found in chapters 18, 48, 59, 71

Euchred

Outwitted or cheated, from the card game euchre.

Found in chapters 2, 53

Eunuch

A man who has been castrated. Eunuchs were employed for centuries to guard harems and to serve as officials in royal courts in the Middle East, China, and Byzantium. See The eunuch (Ch 35).

Found in chapters 35, 36, 38, 42, 43, 45, 46, 49, 52, 61, 63

Euphemistic

Using a mild word in place of a harsh one.

Found in chapter 24

Evanescent

Quickly fading or vanishing.

Found in chapters 2, 6, 29, 32, 34, 51, 62

Ewe-necked

Having a thin neck that curves upward like a ewe’s.

Found in chapter 32

Excrescence

An abnormal outgrowth, such as a wart; anything ugly that sticks out.

Found in chapter 2

Executor

The person named to carry out a will.

Found in chapters 14, 46

Exhume

To dig up from the grave.

Found in chapter 37

Expiration

A last breath; death.

Found in chapters 14, 28, 51, 54

Extant

Still existing.

Found in chapter 29

Extemporal

Done on the spur of the moment.

Found in chapter 32

Extempore

Spoken or done without preparation.

Found in chapter 29

Extensible

Able to be extended.

Found in chapter 32

Extradition

The handing over of an accused person to the country where the crime was committed.

Found in chapter 54

Extraneous

Coming from outside; not essential.

Found in chapters 2, 20

Extricate

To free from a trap or difficulty.

Found in chapters 6, 51, 59

Extrovert

An outgoing person who draws energy from others.

Found in chapters 55, 70

Exultant

Triumphantly joyful.

Found in chapter 16

Eyeshade

A visor worn to shield the eyes from light.

Found in chapter 2

Eyrie

The nest of an eagle or other bird of prey, built high up.

Found in chapter 9

F

Facade

The front of a building; a false front.

Found in chapters 22, 26, 61, 68, 72, 82

Facetious

Joking at an inappropriate time.

Found in chapter 18

Fallacy

A mistaken belief, or a flaw in reasoning that makes an argument unsound.

Found in chapters 36, 43, 65, 70

Fallible

Capable of error.

Found in chapter 33

Falsetto

An artificially high voice.

Found in chapter 70

Fanlight

A half-round window, often ribbed like a fan, over a door.

Found in chapter 48

Fathom

A measure of six feet, used for the depth of water.

Found in chapter 20

Fatuous

Silly and pointless; foolishly self-satisfied.

Found in chapter 2

Faugh

An exclamation of disgust.

Found in chapters 63, 66

Featherweight

In boxing, the class just above bantamweight, long limited to 126 pounds; anything very light.

Found in chapters 53, 72, 73, 74, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81

Fecundate

To make fertile.

Found in chapters 72, 73

Fecundity

Fertility; the power to produce abundantly.

Found in chapter 25

Fedora

A soft felt hat with a brim and a crease along the crown.

Found in chapters 3, 19, 56

Feigned

Pretended.

Found in chapters 13, 40, 70

Feint

A pretended blow meant to throw an opponent off guard.

Found in chapters 22, 53, 73

Femme fatale

A seductive woman who leads men to ruin.

Found in chapter 32

Fence

A dealer in stolen goods.

Found in chapters 18, 73, 77, 79, 80, 81

Festering

Rotting and oozing; growing more corrupt.

Found in chapters 4, 8, 22, 23

Fetters

Chains for the feet.

Found in chapters 37, 41

Fichu

A triangular scarf of lace or muslin worn over the shoulders and knotted at the breast.

Found in chapters 2, 3

Figurehead

A carved figure, often a woman, mounted on the bow of a sailing ship. See On the figurehead and intuition (Ch 40).

Found in chapters 8, 9, 14, 22, 29, 31, 35, 40, 41, 42, 43, 45, 47, 49, 52, 53, 55, 57, 59

Filament

A fine thread or fiber.

Found in chapters 3, 12, 50, 52, 53, 56, 59, 60, 61, 72

Filigree

Delicate ornamental work of fine twisted wire. Young writes “filagreed.”

Found in chapter 4

Fin de siècle

The end of the nineteenth century, with its sense of an age closing in elegance and decay.

Found in chapter 62

Finis

The end.

Found in chapters 33, 47

Fire opal

A red, orange, or yellow opal with flashes of color.

Found in chapter 4

Fire-dog

An andiron, one of a pair of metal stands that hold logs in a fireplace.

Found in chapters 22, 24, 53

Firmament

The sky or the heavens, imagined as a solid dome overhead, as in Genesis 1.

Found in chapters 2, 22, 29, 35, 43, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52, 56, 61, 62, 64, 66, 82

Fish hawk

The osprey, a hawk that dives for fish.

Found in chapter 13

Fishmonger

A seller of fish.

Found in chapters 4, 54

Fishmoth

A silverfish, the small wingless insect that eats paper and starch.

Found in chapters 73, 80

Fitful

Starting and stopping; irregular.

Found in chapters 6, 36, 38, 42, 45, 49, 51, 53, 70

Flaccid

Soft and limp.

Found in chapters 14, 36, 54

Flagstone

A flat paving stone.

Found in chapters 8, 31, 38, 43, 47, 48, 50, 55

Fleshpots

Places or pleasures of luxury and sensual indulgence.

Found in chapter 3

Flinty

Hard and unyielding, like flint.

Found in chapters 3, 79

Florin

A gold coin first struck in Florence in 1252; later a British two-shilling piece.

Found in chapters 54, 60, 61

Flotilla

A small fleet of boats or ships.

Found in chapters 34, 47, 49

Flotsam

Wreckage or goods found floating on the sea.

Found in chapters 47, 81, 82

Flounced

Trimmed with flounces, wide strips of gathered or pleated fabric sewn to a skirt or dress.

Found in chapters 3, 32, 43, 44, 45, 52

Fluorescent

Giving off light through a glowing gas in a tube.

Found in chapter 23

Fluted

Marked with long rounded grooves, like a column.

Found in chapters 5, 7, 28, 32, 43, 45, 47, 49, 50, 51, 56, 70

Fly-specked

Spotted with the tiny marks left by flies.

Found in chapters 1, 22, 63, 65, 71

Foetus

An unborn child.

Found in chapters 5, 47, 68, 71, 72, 74, 75, 81

Fogdog

A bright patch of light seen in a bank of fog.

Found in chapters 5, 59

Foghorn

A deep horn sounded to warn ships in fog.

Found in chapters 14, 18, 25, 36, 41, 47, 49, 53, 54, 58, 59, 60, 61, 64

Foolhardy

Recklessly bold.

Found in chapters 4, 9, 34, 54

Fop

A man vain of his clothes.

Found in chapters 34, 56

Forceps

A pincer-like instrument for grasping, used in delivering babies.

Found in chapters 5, 71

Fore and aft

From front to back, as on a ship.

Found in chapters 49, 79

Forebodings

Feelings that something bad is about to happen.

Found in chapters 20, 43, 65, 71, 81

Forecastle

The forward part of a ship below the deck, where the crew lived. Pronounced “FOHK-sul.”

Found in chapters 22, 43, 49

Foregather

To gather together.

Found in chapter 7

Foreknowledge

Knowledge of a thing before it happens.

Found in chapters 7, 77

Forelock

A lock of hair over the forehead.

Found in chapters 22, 36

Forfend

To ward off; to forbid.

Found in chapter 62

Fortitude

Courage in bearing pain or trouble.

Found in chapters 12, 35, 38

Fortuitous

Happening by chance.

Found in chapter 25

Four-flusher

A bluffer or cheat. In poker, a four flush is a worthless hand of four cards of one suit passed off as five.

Found in chapter 2

Four-in-hand

A carriage drawn by four horses driven by one person; also a necktie knotted the same way.

Found in chapter 54

Freebooter

A pirate or plunderer.

Found in chapter 38

Freighter

A ship that carries cargo.

Found in chapters 4, 62

Frenetic

Frantic.

Found in chapter 36

Frigid

Very cold; stiffly unfriendly.

Found in chapters 11, 38, 53

Fritillary

A butterfly with orange wings checked with black, often silver-spotted beneath.

Found in chapters 55, 62

Frivolities

Silly, trivial, or lighthearted things.

Found in chapters 32, 43, 44

Frugal

Sparing; careful with money.

Found in chapters 12, 64

Frumpery

Dowdy, old-fashioned finery. Young pairs it with trumpery.

Found in chapter 3

Fugacious

Fleeting; falling soon.

Found in chapter 62

Fugue

A composition in which one theme is taken up in turn by several voices; also a flight from one’s own identity.

Found in chapters 14, 33, 60, 62

Fuliginous

Sooty; dusky.

Found in chapter 23

Fuller

One who cleans and thickens cloth.

Found in chapter 20

Furlough

Leave from military duty.

Found in chapter 69

Furtive

Secretive; sly.

Found in chapters 22, 33, 59, 78

Fusilier

A soldier armed with a light musket.

Found in chapter 32

Fusty

Old-fashioned and musty.

Found in chapters 1, 2

G

Gable

The triangular upper end of a wall under a pitched roof.

Found in chapters 16, 54

Gaiter

A covering for the ankle and lower leg; an ankle boot.

Found in chapter 61

Galleon

A large, many-decked sailing ship of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries.

Found in chapters 30, 49, 54

Galoshes

Rubber overshoes.

Found in chapters 68, 71

Galvanized

Shocked into action, as by electricity.

Found in chapter 34

Gangrene

The death and decay of body tissue.

Found in chapters 7, 66

Gannet

A large white seabird that dives for fish.

Found in chapters 18, 29, 62, 63, 82

Gargoyle

A carved grotesque figure on a building, often serving as a waterspout.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 13, 16, 22, 37, 41, 45, 47, 49, 52, 54, 57, 59, 61, 62, 70

Garter

A band worn around the leg to hold up a stocking.

Found in chapters 1, 72, 79

Gate-leg table

A table with hinged leaves held up by legs that swing out like gates.

Found in chapter 2

Gauntlet

An armored glove.

Found in chapter 40

Gauze

A thin, transparent fabric.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 6, 8, 29, 49, 51, 61, 64, 75, 76

Gavel

A small mallet a judge or chairman uses to call for order.

Found in chapters 58, 74

Gelding

A castrated male horse.

Found in chapter 22

Genealogy

A record of a family’s descent.

Found in chapters 9, 10, 15, 18, 20, 22, 30, 52

Genii

Spirits, jinn.

Found in chapter 39

Gentian

A plant with deep blue trumpet-shaped flowers.

Found in chapters 50, 52, 61

Germinal

In the earliest stage of growth; like a seed.

Found in chapter 60

Gibbet

A gallows on which a body was hung in chains.

Found in chapters 37, 54

Girded

Encircled or bound tightly, as with a belt or girdle.

Found in chapters 1, 9, 17, 31

Glacial

Icy; like a glacier.

Found in chapters 6, 11, 21, 25, 31, 35, 42, 45, 52, 55, 59, 61, 62

Gladiator

A fighter in the arenas of ancient Rome.

Found in chapter 17

Glazier

One who sets glass in windows.

Found in chapters 6, 47, 59

Glissando

A rapid slide up or down a musical scale.

Found in chapter 52

Glow-worm

A beetle whose wingless female and larvae give off a greenish light.

Found in chapters 2, 23, 46, 47, 48, 49, 59, 63

Gnarled

Knobbly and twisted, as old trees or hands.

Found in chapters 19, 21, 57, 64

Gnashing

Grinding the teeth together in anger or pain.

Found in chapters 5, 6

Go-between

A person who carries messages or deals between two others.

Found in chapters 29, 32, 79, 80

Go-cart

A small child’s wagon or walker.

Found in chapter 77

Goiter

A swelling of the thyroid gland in the neck.

Found in chapter 71

Goldeneye

A diving duck with bright yellow eyes, called a whistler for the sound of its wings.

Found in chapters 11, 22

Gondolier

The boatman who rows a Venetian gondola, standing at the stern with a single oar.

Found in chapters 43, 45

Gonorrhea

A venereal disease.

Found in chapter 69

Goose pimples

Bumps on the skin raised by cold or fear.

Found in chapter 17

Gorgon

In Greek myth, one of three snake-haired sisters whose gaze turned men to stone.

Found in chapters 10, 59

Gossamer

A fine film of cobweb; anything light and delicate.

Found in chapters 6, 13, 17, 28, 47, 48, 49, 58, 79, 80

Graham cracker

A sweet cracker of whole-wheat graham flour.

Found in chapter 75

Gramophone

An early record player with a horn.

Found in chapters 2, 54, 79

Grandiose

Grand in an exaggerated, self-important way.

Found in chapters 54, 55, 67

Gratuitous

Uncalled for; without cause.

Found in chapters 14, 31, 44, 54

Grazier

One who grazes cattle. Here it means the herds.

Found in chapter 30

Greaves

Armor for the shins.

Found in chapter 18

Gregarious

Fond of company; sociable.

Found in chapters 3, 14, 22, 54

Griffin

A mythical beast with the head and wings of an eagle and the body of a lion.

Found in chapters 2, 22, 28, 40, 44, 49, 54, 62

Grimace

A twisted expression of the face.

Found in chapters 38, 42, 52

Grizzled

Streaked with grey.

Found in chapters 6, 29, 32, 67

Groveling

Crawling on the ground; abasing oneself.

Found in chapters 7, 74

Grudgingly

Unwillingly.

Found in chapters 2, 6, 14, 26, 54, 70

Gulched

Cut into gullies.

Found in chapter 7

Gullet

The throat.

Found in chapter 8

Gumshoe

Slang for a detective, from the soft rubber-soled shoes that let one follow quietly.

Found in chapter 2

Gunny sack

A coarse sack of jute or burlap.

Found in chapter 75

Guttural

Harsh and throaty in sound.

Found in chapter 3

Gyrfalcon

The largest falcon, a bird of the Arctic.

Found in chapter 11

H

Haberdasher

A dealer in men’s furnishings, such as hats and shirts; in Britain, in small sewing goods.

Found in chapter 54

Habitué

A regular visitor to a place.

Found in chapter 49

Hackney

A carriage for hire.

Found in chapters 54, 63

Hackneyed

Worn out by overuse; trite.

Found in chapter 15

Haggard

Worn and gaunt from age, worry, or illness.

Found in chapter 7

Halberdier

A soldier armed with a halberd, a spear and axe on a long pole.

Found in chapter 34

Halcyon

Calm and peaceful. From the halcyon, a mythical bird said to calm the sea while it nested on the waves in winter.

Found in chapters 34, 43

Hale

Healthy and strong, especially said of someone older.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 20

Halloo

A shout to urge on hounds.

Found in chapters 40, 49

Hallucination

Something seen or heard that is not there.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 4, 10, 14, 28, 34, 37, 39, 42, 43, 45, 47, 50, 54, 55, 57, 60, 66, 68, 71

Hallucinatory

Like a hallucination; seeming real but not there.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 5, 12, 26, 36, 39, 42, 43, 53, 54, 59, 61, 62, 70

Halo

A ring of light around the sun or moon, caused by ice crystals high in thin clouds. In art, a ring of light around the head of a saint.

Found in chapters 24, 32, 35, 40, 43, 45, 47, 48, 49, 52, 53, 54, 56, 81

Handlebar

A mustache with long ends curled upward like the handlebars of a bicycle.

Found in chapter 4

Hanging gardens

The Hanging Gardens of Babylon, one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World: terraced gardens said to have been built by King Nebuchadnezzar II. No trace of them has ever been found.

Found in chapters 2, 36, 43, 52, 53

Hansom

A two-wheeled covered cab with the driver seated high behind.

Found in chapter 53

Harangue

To lecture loudly and at length.

Found in chapters 65, 67

Harbinger

A forerunner; a sign of what is coming.

Found in chapter 3

Harebell

A wildflower with nodding blue bell-shaped flowers.

Found in chapters 6, 45, 63, 82

Harlequin

The patched, masked trickster of Italian comedy.

Found in chapters 3, 28, 56, 61

Harpoonist

One who hurls a harpoon.

Found in chapter 15

Harpsichord

A keyboard instrument, ancestor of the piano, whose strings are plucked rather than struck.

Found in chapters 53, 60, 62

Harpy

In Greek myth, a monster with a woman’s face and a bird’s body.

Found in chapters 29, 34

Harrowed

Distressed; tormented.

Found in chapters 18, 61

Hart

A male deer.

Found in chapter 82

Hautboy

An old name for the oboe.

Found in chapter 62

Haw

The red berry of the hawthorn.

Found in chapters 66, 76, 78, 80, 81

Hawking

Hunting with trained hawks or falcons.

Found in chapters 4, 14

Headland

A high point of land jutting into the sea.

Found in chapters 2, 9, 15, 29, 45

Hectagonal

Young's word, probably a slip for hexagonal (six-sided) or heptagonal (seven-sided). Quartz crystals grow in six-sided columns.

Found in chapter 4

Hectic

Of the cheeks: flushed, as with fever. The word first described the flush of consumption.

Found in chapter 3

Heir apparent

The heir whose right cannot be set aside.

Found in chapters 73, 80

Helm

The wheel or tiller that steers a ship.

Found in chapters 14, 22, 43, 45, 62, 68

Helmsman

The person who steers a ship.

Found in chapters 1, 45, 47

Helpmeet

A helper and companion, especially a wife.

Found in chapter 10

Hen-pecked

Nagged and ruled by one's wife.

Found in chapter 42

Henbane

A foul-smelling, poisonous plant of the nightshade family.

Found in chapter 48

Heraldic

Of heraldry, the coats of arms and emblems of noble families.

Found in chapter 2

Hereditament

Property that can be inherited.

Found in chapter 10

Hermetical

Sealed airtight; also secret or occult, from Hermes Trismegistus, the legendary father of alchemy.

Found in chapters 29, 48

Hermit crab

A crab that lives in an empty shell borrowed from another creature.

Found in chapters 3, 14, 39, 61

Heterogeneous

Made of unlike parts; mixed.

Found in chapters 25, 28, 29, 45, 54

Hieroglyph

A picture-sign of a writing system, as in ancient Egypt.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 29, 36, 40, 44, 49, 51, 52, 54, 55, 58, 60, 61, 63

Hieroglyphics

Picture writing, as of ancient Egypt; any writing hard to read.

Found in chapters 14, 40, 49, 54, 60, 61, 63

High-hat

Slang of the 1920s: to treat someone with snobbish disdain.

Found in chapter 64

Hoar-frost

White frost formed as feathery ice crystals.

Found in chapters 4, 37, 44, 63, 65, 72, 81

Hoary

Gray or white with age.

Found in chapter 17

Hobble skirt

A long skirt so narrow below the knee that it hampered walking, fashionable about 1910.

Found in chapters 52, 53

Hobnailed

Studded with short nails on the sole.

Found in chapters 9, 68, 79

Hock

The joint in the hind leg of a horse, between the knee and the fetlock.

Found in chapters 5, 22

Holy Writ

The Bible; sacred scripture.

Found in chapter 50

Homespun

Simple and plain; originally, cloth spun at home.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 65

Homily

A sermon; a moral saying.

Found in chapter 63

Homunculus

A tiny man.

Found in chapter 35

Hooligan

A rough, lawless young man.

Found in chapters 9, 17

Hophead

A drug addict, especially one who uses opium.

Found in chapter 54

Hopscotch

A children’s game of hopping through squares chalked on the ground.

Found in chapters 3, 7, 59, 64, 78

Horologer

A clockmaker.

Found in chapter 12

Horticulturist

One who grows garden plants.

Found in chapter 57

Hostelry

An inn.

Found in chapter 65

Houri

A beautiful maiden of the Muslim paradise.

Found in chapter 36

Hubbub

A noisy commotion.

Found in chapter 14

Hulk

The body of an old ship; a big, clumsy person or thing.

Found in chapters 8, 22, 29, 53, 82

Humbug

A fraud; nonsense.

Found in chapter 12

Hummock

A small hill or mound.

Found in chapters 9, 56, 59, 61

Hurricane lamp

An oil lamp with a glass chimney to shield the flame from wind.

Found in chapters 22, 29, 64, 65, 66

Husbanded

Kept carefully; conserved.

Found in chapter 4

Hydra

A many-headed serpent of Greek myth.

Found in chapter 10

Hypocrisies

Pretenses of virtue or feeling one does not have.

Found in chapters 21, 72

Hypothetical

Supposed; existing only as an idea.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 39, 42, 54

I

Ibis

A long-legged wading bird with a downward-curved bill, sacred in ancient Egypt to Thoth, god of writing and wisdom.

Found in chapters 6, 43

Ice floe

A sheet of floating ice.

Found in chapters 4, 23, 29, 37, 45, 47, 54, 61, 62, 63, 72, 74, 75, 77, 80

Icebox

A cabinet cooled by a block of ice; an early refrigerator.

Found in chapters 2, 78

Idée fixe

A fixed idea; an obsession.

Found in chapters 38, 61

Ideograph

A written sign that stands for an idea or thing rather than a sound.

Found in chapter 56

Igloo

An Inuit house built of snow blocks.

Found in chapters 15, 18, 23, 63, 66, 70

Ill repute

A bad reputation.

Found in chapter 80

Illimitable

Without limits; boundless.

Found in chapters 50, 53

Imbroglio

A confused or complicated situation.

Found in chapters 32, 40

Imbued

Filled or soaked through with a quality or feeling.

Found in chapter 3

Immemorial

Older than memory.

Found in chapters 2, 20, 35

Immoderate

Excessive; beyond reasonable limits.

Found in chapters 9, 21, 70

Immolation

Sacrifice, especially by fire.

Found in chapter 53

Immunized

Made safe against something.

Found in chapter 27

Immured

Shut in or imprisoned, as if walled up.

Found in chapters 39, 43

Impalpable

Unable to be touched or grasped.

Found in chapter 28

Impartial

Fair; favoring no side.

Found in chapter 21

Impassive

Showing no emotion.

Found in chapter 27

Imperceptibly

So slowly or slightly as to go unnoticed.

Found in chapters 4, 25, 34, 41, 47, 50, 53, 54, 55, 79, 82

Imperious

Proud and commanding.

Found in chapters 2, 11, 34, 36, 38

Impersonations

Acts of pretending to be someone else.

Found in chapter 21

Imploring

Begging earnestly.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 3, 12, 20, 22, 30, 63, 70, 74

Imponderable

Something that cannot be measured, weighed, or judged.

Found in chapters 12, 36, 43, 63, 73

Impostor

One who pretends to be someone else.

Found in chapters 69, 70

Imposture

A deception; passing oneself off as someone else.

Found in chapter 12

Impoverished

Made poor.

Found in chapters 9, 10, 20, 35, 47, 55, 63

Imprecation

A spoken curse.

Found in chapter 9

Impregnable

Unable to be captured or broken into.

Found in chapters 8, 32, 79

Impresario

The manager of an opera or concert company.

Found in chapters 51, 54

Inane

Silly; empty of meaning.

Found in chapters 25, 29

Inanition

Exhaustion caused by lack of nourishment, or lack of mental or spiritual vigor and enthusiasm.

Found in chapters 5, 34, 54

Inarticulate

Unable to express oneself clearly.

Found in chapters 21, 43, 45, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 61, 75, 82

Incalculable

Too great to be counted.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 25, 27, 28, 37, 42, 43, 44, 46, 47, 51, 55, 58, 60, 61

Incandescence

The giving off of light by something heated until it glows.

Found in chapters 48, 49, 51, 57, 68

Incarceration

Imprisonment.

Found in chapter 64

Inchoate

Only begun; unformed.

Found in chapter 40

Incipient

Just beginning.

Found in chapters 37, 54

Incisive

Sharp and clear in thought.

Found in chapters 34, 38

Inclemency

Harshness, especially of weather.

Found in chapters 51, 53, 55, 63

Inclement

Of weather: cold, wet, or stormy.

Found in chapters 3, 54

Incongruent

Not in agreement.

Found in chapters 14, 29

Incongruous

Out of place; not in keeping with its surroundings.

Found in chapters 1, 14, 53, 63

Inconspicuous

Not easily noticed.

Found in chapter 12

Incorporeal

Without a body; not physical.

Found in chapters 10, 22, 28, 36

Incorrigible

Beyond correction.

Found in chapters 36, 41, 70

Incorruptible

Not subject to decay or to bribery.

Found in chapters 2, 22, 26, 35, 49, 54, 63

Incredulity

Disbelief.

Found in chapter 33

Incriminate

To make someone appear guilty of a crime.

Found in chapters 74, 76

Indeterminate

Not clearly fixed or defined.

Found in chapters 6, 45, 49, 52

Indetermination

Indecision.

Found in chapter 10

Indisposed

Slightly ill; unwell.

Found in chapters 13, 39, 70

Indolent

Lazy; avoiding effort.

Found in chapter 4

Indubitably

Beyond doubt.

Found in chapter 31

Ineffable

Too great or wonderful to be put into words.

Found in chapters 2, 12, 29, 31, 33, 38, 41, 48, 53, 54, 58, 65

Ineluctable

Not to be escaped or avoided.

Found in chapter 49

Inexactitude

Lack of exactness.

Found in chapters 1, 2

Infanticide

The killing of an infant.

Found in chapters 65, 76, 78

Infinitesimal

Extremely small.

Found in chapters 2, 25, 41, 45, 54, 62

Infrangible

Unbreakable; not to be violated.

Found in chapter 49

Ingratitude

Lack of thankfulness.

Found in chapters 55, 63, 78

Iniquity

Great wickedness or injustice.

Found in chapter 3

Inkhorn

A small portable ink pot, once made of horn.

Found in chapter 62

Inner sanctum

A private, secret room; originally, the holiest room of a temple.

Found in chapter 2

Innocuous

Harmless.

Found in chapter 12

Innumerable

Too many to count.

Found in chapters 3, 8, 9, 14, 26, 27, 33, 38, 41, 42, 45, 49, 53, 54, 56, 57, 59, 68, 70, 76, 77

Inordinately

Excessively.

Found in chapters 22, 31

Inquest

A legal inquiry, especially into a death.

Found in chapters 74, 75, 77

Inscrutable

Impossible to understand or interpret.

Found in chapters 2, 9, 10, 20, 23, 30, 31, 43, 45, 47, 48, 55, 65

Inscrutably

In a way that cannot be understood.

Found in chapters 2, 9, 10, 14, 20, 23, 30, 31, 36, 43, 45, 47, 48, 55, 65

Insensate

Without feeling or sense.

Found in chapter 25

Insolent

Rude and disrespectful.

Found in chapters 2, 9, 26, 57, 74

Insouciant

Carefree; unconcerned.

Found in chapter 2

Insurrectionist

A rebel.

Found in chapter 38

Intaglio

A design cut into the surface of a gem or stone.

Found in chapters 45, 52, 59

Integer

A whole number.

Found in chapter 34

Integument

An outer covering, such as skin, rind, or shell.

Found in chapter 56

Interlocutor

A person who takes part in a conversation.

Found in chapter 55

Interloper

An intruder.

Found in chapter 70

Intermittent

Stopping and starting.

Found in chapters 27, 49, 53, 59, 61

Interstellar

Between the stars.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 53

Interstices

Small gaps or spaces between things.

Found in chapters 18, 49, 72

Intestate

Having made no will.

Found in chapters 51, 63

Intrepid

Fearless.

Found in chapter 42

Intricacy

Complexity; many interwoven parts.

Found in chapters 6, 37

Intrinsic

Belonging to the very nature of a thing.

Found in chapters 54, 76

Introversion

A turning inward of the mind.

Found in chapter 70

Inverness

A man’s overcoat with a detachable cape.

Found in chapters 2, 35, 56

Inveterate

Long settled in a habit and unlikely to change, as in “inveterate gambler.”

Found in chapters 43, 53, 54

Invidious

Hateful; likely to cause resentment.

Found in chapter 22

Inviolable

Never to be broken or harmed.

Found in chapter 29

Involuted

Intricate; curled inward.

Found in chapter 37

Invulnerable

Unable to be wounded or harmed.

Found in chapters 3, 17, 18, 20, 34, 36, 67

Iridescence

A rainbow shimmer of colors that change with the angle of view.

Found in chapters 12, 23, 28, 29, 31, 32, 33, 40, 47, 49, 51, 53, 54, 57, 58, 61, 65, 68, 70

Irksome

Annoying; tiresome.

Found in chapter 75

Ironmonger

A dealer in hardware.

Found in chapters 22, 63, 73

Irredeemable

Beyond saving or repair.

Found in chapter 6

Irremediable

Impossible to cure or put right.

Found in chapter 26

Irresolute

Undecided, wavering.

Found in chapters 32, 40

Irrevocably

In a way that cannot be undone.

Found in chapters 17, 36, 55

Isinglass

Thin sheets of mica, used for windows in stoves and early cars.

Found in chapter 7

Isocheim

A line on a map joining places with the same average winter temperature.

Found in chapter 55

Issue

In law, a person’s children or descendants.

Found in chapter 26

Itinerant

Traveling from place to place.

Found in chapters 58, 61

J

Jab

A quick, short punch.

Found in chapters 17, 70

Jack-in-the-pulpit

A woodland plant whose flower spike stands under a hooded leaf, like a preacher in a pulpit.

Found in chapters 6, 29, 52, 61, 74, 77, 80, 82

Jackdaw

A small crow known for picking up bright objects and sticks.

Found in chapter 82

Jasper

An opaque, often red, variety of quartz.

Found in chapters 22, 29, 38, 42

Jaundiced

Sour and distrustful, as if seeing through the yellow of jaundice.

Found in chapter 53

Jaunty

Lively and self-confident; set at a rakish angle.

Found in chapters 14, 16, 53, 54, 58

Jeremiad

A long, bitter lament.

Found in chapters 7, 22

Jersey

A soft knitted cloth.

Found in chapters 9, 18, 19, 55

Jester

A clown kept at a royal court.

Found in chapters 3, 5, 21, 25

Jinrikisha

A rickshaw, a light two-wheeled hooded carriage drawn by one or more people.

Found in chapter 49

Jitney

A small bus or car carrying passengers for a low fare.

Found in chapter 49

Jugular

The great vein of the neck.

Found in chapter 67

Juryman

A man serving on a jury.

Found in chapter 77

K

Kaleidoscope

A tube of mirrors and colored glass making changing patterns.

Found in chapter 70

Keel and list

To keel over is to capsize, with the keel, the ship’s backbone along the bottom, turning upward. To list is to lean to one side, usually from water taken on.

Found in chapters 29, 31, 32, 42, 43, 48, 51

Ketch

A two-masted sailboat with the smaller mast set behind the main mast.

Found in chapter 2

Kewpie

A plump, wide-eyed baby doll.

Found in chapters 72, 81

Khan

A title of rulers in Central Asia.

Found in chapters 30, 32, 35, 39

Kibitzer

An onlooker at a card game who offers unwanted advice.

Found in chapter 52

King post

The upright beam in the middle of a roof truss.

Found in chapters 56, 65

Kingpin

The central pin in bowling; the most important person in a group.

Found in chapters 3, 65

Knave

A dishonest man; a rogue. Also the jack in a deck of cards.

Found in chapters 14, 40

Knight errant

A medieval knight who wandered in search of adventure.

Found in chapters 8, 39

L

Labia

The lips of the vulva.

Found in chapter 76

Labial

Of the lips; a sound made with the lips.

Found in chapter 61

Laburnum

A small tree with hanging yellow flowers and poisonous seeds.

Found in chapter 7

Labyrinthine

Like a labyrinth; intricate and confusing.

Found in chapters 2, 38

Laconic

Using very few words.

Found in chapter 51

Laconically

Using very few words.

Found in chapters 15, 22

Lacuna

A blank space or missing part; plural lacunae.

Found in chapters 42, 54

Laggard

Slow; falling behind.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 9, 22

Lagoon

A stretch of shallow water separated from the sea by a reef or sandbar.

Found in chapters 29, 36, 43, 50, 59, 62, 82

Lair

A wild animal’s den; a hiding place.

Found in chapter 77

Lambent

Softly glowing or flickering.

Found in chapter 29

Languorous

Oppressive stillness or tiredness, inactivity of a pleasurable kind. Young spells it “langorous.”

Found in chapters 1, 13, 27, 71

Lapidarian

A cutter or polisher of gems.

Found in chapter 47

Lapis lazuli

A deep-blue stone, ground by painters to make the pigment ultramarine.

Found in chapter 4

Larboard

The old word for the left side of a ship.

Found in chapters 22, 42, 46, 49, 50, 52, 54, 61

Largo

In music, very slow and broad.

Found in chapters 47, 61, 62

Larkspur

A garden and wild flower with spurred blue or purple blossoms.

Found in chapter 79

Laryngeal

Of the larynx, the voice box.

Found in chapter 61

Lath

A thin, narrow strip of wood. A sword of lath is a wooden stage sword.

Found in chapter 3

Laudanum

A tincture of opium.

Found in chapter 65

Laundress

A woman who washes and irons clothes for a living.

Found in chapter 2

Lave

To wash or bathe.

Found in chapter 66

Layette

A set of clothing and linens for a newborn.

Found in chapters 72, 79

Lazar

A diseased beggar, especially one with leprosy. More in the Chapter 43 Resources.

Found in chapters 18, 30, 31, 43, 51

Leathern

Made of or like leather.

Found in chapter 33

Lecherous

Lustful.

Found in chapter 68

Leeward

On the side sheltered from the wind.

Found in chapters 18, 22, 30, 48, 49

Legatee

One who receives a legacy.

Found in chapter 51

Legato

In music, smooth and connected, without breaks between notes.

Found in chapter 49

Legerdemain

Sleight of hand; trickery.

Found in chapter 56

Leghorn

A breed of chicken.

Found in chapters 9, 66

Legion

A vast number.

Found in chapter 10

Lepidopterist

One who studies butterflies and moths.

Found in chapter 51

Lethargic

Sluggish and drowsy.

Found in chapters 55, 64

Lethargy

Sluggishness, drowsiness, a lack of energy.

Found in chapters 36, 43

Lethean

Of Lethe, the river of forgetfulness; causing oblivion.

Found in chapter 25

Leviathan

A sea monster in the Bible; anything huge.

Found in chapters 8, 22

Lexicographer

One who writes dictionaries.

Found in chapter 61

Libertine

One who lives without moral restraint, especially in love.

Found in chapter 32

Limitary

Of or at a limit.

Found in chapter 38

Limpid

Clear and transparent.

Found in chapters 14, 66, 81

Limpidly

Clearly.

Found in chapter 40

Linoleum

A floor covering of linseed oil and cork on canvas.

Found in chapter 79

Lintel

The horizontal beam across the top of a door or window.

Found in chapters 52, 56

Liquescent

Melting or becoming liquid.

Found in chapter 51

Liqueur

A strong, sweet, flavored spirit taken after dinner.

Found in chapter 55

Listlessly

Without energy or interest.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 65

Litigacious

An old form of litigious: fond of lawsuits; quarrelsome.

Found in chapters 51, 52

Litigant

A person engaged in a lawsuit.

Found in chapter 47

Liveried

Dressed in the uniform of a household servant.

Found in chapter 35

Livery

The uniform worn by a servant, such as a coachman.

Found in chapters 14, 31, 54

Livid

Bluish-gray, the color of a bruise. Also furiously angry.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 14, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 22, 29, 36, 42, 43, 47, 57, 58, 61, 63, 65, 70, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 80, 81

Lode

A vein of metal ore in rock.

Found in chapters 3, 68

Lodestar

A guiding star, especially the polestar.

Found in chapters 37, 54, 63

Lodestone

A naturally magnetic stone; anything that draws or attracts.

Found in chapter 49

Loo

An old card game played for stakes.

Found in chapter 30

Lope

A long, easy, bounding stride.

Found in chapters 18, 53, 54

Loping

Moving with long, easy strides.

Found in chapter 18

Loquacious

Talkative.

Found in chapter 69

Lorgnette

A pair of eyeglasses held up to the eyes by a long handle.

Found in chapters 2, 52

Lounge lizard

A man who idles in fashionable places seeking rich women.

Found in chapter 34

Lucid

Clear; clear-headed.

Found in chapters 2, 6, 14, 19, 22, 53, 81

Lugubrious

Mournful; gloomy.

Found in chapters 23, 63

Lumbering

Moving heavily and clumsily.

Found in chapters 1, 7, 25, 49, 51, 61, 78

Luminous

Giving off light.

Found in chapters 2, 5, 6, 12, 14, 23, 28, 29, 33, 34, 37, 38, 39, 43, 47, 53, 54, 55, 58, 59, 64, 65, 72, 73, 74, 81

Luna moth

A large pale green moth of North America with long tails on its hind wings.

Found in chapters 2, 13, 29, 56, 67

Lunar month

The time from one new moon to the next, about 29.5 days.

Found in chapters 22, 43

Lustrous

Shining with a soft glow.

Found in chapters 11, 72, 73

Lute

A plucked string instrument with a rounded back shaped like half a pear, popular in Europe from the Middle Ages through the 1700s.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 16, 32, 33, 38, 43, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 52, 55, 58, 60, 61, 62, 64, 65, 82

Lyrebird

An Australian songbird whose tail, spread, has the shape of a lyre.

Found in chapters 3, 41

M

Macabre

Grim and concerned with death.

Found in chapters 28, 34

Mace

A heavy club carried as a weapon or a symbol of authority; also the early stick used in billiards.

Found in chapters 53, 54, 58

Mackerel sky

A sky of rippled clouds like the markings of a mackerel.

Found in chapters 7, 22, 63

Mackintosh

A raincoat of rubberized cloth, named for its inventor, Charles Macintosh.

Found in chapters 3, 9, 19, 22, 63, 64, 65, 66

Madcap

A reckless, impulsive person.

Found in chapter 25

Maelstrom

A powerful whirlpool; any violent, confused situation.

Found in chapters 2, 34, 63

Magnate

A wealthy, powerful businessman.

Found in chapter 14

Maharajah

A great king or prince in India. From the Sanskrit for “great king.”

Found in chapters 42, 43, 54, 70

Maidenhair

A delicate fern with fan-shaped leaflets on dark, hair-thin stalks.

Found in chapters 27, 47, 54

Mailed

Armored in chain mail.

Found in chapters 4, 6, 33, 36

Makeshift

Serving as a rough, temporary substitute.

Found in chapters 18, 26, 71

Malignance

Deadly harmfulness; the quality of a disease that spreads.

Found in chapter 12

Malingering

Pretending to be ill to avoid work.

Found in chapter 2

Mandarin

A high-ranking official of imperial China.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 24, 27, 32, 33, 36, 40, 42, 43, 45, 49, 51, 53, 55, 60, 64, 66, 82

Mandrake

A plant with a forked root once thought to scream when pulled up.

Found in chapters 56, 68, 71

Manifold

Many and various.

Found in chapters 10, 14, 56

Mannikin

A little man; a dwarf.

Found in chapter 35

Mansard

A roof with two slopes on each side, the lower one steep, named for François Mansart.

Found in chapter 54

Mantilla

A lace scarf worn over the head and shoulders.

Found in chapters 39, 44, 47

Mantle

A loose sleeveless cloak; anything that covers or envelops.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 5, 14, 22, 44, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 56, 59, 64

Mantling

In falconry, a hawk’s spreading of its wings over its prey.

Found in chapters 56, 61

Mantua-maker

A dressmaker; from the mantua, a loose gown of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Found in chapter 52

Marauding

Roaming in search of plunder.

Found in chapters 8, 49

Marcel

A hairstyle of deep, regular waves made with a heated iron.

Found in chapter 18

Marcelled

Set in deep, regular waves with heated irons.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 9, 22

Marquee

A large tent or awning.

Found in chapter 16

Marsh light

A will-o’-the-wisp, a flickering light over marshes from burning marsh gas.

Found in chapter 48

Martialing

Young’s spelling of marshaling, arranging in order, as troops.

Found in chapter 41

Mary Janes

Low, strapped shoes for children.

Found in chapter 77

Mastication

Chewing.

Found in chapter 72

Matador

The bullfighter who kills the bull.

Found in chapter 52

Matrimony

Marriage.

Found in chapters 4, 10

Matron

A woman in charge of an institution such as an orphanage.

Found in chapter 64

Maudlin

Tearfully sentimental, as a drunk can be.

Found in chapters 67, 70

Mauve

A pale purple.

Found in chapters 21, 23, 41, 55, 57, 63, 64, 65

Maypole

A tall pole wreathed with flowers and ribbons for dancing around on May Day.

Found in chapter 75

Mazurka

A lively Polish dance in triple time.

Found in chapter 12

Mealy-mouthed

Afraid to speak plainly.

Found in chapter 80

Mediocrity

The state of being ordinary or second-rate.

Found in chapters 21, 82

Medusa

A jellyfish in its free-swimming, bell-shaped stage, named for the Gorgon of Greek myth whose hair was snakes.

Found in chapters 2, 7, 14, 16, 18, 24, 29, 43, 45, 47, 50, 51, 52, 61

Melodiously

Tunefully.

Found in chapters 55, 65, 67, 69, 70, 72

Memento mori

A reminder of death, such as a skull.

Found in chapters 39, 47

Ménage

A household.

Found in chapter 3

Menses

The monthly flow of blood from the womb; menstruation.

Found in chapter 74

Mercantile

Of merchants and trade; commercial.

Found in chapter 2

Mercurial

Quick and changeable in mood. From the swift Roman messenger god Mercury and the liquid metal named for him.

Found in chapters 2, 29, 30, 36, 41, 43, 53, 58, 75

Mercurially

Changeably, unpredictably.

Found in chapter 33

Mesa

A flat-topped hill with steep sides. Young writes of a “mesa of snow.”

Found in chapters 2, 36, 54

Metamorphic

Having to do with a change of form. In geology, rock that heat and pressure have changed.

Found in chapters 26, 28, 29, 32, 43, 47

Metronome

A device that clicks a steady beat to keep musical time.

Found in chapter 82

Metropolitan

In the Orthodox churches, a bishop who presides over the other bishops of a province.

Found in chapters 2, 9

Mettlesome

Spirited, high-mettled.

Found in chapter 35

Miasmic

Foul-smelling and unhealthy, like a miasma, the vapor once thought to cause disease.

Found in chapters 3, 25

Mica

A mineral that splits into thin, shiny, nearly transparent sheets and makes rock glitter.

Found in chapters 22, 32, 43, 49, 62

Middlebrow

Of conventional, middling taste.

Found in chapters 3, 12, 23

Mien

A person’s look or manner.

Found in chapters 3, 53

Mignonette

A small, sweet-scented garden flower.

Found in chapter 61

Milliner

A maker or seller of women’s hats.

Found in chapter 2

Minaret

A tall, slender tower of a mosque, from which the call to prayer is given.

Found in chapters 22, 30, 31, 35, 39, 41, 42, 43, 45, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 61

Minuet

A slow, stately dance in triple time for couples, and the music written for it.

Found in chapters 35, 55, 70

Minuscular

Tiny. Young’s form of minuscule.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 35, 40, 42, 47, 54, 55

Mirage

An optical illusion, common in deserts, in which hot air bends light so that distant water or cities seem to appear.

Found in chapters 2, 11, 13, 21, 30, 31, 36, 39, 43, 44, 45, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 61, 64, 65, 66, 73

Misadventure

An unlucky accident.

Found in chapter 5

Misanthrope

A hater of humankind.

Found in chapter 38

Misbegotten

Born out of wedlock; badly conceived.

Found in chapter 75

Miscue

In billiards, a stroke in which the cue slips off the ball; any blunder.

Found in chapter 53

Mitre

The tall pointed hat of a bishop.

Found in chapters 14, 28, 48, 49, 54

Mitts

Fingerless gloves.

Found in chapters 7, 80

Moccasins

Soft leather shoes first made by Native American peoples.

Found in chapter 1

Mock moon

A bright spot beside the moon made by ice crystals; a paraselene.

Found in chapter 51

Modicum

A small amount.

Found in chapters 2, 63, 72

Moldering

Slowly crumbling into decay.

Found in chapters 13, 37, 73

Moleskin

A heavy cotton fabric with a soft, short nap like the fur of a mole.

Found in chapter 2

Mollusk

A soft-bodied creature, such as a snail or clam, usually with a shell.

Found in chapters 3, 16, 18, 27, 36, 44, 47, 48, 50, 51, 55, 56, 59, 61, 63, 82

Molt

To shed hair or feathers.

Found in chapters 5, 6, 49, 51

Mongoose

A small, quick animal of Asia and Africa that kills snakes.

Found in chapters 22, 23, 63

Monitor

One who watches over and warns.

Found in chapters 18, 68

Monocle

A single eyeglass held in place by the muscles around the eye.

Found in chapter 54

Monopoly

Sole possession or control of something.

Found in chapters 63, 67

Monsoon

A seasonal wind in South Asia that brings months of heavy rain.

Found in chapters 13, 22, 23, 29, 42, 43, 44, 49, 63, 65, 66

Moondial

A dial that tells the time by the shadow cast by moonlight.

Found in chapter 50

Moonstone

A milky, pearly-blue gemstone.

Found in chapters 3, 4, 14, 48, 49, 51, 62

Morassed

Bogged down, as in a morass, a swamp.

Found in chapter 3

Morceau

A short piece of music or writing (French, a morsel).

Found in chapter 55

Morgue

A place where the bodies of the dead are kept for identification.

Found in chapters 25, 26, 27, 29, 54

Moribund

Dying; near death.

Found in chapters 3, 14

Morosely

Gloomily, sullenly.

Found in chapters 2, 22, 37, 53, 68

Morsel

A small piece, especially of food.

Found in chapters 8, 79

Mortality rate

The number of deaths in a population over a given period.

Found in chapters 1, 55

Mortice

A hole cut to receive a tenon in joining wood; also spelled mortise.

Found in chapters 49, 59

Mortmain

“Dead hand”; ownership that can never be passed on.

Found in chapter 62

Mosaic

A picture or pattern made by setting small pieces of colored stone, glass, or tile together.

Found in chapters 6, 14, 16, 22, 28, 29, 41, 42, 43, 47, 55, 56, 59, 61, 64

Mosaicist

A maker of mosaics.

Found in chapter 47

Mossback

An old-fashioned person; literally, an old turtle with moss on its back.

Found in chapter 23

Mother lode

The main vein of ore in a mine; a rich source.

Found in chapter 68

Mother-of-pearl

The shining, rainbow-colored lining of some shells, used for inlay.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 6, 14, 16, 29, 31, 35, 36, 37, 40, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 59, 61, 62, 64

Motley

Of many mixed kinds; the fool's patched dress.

Found in chapters 28, 59

Motor veil

A long veil tied over a woman's hat and face to keep off dust in an open automobile.

Found in chapter 2

Mottled

Marked with spots or blotches of different colors.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 7, 29, 38, 46, 49, 51, 61, 64, 69, 72, 74, 79

Mountebank

A swindling showman.

Found in chapters 29, 37, 46

Mourning cloak

A dark butterfly with pale-edged wings that survives the winter as an adult; also a black cloak worn in mourning.

Found in chapters 29, 49, 50, 52, 53, 55, 59, 61

Muezzin

The man who calls Muslims to prayer.

Found in chapters 30, 35, 42

Muffler

A scarf worn around the neck for warmth.

Found in chapters 7, 23, 59, 80

Mulatto

An old and now offensive term for a person of mixed Black and white ancestry.

Found in chapter 71

Muleteer

A driver of mules.

Found in chapter 44

Mummer

An actor in a masked pantomime or folk play.

Found in chapter 54

Mummified

Preserved by embalming and drying, as in ancient Egypt.

Found in chapters 2, 26, 42

Mundane

Ordinary; of this world.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 28, 31, 53, 60, 61, 62

Munificence

Lavish generosity.

Found in chapter 54

Mush

To travel by dogsled; also the command that starts sled dogs running.

Found in chapter 2

Mutable

Changeable.

Found in chapters 29, 57

Myopic

Nearsighted.

Found in chapters 3, 29, 35, 42, 44, 51, 52, 59

Myriad

A countless number.

Found in chapters 15, 17, 29, 45

Myrrh

A fragrant resin used in incense and embalming.

Found in chapters 22, 29, 66, 78

N

Nacreous

Like mother-of-pearl; iridescent.

Found in chapters 48, 51

Nadir

The lowest point.

Found in chapters 29, 47, 49, 50

Nag

An old or worn-out horse.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 43, 47, 53, 59, 82

Naiad

A nymph of springs, streams, and fountains.

Found in chapter 62

Narcotize

To dull with a drug.

Found in chapter 26

Nautilus

A sea creature with a spiral shell. The paper nautilus is a small octopus whose female makes a thin, papery shell.

Found in chapters 3, 18, 42, 47, 49, 50, 55, 82

Neap tide

The tide with the smallest difference between high and low water, twice a month at the quarter moons. More in the Chapter 43 Resources.

Found in chapters 22, 39, 43, 44, 45, 58

Nebula

A cloud of gas and dust in space; once any hazy patch of light among the stars, including galaxies.

Found in chapters 48, 49, 51, 66, 72

Necessitous

Needy; forced by necessity.

Found in chapter 20

Necromancer

One who calls up the dead.

Found in chapter 10

Née

Born; used before a woman’s maiden name. Young writes “nee.”

Found in chapters 4, 33

Ne’er-do-well

A lazy, worthless person.

Found in chapters 2, 54

Nefarious

Wicked; villainous.

Found in chapter 3

Negation

Denial; saying no.

Found in chapters 10, 20

Negligee

A woman’s light, flowing dressing gown.

Found in chapters 2, 4, 6, 39, 43

Nepenthe

In Homer’s Odyssey, a drug from Egypt that Helen puts in the wine to banish grief and sorrow. Anything that brings forgetfulness of pain. See On Nepenthe (Ch 82).

Found in chapters 41, 43, 51, 82

Nether

Lower; under.

Found in chapters 2, 10, 45, 55, 63

Nettle

A plant with stinging hairs.

Found in chapters 3, 18, 47, 49, 61, 75, 77, 79

Neuralgia

Sharp nerve pain.

Found in chapter 32

Nimbus

A halo or glow of light.

Found in chapters 15, 55, 81, 82

Ninepins

A bowling game with nine pins, forerunner of tenpins.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 53, 64, 65

Nocturnal

Of or happening in the night.

Found in chapters 2, 6, 19, 25, 29, 30, 35, 37, 42, 48, 49, 53, 80

Nocturne

A dreamy piece of music suggesting the night.

Found in chapters 38, 47, 50, 62

Nomadic

Wandering from place to place.

Found in chapters 31, 38

Nonconformist

A Protestant outside the established church; anyone who does not conform.

Found in chapter 64

Nonentity

A thing that does not exist; also a person of no importance.

Found in chapter 57

Nosegay

A small bouquet.

Found in chapter 61

Noxious

Harmful or poisonous.

Found in chapter 4

Nugatory

Of no value or importance.

Found in chapter 32

Nullification

The act of making something void.

Found in chapter 25

Numbers racket

An illegal lottery in which bettors pick numbers, usually run by organized crime. Young writes “a number’s racket.”

Found in chapters 2, 53

Numerologist

One who reads hidden meanings in numbers.

Found in chapter 42

Nuncio

An ambassador of the Pope; any messenger.

Found in chapters 2, 52

O

Obdurate

Stubborn, unyielding.

Found in chapters 38, 82

Obfuscation

The act of making something unclear or obscure.

Found in chapters 2, 82

Obituary

A newspaper notice of a death.

Found in chapters 14, 22, 49, 52, 53, 54, 56, 57, 60, 63, 76

Oblique

Indirect; slanting.

Found in chapters 36, 38, 40, 79

Oblivion

The state of being forgotten, or of being unaware of everything.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 18, 23, 25, 26, 30, 31, 32, 36, 37, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 59, 63, 65, 75, 82

Obsequies

Funeral rites.

Found in chapters 24, 59

Obsolescence

The process of going out of use.

Found in chapter 22

Obtrude

To push in where one is not wanted.

Found in chapters 3, 80

Obtrusive

Pushing oneself forward; unwelcome.

Found in chapters 66, 76

Obtuse

Slow to understand.

Found in chapters 25, 28, 35, 36, 38, 49, 51, 53, 54

Obtuseness

Slowness to understand.

Found in chapters 54, 68

Octahedron

A solid figure with eight faces.

Found in chapter 48

Octave

The interval of eight notes between two tones of the same name.

Found in chapters 14, 48, 54

Octogenarian

A person in their eighties.

Found in chapter 2

Oculist

An eye doctor.

Found in chapter 81

Odalisque

A servant woman or concubine in a Turkish harem. More in the Chapter 43 Resources.

Found in chapter 43

Officious

Pushy in offering help or giving orders.

Found in chapter 70

Ogre

A man-eating giant of folktale.

Found in chapters 36, 38, 39, 42

Oilskin

Cloth made waterproof with oil; a raincoat of it.

Found in chapters 3, 15, 19, 62, 65, 77

Ominous

Threatening; foreboding.

Found in chapters 2, 7, 13, 25, 65, 72

Omniscient

All-knowing.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 6, 12, 14, 25, 27, 37, 39, 47, 49, 54, 55, 56, 70

Omnivorous

Eating everything; taking in everything.

Found in chapters 33, 71, 72

Oozy

Wet with soft mud or slime.

Found in chapters 8, 10, 22, 61, 66

Opalescent

Shimmering with changing colors, like an opal.

Found in chapters 3, 14, 19, 25, 29, 32, 37, 41, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 62, 72, 76, 81

Opiate

A drug made from opium; anything that dulls the senses.

Found in chapter 11

Oracle

A message from the gods; a source of prophecy.

Found in chapter 16

Oratorio

A large musical work for voices and orchestra on a sacred theme.

Found in chapter 40

Oscillate

To swing back and forth.

Found in chapters 29, 35

Ossification

Turning to bone; hardening.

Found in chapter 8

Ossified

Turned to bone; hardened.

Found in chapters 73, 76, 81

Ossifrage

The bearded vulture; literally, bone-breaker.

Found in chapter 59

Overture

An orchestral piece that opens an opera or other work.

Found in chapters 33, 36, 53, 55, 58, 62

Owlishly

Like an owl; staring wide-eyed and solemn.

Found in chapters 4, 41

Oxfords

Low, laced leather shoes.

Found in chapters 3, 9

P

Pacific

Peaceful.

Found in chapters 27, 54, 61

Paddock

A small field where horses are kept.

Found in chapters 3, 15, 16, 28

Pagoda

An Asian tiered tower with multiple eaves, usually a Buddhist temple or shrine.

Found in chapters 3, 13, 15, 28, 31, 36, 39, 42, 43, 49, 53, 54, 55, 56, 61, 62, 63, 82

Paladin

One of Charlemagne’s twelve knights; any heroic champion.

Found in chapter 46

Palanquin

A covered litter carried on poles on the shoulders of bearers.

Found in chapter 6

Palimpsest

A parchment scraped and written over, the old writing still faintly visible.

Found in chapters 14, 47

Palings

Pointed wooden stakes, or a fence made of them.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 47, 49, 71

Pall

A cloth spread over a coffin; anything dark that covers.

Found in chapters 49, 53, 62, 63

Pallbearer

One who helps carry a coffin at a funeral.

Found in chapters 5, 6, 7, 16, 56, 57

Pallid

Pale; lacking color or life.

Found in chapters 4, 34, 78

Palmer

A medieval pilgrim who brought back a palm frond from the Holy Land. More in the Chapter 43 Resources.

Found in chapters 43, 45

Palpable

Able to be touched or felt; plain to see.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 21, 49, 72, 73, 76

Palpitation

A rapid, pounding heartbeat.

Found in chapters 7, 47, 49, 80

Palsy

Paralysis or uncontrollable trembling.

Found in chapters 6, 7, 48, 58

Paltry

Small and worthless.

Found in chapter 18

Pander

A go-between in love affairs.

Found in chapter 29

Pannier

A frame or hoop worn under a skirt to widen it at the hips.

Found in chapter 52

Papaw

A small native tree of the eastern woods with large, custardy fruit; also pawpaw.

Found in chapter 76

Papyrus

Writing material the ancient Egyptians made from the stems of the papyrus reed.

Found in chapters 2, 44

Parable

A short story that teaches a lesson.

Found in chapters 14, 16, 17, 34, 40

Parabolic

Curved like a parabola; also, like a parable.

Found in chapter 11

Paradox

A statement or situation that seems to contradict itself and yet may be true.

Found in chapters 11, 26, 34, 43, 47, 49, 51, 53, 62

Parallelogram

A four-sided figure whose opposite sides are parallel.

Found in chapters 48, 53, 55, 62

Paraphernalia

Personal belongings or equipment.

Found in chapters 18, 22, 27

Paraselene

A mock moon; a bright spot beside the moon seen through thin cloud.

Found in chapters 29, 62

Parasitically

Like a parasite, living off another.

Found in chapter 70

Parasol

A light umbrella carried for shade from the sun.

Found in chapters 2, 11, 14, 32, 43, 79

Pariah

An outcast.

Found in chapter 62

Parimutuel

A form of betting in which the winners share the total amount bet.

Found in chapters 14, 55

Parlay

To build a small stake into a large one by betting the winnings again.

Found in chapter 66

Paroxysm

A sudden violent attack or outburst.

Found in chapter 58

Parsimonious

Very unwilling to spend money; stingy.

Found in chapters 53, 55

Parterre

An ornamental garden of flower beds laid out in a pattern. A parterred floor is inlaid in patterned sections.

Found in chapters 24, 43, 55

Parti-colored

Made of patches of different colors.

Found in chapters 3, 20

Parturition

The act of giving birth.

Found in chapter 5

Pasha

A high Ottoman title for a governor or general.

Found in chapters 32, 36, 37

Patent leather

Leather with a hard, glossy finish.

Found in chapters 1, 6, 53, 81

Patriarchal

Of or ruled by fathers or men; venerable like a patriarch.

Found in chapters 13, 41, 46

Patrician

Aristocratic; in Rome, a member of the noble class.

Found in chapter 32

Patrimonial

Inherited from one’s father.

Found in chapters 22, 55

Patrimony

Property inherited from one’s father or ancestors.

Found in chapter 55

Paucity

Scarcity.

Found in chapter 27

Pauperdom

The state of being a pauper; poverty.

Found in chapter 55

Pavane

A slow, stately court dance.

Found in chapter 62

Pavilion

A large tent; a light ornamental building.

Found in chapters 6, 42, 52, 65

Paymaster

The official who pays out wages.

Found in chapter 7

Peaked

Thin and pale, as from illness.

Found in chapters 2, 7, 12, 22, 30, 34, 35, 46, 47, 49, 56, 61

Peccadillo

A small, trifling sin.

Found in chapter 49

Pecuniary

Having to do with money.

Found in chapter 54

Pedal point

A long-held note, usually in the bass, sounding on while the harmonies change.

Found in chapter 60

Pedestal

The base on which a statue or bust stands.

Found in chapters 19, 26, 41

Pedigree

The recorded line of descent of an animal or person.

Found in chapter 16

Pendulous

Hanging loosely.

Found in chapters 49, 70, 80

Pendulum

A weight that swings back and forth, as in a clock.

Found in chapters 6, 45, 47, 49, 64, 76, 79

Penumbra

The partly shaded outer region of a shadow cast by an opaque object.

Found in chapter 50

Perambulations

Walks or strolls, especially leisurely ones.

Found in chapters 43, 81

Percale

A fine, closely woven cotton.

Found in chapter 22

Perchance

Perhaps; by chance.

Found in chapters 3, 76

Percheron

A heavy French draft horse.

Found in chapter 64

Perdition

Damnation; eternal ruin.

Found in chapter 5

Peregrination

A long, wandering journey.

Found in chapters 14, 29, 43, 53

Peregrinations

A journey, especially a long or meandering one.

Found in chapters 14, 29, 43, 53

Peregrine

A wanderer or pilgrim; also a falcon.

Found in chapters 36, 42, 64

Perennial

Lasting or returning year after year.

Found in chapters 27, 38

Perfidious

Treacherous.

Found in chapters 64, 65

Perfunctory

Done as a duty, without care or interest.

Found in chapter 68

Perigee

The point in an orbit nearest the earth.

Found in chapter 62

Perineal

Of the perineum, the area between the genitals and the anus.

Found in chapters 73, 76

Perineum

The area between the genitals and the anus.

Found in chapter 72

Periphery

The outer edge.

Found in chapters 3, 49, 52, 55, 61, 66

Periwinkle

A small edible sea snail.

Found in chapters 3, 47, 61

Perjurer

One who lies under oath.

Found in chapter 64

Perjury

Lying under oath.

Found in chapters 66, 76

Perpendicular

Upright; at a right angle to the horizon.

Found in chapters 2, 19, 34, 37, 39, 42

Perpetuity

Endless time; in law, an interest meant to last forever.

Found in chapter 26

Persian

A person of Persia, now Iran.

Found in chapters 24, 30, 35, 40, 45, 61, 82

Peruke

A powdered wig of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Found in chapters 12, 16, 41

Peruked

Wearing a peruke, a wig popular from the 17th to the 19th century.

Found in chapters 12, 16, 32, 41

Petrified

Turned to stone; also, paralyzed with fear.

Found in chapters 5, 35, 53, 70

Petticoat

An underskirt.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 6, 7, 41, 42, 44, 52

Pettifogger

A petty, quibbling, or dishonest lawyer.

Found in chapter 14

Petulantly

In a sulky, impatient way.

Found in chapter 6

Phaeton

A light, open, four-wheeled carriage; also a name for some seashells.

Found in chapters 16, 29, 35, 44, 47, 48, 61, 62, 82

Phantasm

A ghostly figure or illusion of the mind.

Found in chapters 14, 47

Phantasmagoric

Like a phantasmagoria, a shifting series of dreamlike or nightmarish images. A phantasmagoria was an eighteenth-century magic-lantern ghost show.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 17, 23, 25, 27, 34, 39, 56, 66, 82

Phantasmal

Ghostly; like a phantom or an illusion.

Found in chapters 11, 12, 14, 18, 22, 29, 31, 40, 43, 50, 52

Philanderer

A man who carries on many love affairs.

Found in chapter 6

Philatelist

A stamp collector.

Found in chapters 45, 55

Phosphorescent

Glowing faintly in the dark.

Found in chapters 6, 15, 16, 25, 47, 63, 72

Phrenologist

One who claims to read character from the bumps of the skull.

Found in chapter 64

Piebald

Of a horse: with irregular patches of two colors, usually black and white.

Found in chapters 2, 29

Pigeon-breasted

Having a chest that juts forward like a pigeon’s.

Found in chapter 13

Pigeon-hole

A small open compartment in a desk for papers.

Found in chapters 26, 44, 52, 57

Pigeoncote

A house for doves or pigeons, standing alone or built into a house; pigeons kept there were once an important source of food.

Found in chapter 48

Pigmentation

The natural coloring of skin, hair, or other tissue.

Found in chapters 29, 66

Pine-marten

A weasel-like animal of northern forests, prized for its fur.

Found in chapter 3

Pinion

A bird’s wing, or the outer part of it.

Found in chapters 5, 50, 51, 58

Pinioned

Held or bound fast, especially by the arms.

Found in chapters 17, 18, 73, 79, 82

Pinnacle

The highest point; a tall, pointed mountain peak or the slender spire on a building.

Found in chapters 22, 30, 32, 34, 35, 38, 39, 41, 43, 45, 46, 47, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 58, 62, 63, 64

Pinochle

A card game for two to four players, played with a 48-card deck.

Found in chapters 6, 72

Pippin

An old variety of eating apple.

Found in chapter 3

Pirouetting

Spinning on one foot, as in ballet.

Found in chapters 6, 49

Plaintive

Sad and mournful in sound.

Found in chapters 1, 6, 10, 14, 18, 20, 25, 26, 35, 38, 44, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 54, 58, 59, 61, 62, 64

Planetarium

A domed theater in which images of the night sky are projected onto the ceiling.

Found in chapter 1

Plinth

The square block at the base of a column, pedestal, or statue.

Found in chapter 55

Plumage

A bird’s feathers.

Found in chapters 19, 29, 41, 57

Plumb line

A cord with a weight at the end, used to find the true vertical or to sound depth.

Found in chapter 52

Plumed

Decorated with feathers.

Found in chapters 1, 6, 11, 35, 43, 44, 49, 59, 61, 62

Podiatrist

A foot doctor.

Found in chapter 70

Polka

A lively couple dance from Bohemia.

Found in chapters 12, 55, 56, 69

Pollarded

Cut back to the trunk to make a dense head of branches.

Found in chapter 40

Polyandrous

Having more than one husband at a time.

Found in chapter 44

Polygon

A flat figure with many straight sides.

Found in chapters 9, 53

Polysyllabic

Having many syllables.

Found in chapter 60

Pompous

Self-important; puffed up.

Found in chapters 13, 54

Ponderous

Heavy; slow and labored.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 27, 33, 71, 72

Pontiff

A high priest; the pope.

Found in chapter 12

Porous

Full of tiny holes that let water through.

Found in chapters 3, 8, 47, 52, 53, 59, 69, 81

Porphyry

A hard purple-red rock with embedded crystals, prized by Roman emperors.

Found in chapters 44, 47, 49

Portcullis

A heavy iron grating lowered to close a castle gateway.

Found in chapter 41

Porte-cochere

A covered entrance where a carriage stops to let passengers out.

Found in chapters 14, 24, 41, 55, 70, 71

Portfolio

A flat case for carrying loose papers and documents.

Found in chapters 43, 47, 54, 59

Portico

A porch with a roof supported by columns.

Found in chapter 16

Portiere

A curtain hung across a doorway.

Found in chapter 31

Poseur

One who puts on airs to impress.

Found in chapter 46

Posterior

The buttocks; at the back.

Found in chapter 79

Postern

A back or side gate.

Found in chapter 14

Postilion

One who rides the near horse of a carriage team.

Found in chapter 37

Postscript

A note added after the signature of a letter.

Found in chapter 74

Postulated

Assumed as true, as the basis for an argument.

Found in chapters 15, 61

Potter’s field

A burial ground for the poor and the unknown.

Found in chapter 66

Poultice

A soft, warm mass spread on cloth and laid on the body as a remedy.

Found in chapter 15

Pouter

A breed of pigeon that puffs out its crop.

Found in chapter 49

Pram

A baby carriage.

Found in chapter 53

Preadamite

Before Adam.

Found in chapter 9

Precarious

Unstable and likely to fall or fail.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, 14, 25, 26, 28, 29, 31, 35, 36, 38, 42, 45, 48, 49, 54, 55, 56, 59, 60, 62, 70

Precipitous

Very steep; headlong.

Found in chapters 23, 25, 42

Predilection

A preference or special liking.

Found in chapter 53

Premature

Born or happening too early.

Found in chapters 49, 72, 78, 79, 81

Prepossessing

Making a good first impression.

Found in chapter 42

Prescience

Knowledge of events before they happen.

Found in chapters 6, 30, 52

Presentiment

An intuitive feeling that something is about to happen.

Found in chapters 3, 12, 14, 43, 49, 50, 52, 55, 58

Presto

In music, very fast.

Found in chapter 61

Pretender

One who pretends; also, someone who claims a throne or title without a rightful claim.

Found in chapters 1, 9, 17, 18

Preternatural

Beyond what is natural.

Found in chapters 12, 17, 29, 38, 48

Primogeniture

The right of the first-born son to inherit the whole estate.

Found in chapter 54

Principality

A territory ruled by a prince.

Found in chapters 3, 43

Prism

A clear piece of glass with flat sides that splits light into the colors of the rainbow.

Found in chapters 3, 4, 16, 21, 22, 25, 28, 29, 31, 32, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 58, 59, 61, 63, 64, 65, 82

Pristine

Fresh and pure, as if new.

Found in chapters 19, 29, 47, 49

Problematical

Doubtful; hard to settle.

Found in chapters 20, 22, 25, 28, 29, 30, 43, 48, 55, 61

Proclivities

Natural leanings or tendencies.

Found in chapter 20

Procreation

The begetting of offspring.

Found in chapter 71

Proffered

Held out; offered.

Found in chapters 2, 26, 54, 55, 59

Profligacy

Reckless extravagance; wastefulness.

Found in chapters 54, 56

Profligate

A reckless, immoral spendthrift.

Found in chapters 30, 53, 59

Progeny

Offspring.

Found in chapters 49, 68, 73, 80

Promontory

A high point of land jutting out into the sea.

Found in chapters 2, 9, 32, 34, 43, 45

Prophylactic

Preventing disease.

Found in chapter 8

Propitiate

To win over or appease.

Found in chapter 32

Proposition

A statement put forward as true, to be argued.

Found in chapters 11, 56

Protean

Able to change shape or form readily, like the sea god Proteus.

Found in chapter 2

Protracted

Drawn out.

Found in chapters 12, 14, 29, 34, 41, 47, 70, 71

Protuberance

A bulge or swelling.

Found in chapters 1, 59, 65

Proverbial

Of proverbs; widely known.

Found in chapter 13

Prowess

Skill or daring, especially in fighting or in love.

Found in chapters 40, 44, 74

Proximity

Nearness.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 18, 22, 55, 66

Pseudopsia

A false or deluded vision.

Found in chapter 9

Pseudosmia

A false sense of smell.

Found in chapter 9

Psyche

A tall mirror that swings in a frame; also the soul.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 29, 38, 40, 42, 47, 48, 49, 51, 52, 54, 55, 61

Ptarmigan

A grouse of cold mountains and the far north that turns white in winter.

Found in chapters 35, 42, 45

Pugilist

A boxer.

Found in chapters 51, 65, 79

Pugnacious

Eager to fight.

Found in chapter 81

Puissance

Power, might.

Found in chapter 34

Pulverized

Ground to powder.

Found in chapters 36, 41, 47, 50, 51, 55, 56, 59, 61

Pumice

A light, porous, grey volcanic stone.

Found in chapters 3, 5, 47, 53

Punch-drunk

Dazed and confused from repeated blows to the head.

Found in chapter 53

Punctilio

A fine point of etiquette; exactness in form.

Found in chapters 45, 57

Punctilious

Exact in matters of etiquette and detail.

Found in chapters 42, 71, 82

Pupa

An insect in its resting stage inside a cocoon, between larva and adult.

Found in chapters 59, 76

Purblind

Partly blind; dim-sighted.

Found in chapter 47

Purdah

The seclusion of women from public sight.

Found in chapter 34

Purlieus

Outskirts; haunts.

Found in chapters 36, 46, 49, 52, 62

Purling

Knitting in purl, the reverse of a plain stitch.

Found in chapter 35

Pyramidal

Shaped like a pyramid.

Found in chapter 41

Q

Quadrant

An instrument for measuring the height of stars, used in navigation and surveying.

Found in chapter 55

Quail

A small, plump ground bird hunted as game.

Found in chapters 1, 6, 22, 35, 50, 61, 69, 75

Quavering

Trembling, as a voice.

Found in chapters 35, 44, 47, 54, 55

Queen Anne’s lace

Wild carrot, a weed with flat white flower clusters like lace.

Found in chapters 15, 61

Quicksilver

Mercury, the liquid metal; anything quick and shining.

Found in chapters 49, 56, 57, 58, 62, 74, 79

Quiescent

Still; at rest.

Found in chapters 12, 25, 28, 65

Quinquevalent

Having five valences; Young’s music of five roads.

Found in chapter 62

Quitclaim

A legal release of a claim or right.

Found in chapters 54, 62

Quixotic

Idealistic and impractical, like Don Quixote.

Found in chapter 29

Quizzically

In a puzzled or questioning way.

Found in chapters 9, 14

R

Rabbit punch

An illegal blow to the back of the neck.

Found in chapters 17, 22

Rabbit warren

A network of rabbit burrows. Figuratively, a crowded building full of small, maze-like rooms.

Found in chapters 1, 2

Ramification

A branching consequence.

Found in chapters 14, 31, 44, 63

Rapacious

Greedy; predatory.

Found in chapter 42

Ratiocination

Exact, logical reasoning.

Found in chapter 33

Raucous

Harsh and loud.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 25, 26, 63, 64

Ravishing

Enchanting; also, seizing by force.

Found in chapters 6, 17

Razorback

A wild hog with a sharp ridge of bristles along its back; also a sharp-ridged hill.

Found in chapter 5

Recessional

A hymn sung as the clergy and choir leave the chancel.

Found in chapter 27

Recessive

Tending to recede; hidden or held back.

Found in chapters 14, 18, 72, 79

Reciprocation

A return in kind.

Found in chapter 29

Recluse

A person who lives shut away from others.

Found in chapters 26, 39

Recreant

Cowardly; unfaithful to a belief.

Found in chapter 39

Red-cap

A railroad porter who carries luggage.

Found in chapter 11

Refraction

The bending of light as it passes from one medium to another.

Found in chapters 24, 37, 40, 45, 49, 53, 59, 61

Refulgent

Shining brightly; radiant.

Found in chapters 2, 12, 20, 49, 51, 61

Refuse

Garbage or trash. As a noun it is pronounced REF-yoos.

Found in chapter 1

Regatta

A series of boat races.

Found in chapters 2, 22, 39, 51

Regnancy

The state of reigning; rule.

Found in chapter 35

Regnant

Reigning; ruling.

Found in chapter 20

Regurgitation

A flowing or casting back.

Found in chapter 41

Rejuvenation

Making young again.

Found in chapter 8

Remorseless

Without pity; relentless.

Found in chapters 1, 47, 77, 80

Remuneration

Payment for work or service.

Found in chapter 58

Renunciation

The act of giving something up.

Found in chapters 20, 38, 46, 63

Reprobate

A person beyond hope of salvation; an unprincipled person.

Found in chapter 47

Requiem

A Mass or song for the dead.

Found in chapters 32, 37, 49, 61, 62

Resonance

Deep, full, echoing sound.

Found in chapters 18, 60

Resonant

Echoing; deep and full in sound.

Found in chapters 1, 55

Restive

Restless; resisting control.

Found in chapter 26

Reticence

Reserve; a habit of keeping silent.

Found in chapters 69, 80

Reticule

A small drawstring handbag.

Found in chapters 1, 3

Retort

A glass vessel with a long bent neck, used by alchemists for distilling.

Found in chapters 34, 42, 62, 81

Retread

To put new tread on a worn tire.

Found in chapter 7

Retribution

Punishment given in return for a wrong.

Found in chapters 12, 18, 53, 80

Retrospect

A looking back on the past.

Found in chapters 3, 6, 12, 25, 27, 29, 36, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 47, 50, 51, 54, 62, 63, 65, 73, 74

Retrospection

A looking back on the past.

Found in chapter 18

Reveille

The bugle call that wakes soldiers in the morning.

Found in chapters 7, 42, 47, 49

Reverberation

An echo; a sound that rolls back and forth.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 14, 33, 40, 41, 49, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 59, 61, 63, 72, 73, 80, 82

Revers

The turned-back edge of a coat, as a lapel (French).

Found in chapter 56

Revivification

A bringing back to life.

Found in chapters 29, 38

Rhapsodic

Full of rapturous feeling.

Found in chapters 53, 54, 58, 64, 70, 82

Rheumatism

Pain and stiffness in the joints and muscles.

Found in chapter 10

Rheumed

Clouded or filmed, as eyes with rheum.

Found in chapter 46

Rhomb

A rhombus, a parallelogram with four equal sides.

Found in chapter 48

Ribald

Coarsely humorous.

Found in chapters 14, 21

Rice powder

A fine face powder made from rice, used to whiten the skin.

Found in chapter 2

Riddance

Freedom from something unwanted, as in good riddance.

Found in chapter 77

Riding habit

A woman’s outfit for riding horseback.

Found in chapter 2

Rimless

Of eyeglasses, with no frame around the lenses.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 74

Riotous

Wild and unrestrained.

Found in chapters 34, 69

Riparian

Of or on the bank of a river or stream.

Found in chapter 49

Ritualist

One devoted to the strict observance of rituals.

Found in chapter 2

Rivulet

A small stream.

Found in chapter 38

Roan

Of a horse: with a solid-colored coat sprinkled with white hairs.

Found in chapters 2, 6

Robust

Strong and healthy.

Found in chapters 3, 20, 21, 68, 73

Romish

An old, hostile Protestant word for Roman Catholic.

Found in chapter 3

Rose window

A round church window of stained glass, with tracery spreading from the center like petals.

Found in chapters 7, 11, 51

Roseate

Rose-colored. Also hopeful or overly optimistic.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 43, 45, 47

Rosette

A rose-shaped decoration of ribbon or lace.

Found in chapters 4, 21, 52, 70

Rotund

Round and plump.

Found in chapter 70

Roué

A pleasure-seeking man of loose morals.

Found in chapter 14

Rouge

A red powder or cream used to color the cheeks or lips.

Found in chapters 1, 6, 76

Roulade

A rapid run of notes sung to one syllable.

Found in chapter 11

Roulette

A gambling game in which a ball comes to rest in a numbered slot of a spinning wheel.

Found in chapters 14, 29, 53, 59

Roundhouse

A circular building for storing and turning locomotives.

Found in chapter 24

Royal mast

The topmost section of a sailing ship’s mast, above the topgallant.

Found in chapter 11

Rubicon

A small river in northern Italy. Julius Caesar crossed it with his army in 49 BC, starting a civil war, so “crossing the Rubicon” means passing a point of no return. See Crossing the Rubicon (Ch 23).

Found in chapters 23, 43

Rubric

A heading or instruction printed in red, as in a prayer book.

Found in chapter 11

Rueful

Sorrowful; regretful.

Found in chapter 12

Rune

A letter of the old Germanic alphabets, often thought to hold magic.

Found in chapter 11

Rushlight

A cheap candle of rush pith dipped in fat.

Found in chapter 36

Russet

A reddish-brown color; also an apple with rough, brownish skin.

Found in chapter 3

S

Sable

Black.

Found in chapters 2, 35, 37, 65

Sackcloth

A coarse cloth worn in mourning or penance.

Found in chapters 20, 77

Saffron

Orange-yellow, the color of the spice.

Found in chapters 12, 49, 54, 61, 62, 65, 81

Sahib

Master, a title for Europeans in colonial India.

Found in chapters 38, 39

Sallow

Of a sickly yellow color.

Found in chapter 65

Salt-and-pepper

Of cloth or hair: flecked with black and white.

Found in chapters 3, 19, 23

Salubrious

Healthful.

Found in chapter 65

Salutary

Beneficial; healthful.

Found in chapter 36

Samovar

A metal urn used, especially in Russia, to boil water for tea.

Found in chapters 52, 54

Sand dollar

A flat, round sea urchin whose white skeleton is found on beaches.

Found in chapters 3, 47, 54, 55, 60, 62, 66

Sandalwood

A fragrant wood from India and the Pacific, burned as incense and used in perfume.

Found in chapters 40, 43

Sandpiper

A small wading shorebird that runs along the tide line.

Found in chapters 2, 3, 6, 9, 22, 29, 39, 40, 47, 48, 49, 51, 64, 65, 82

Sangfroid

Coolness in danger.

Found in chapter 30

Sarcophagus

A stone coffin, often carved, placed above ground. The plural is sarcophagi.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 39, 47, 48, 55, 56, 61

Sardonic

Grimly mocking.

Found in chapter 79

Sartorial

Having to do with clothing, tailoring, or style of dress.

Found in chapters 43, 56

Satinwood

A hard, lustrous yellow wood used for fine furniture and instruments.

Found in chapter 53

Satire

The use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize folly or vice.

Found in chapter 55

Satrap

A Persian provincial governor.

Found in chapter 30

Scabrous

Rough and scaly; also indecent.

Found in chapter 61

Scalloped

Edged with a series of curves like the rim of a scallop shell.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 7, 16, 36, 37, 51, 52, 56, 59, 62, 68, 81, 82

Scalpel

A small, sharp surgeon’s knife.

Found in chapter 6

Sceptre

A staff carried by a ruler as a sign of power. Also spelled scepter.

Found in chapters 5, 45, 51, 58

Schottische

A round dance like a slow polka, popular in the nineteenth century.

Found in chapter 55

Scimitar

A curved Eastern sword.

Found in chapters 37, 44, 45

Scintilla

A spark; a tiny trace.

Found in chapter 34

Scintillation

A spark or flash.

Found in chapters 14, 29, 51, 52

Scratch sheet

A racing sheet listing the day’s entries and the horses scratched.

Found in chapter 51

Scrofulous

Diseased with scrofula; shabby and corrupt.

Found in chapter 68

Scrupulous

Very careful to do what is right.

Found in chapters 14, 26, 52, 57, 65, 79

Scrutiny

Close, searching examination.

Found in chapters 3, 19, 42, 52, 54, 63

Scudding

Moving fast before the wind.

Found in chapters 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 40, 43, 46, 54, 57, 61

Sea nettle

A stinging jellyfish.

Found in chapters 3, 49

Sealing wax

A wax that is melted to seal letters.

Found in chapter 19

Seamy

Sordid; the rough, unpleasant side of life.

Found in chapter 18

Secretary

A writing desk with drawers and pigeon-holes; also a person who handles another’s letters.

Found in chapters 24, 26, 54

Sedimentary

Settled out like sediment.

Found in chapter 42

Sedition

Speech or action inciting rebellion against the state.

Found in chapter 49

Seed pearl

A very small pearl.

Found in chapters 6, 9, 11, 21, 65

Seepage

A slow oozing or leaking of liquid.

Found in chapters 48, 74

Seer

A person who sees the future; a prophet.

Found in chapters 43, 63

Seesaw

To move up and down or back and forth.

Found in chapter 67

Segno

A sign in written music marking where a repeat begins or ends.

Found in chapters 53, 59, 62

Seine

To fish with a large hanging net.

Found in chapters 18, 22, 38, 42, 47, 50, 65, 82

Selah

A Hebrew word in the Psalms, perhaps a pause.

Found in chapters 10, 65

Semaphore

A signaling apparatus with arms or flags.

Found in chapter 51

Seminal

Seedlike; giving rise to later growth.

Found in chapters 44, 51

Senile

Weakened in mind by old age.

Found in chapters 5, 69, 71, 72

Sensorium

The whole of a person’s senses; the seat of sensation in the brain.

Found in chapters 1, 50

Sententiously

In a moralizing, pompous way.

Found in chapter 56

Sentient

Able to feel and perceive.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 13, 40, 65

Sentimentalist

One who indulges in tender feeling, often more than the occasion warrants.

Found in chapters 42, 56

Sentinel

A guard or watchman.

Found in chapters 30, 34, 40, 41, 45, 48, 54, 62

Sepulchral

Of the tomb; gloomy and deathly.

Found in chapters 14, 34, 40, 41, 53, 61, 72, 74, 81

Sepulchre

A tomb cut in rock or built of stone.

Found in chapters 45, 65

Sequester

To set apart or hold in safekeeping.

Found in chapters 3, 36, 49, 50

Sequestered

Set apart; hidden away.

Found in chapters 36, 49, 50

Sequestration

Seclusion; a setting apart.

Found in chapters 53, 55

Sequin

A small shining disk sewn on clothing; first the zecchino, a Venetian gold coin.

Found in chapters 14, 39, 41, 42, 47, 49, 50, 51, 59, 62, 65

Seraglio

The women’s quarters of a Muslim palace; a harem.

Found in chapters 36, 37, 45, 49, 52

Seraphic

Angelic.

Found in chapters 29, 53, 70

Seraphim

The highest order of angels, each with six wings. The singular is seraph.

Found in chapters 3, 40, 55

Sere

Dry and withered.

Found in chapter 33

Serf

A peasant bound to the land and to its lord.

Found in chapter 54

Serge

A sturdy twilled woolen cloth.

Found in chapters 3, 19

Sexton

A church officer who looks after the building and churchyard and often digs the graves.

Found in chapters 2, 6, 7, 52, 79

Shade

A ghost; the spirit of a dead person. The underworld is “that dark abode of shades.”

Found in chapters 1, 2

Shades

Ghosts; the spirits of the dead.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 3, 7, 10, 15, 29, 34, 38, 41, 51, 61, 63, 64, 66, 72, 73

Shah

The title of the king of Persia, now Iran.

Found in chapters 43, 45, 47, 51, 52

Shanks

The legs, especially from knee to ankle.

Found in chapter 5

Shay

A light, one-horse carriage; a chaise.

Found in chapters 57, 67

Sheet anchor

A ship’s largest anchor, kept for emergencies; a last hope.

Found in chapter 15

Sheik

An Arab chief or elder.

Found in chapters 30, 31, 32, 35, 37, 42, 44, 45, 49

Shekel

An ancient Hebrew weight and coin of silver or gold.

Found in chapters 54, 60

Shell game

A swindle in which a pea is hidden under one of three shells or cups and shuffled, and bettors guess where it is. The operator usually palms the pea, so no one can win.

Found in chapters 43, 53

Shingle

A beach of small, rounded stones.

Found in chapters 15, 47

Shipshape

Neat and in good order.

Found in chapter 18

Shirtwaist

A woman’s blouse tailored like a man’s shirt.

Found in chapters 3, 12, 19, 21

Shorthorn

A breed of cattle with short horns.

Found in chapter 9

Shot silk

Silk woven with threads of two colors, so it changes color in the light.

Found in chapter 45

Shrive

To hear confession and grant absolution.

Found in chapters 47, 49

Shunting

Moving railroad cars from one track to another.

Found in chapter 5

Shuttlecock

A feathered cork struck back and forth in battledore or badminton.

Found in chapter 17

Sibyl

A prophetess of the ancient world.

Found in chapters 26, 29

Sidereal

Of or measured by the stars.

Found in chapter 50

Sieve

A strainer with fine holes.

Found in chapters 14, 52, 80

Signet

A small seal, often set in a ring, used to stamp documents.

Found in chapter 52

Silage

Green fodder stored to ferment for winter feed.

Found in chapter 69

Similitude

A likeness.

Found in chapter 29

Simulacrum

An image or likeness; a mere imitation.

Found in chapters 14, 21, 63

Skein

A loosely coiled length of yarn or thread.

Found in chapters 1, 29, 41, 52

Skiff

A small, light boat for rowing or sailing. Young's "skiff moon" is a crescent shaped like one.

Found in chapters 42, 43, 44

Skulking

Lurking or moving about in a sneaking way.

Found in chapters 3, 15

Slag

The stony waste left over when metal is smelted from ore.

Found in chapter 1

Slalom

A downhill ski race on a winding course between pairs of flags.

Found in chapter 53

Slate

A small board of slate that schoolchildren wrote on with chalk.

Found in chapters 15, 37, 41, 45, 47, 48, 49, 62, 80, 82

Sleazy

Of cloth: thin and flimsy. This was the word's first meaning; the sense of sordid came later.

Found in chapter 1

Sleight of hand

Skillful tricks done with the hands, such as a magician's.

Found in chapters 1, 14, 47, 49, 61

Sloop

A sailboat with one mast.

Found in chapters 2, 39, 41, 42, 47, 48, 53

Sloth

Laziness; one of the seven deadly sins.

Found in chapters 18, 19

Slumberous

Sleepy; inducing sleep.

Found in chapters 2, 4, 9, 13, 14, 25, 29, 70, 72, 82

Smelling salts

A strong-smelling mixture, chiefly ammonium carbonate, sniffed to revive someone who feels faint.

Found in chapter 2

Snood

A hairnet or band worn to hold the hair at the back of the head.

Found in chapters 6, 13, 29

Snowbird

Slang for a cocaine user; also a small finch of winter.

Found in chapters 2, 5, 6, 38, 41, 42, 43, 50, 54

Snuffers

A scissor-like tool for trimming or putting out a candle.

Found in chapters 9, 23, 55

Soapstone

A soft, smooth stone that feels like soap, carved into dishes and ornaments.

Found in chapter 19

Solder

Melted metal used to join metal parts; to join them with it.

Found in chapters 6, 52

Solicitous

Anxious and attentive.

Found in chapter 30

Solstice

Either of the two days of the year when the sun is farthest north or south, the longest and shortest days.

Found in chapter 18

Sombre

Dark and grave.

Found in chapters 14, 26, 29, 36, 76

Somnambulist

A sleepwalker.

Found in chapters 13, 40

Somnolence

Sleepiness; drowsiness.

Found in chapters 40, 47, 49, 51, 52, 58, 61

Somnolent

Sleepy; causing sleep.

Found in chapters 3, 4, 6, 29, 36, 38, 40, 41, 47, 49, 51, 52, 58, 61, 65, 82

Sonata

An instrumental composition, usually in three or four movements.

Found in chapters 14, 54, 58, 60

Sonority

Fullness of sound.

Found in chapter 13

Sonorous

Deep and full in sound.

Found in chapters 8, 45, 49, 51, 54, 58, 59, 61, 62, 82

Soothsayer

One who claims to foretell the future.

Found in chapter 2

Soporific

Causing sleep; dulling the senses.

Found in chapters 3, 29, 34

Sostenuto

Sustained; a direction to hold the notes for their full value.

Found in chapter 54

Soughing

Making a soft sighing or rushing sound, like wind in trees.

Found in chapters 3, 42, 46, 47, 49, 61

Southpaw

A left-handed boxer.

Found in chapter 17

Spangled

Covered with spangles, small glittering ornaments.

Found in chapters 1, 42, 52

Spar

A pole used as a ship’s mast, boom, or yard. Spar is also the name for certain shiny, easily split crystalline minerals, such as Iceland spar.

Found in chapters 3, 4, 14, 18, 22, 40, 43, 45, 49, 63, 73, 81

Spasmodic

Occurring in fits and starts.

Found in chapters 32, 68

Spats

Short cloth gaiters worn over the instep and ankle.

Found in chapters 2, 53, 54, 58

Spavined

Of a horse: lame from a swelling of the hock; decrepit or broken down.

Found in chapter 5

Speakeasy

An illegal bar during Prohibition.

Found in chapter 53

Specious

Seeming true but false.

Found in chapter 37

Spectral

Ghostly.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 8, 9, 17, 21, 27, 31, 41, 51, 53, 59, 61, 81

Spectre

A ghost.

Found in chapters 22, 29, 35, 38, 45, 49, 51, 52

Speculative

Thoughtful and wondering; based on guesswork.

Found in chapters 2, 6, 17, 45, 55, 70, 74

Spindle

A rod on which thread is twisted and wound in spinning.

Found in chapters 2, 6, 28, 36, 37, 39, 47, 49, 50, 52, 54, 56, 59, 61

Spindrift

Spray blown from the tops of waves.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 45, 51, 82

Spinster

An unmarried woman, especially an older one. The word first meant a woman who spun thread.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 3, 5, 12, 26, 34, 66

Spiritous

Alcoholic; an old spelling of spirituous.

Found in chapters 32, 65

Spiritualist

One who believes the living can speak with the spirits of the dead.

Found in chapter 79

Spittoon

A bowl for spitting into.

Found in chapters 68, 71

Sporadic

Occurring now and then.

Found in chapters 2, 7, 12, 14, 21, 25, 26, 28, 29, 40, 45, 48, 50, 51, 52, 54, 61, 63

Sprightly

Lively and energetic.

Found in chapter 18

Spruce

An evergreen tree of northern forests.

Found in chapters 3, 14, 15, 16, 23, 29, 47, 48, 56, 58, 59

Spume

Foam or froth on the sea.

Found in chapters 3, 45, 62

Spurious

False.

Found in chapters 34, 50, 51, 82

Squall

A sudden, violent gust of wind, often with rain or snow.

Found in chapters 3, 4, 27, 45, 51, 61, 81, 82

Squeamish

Easily sickened or shocked.

Found in chapters 66, 76

Squire

A knight’s attendant.

Found in chapters 6, 39

Staccato

In music, short and detached, each note cut off from the next.

Found in chapter 49

Staggy

Like a stag; rangy and long-legged.

Found in chapter 50

Stalactite

An icicle-shaped formation of minerals hanging from the roof of a cave.

Found in chapters 2, 41, 69

Stalagmite

A column of mineral rising from a cave floor, built by drips from above.

Found in chapter 41

Stamen

The pollen-bearing part of a flower.

Found in chapter 12

Stanchly

Firmly; loyally.

Found in chapter 30

Starboard

The right-hand side of a ship, facing forward.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 29, 35, 42, 46, 48, 49, 50, 54, 61, 82

Statistician

One who collects and studies numbers about people and things.

Found in chapter 64

Stays

Strips of whalebone or steel that stiffen a corset.

Found in chapter 17

Steeplechase

A horse race over fences, ditches, and water jumps, first run cross-country from one church steeple to another.

Found in chapters 16, 22, 35, 40, 43, 46, 49, 51, 53, 54, 55

Steeplejack

One who climbs and repairs steeples and chimneys.

Found in chapters 46, 47, 62

Steppe

A vast, treeless grassland, as in Russia.

Found in chapters 34, 45, 54

Stethoscope

An instrument for listening to the heart and lungs.

Found in chapters 5, 8, 71

Stickpin

An ornamental pin worn in a necktie.

Found in chapter 71

Stirrup cup

A last drink taken in the saddle before riding off.

Found in chapters 51, 54

Stolidity

Calm, unemotional dullness.

Found in chapter 1

Stomacher

An ornamental panel worn over the chest and stomach under the lacing of a bodice.

Found in chapter 52

Stool pigeon

A police informer.

Found in chapter 81

Storm lamp

A lantern shielded against the wind.

Found in chapters 1, 17, 19, 47

Stovepipe

A tall silk hat; also the metal pipe that carries smoke from a stove.

Found in chapters 14, 33, 68, 80

Striated

Marked with thin parallel lines or bands.

Found in chapters 49, 72, 79

Stridently

Harshly and loudly.

Found in chapters 22, 32

Strumpet

A prostitute; a woman thought immoral.

Found in chapter 6

Stubble

The short stalks left after a harvest.

Found in chapters 10, 65, 79

Stultified

Dulled; made foolish or useless.

Found in chapter 14

Stumble-bum

A clumsy, punch-drunk boxer; a down-and-out.

Found in chapter 53

Stygian

Of the river Styx in the Greek underworld; dark and gloomy.

Found in chapters 3, 29, 35, 45, 47

Sublunar

Beneath the moon; earthly.

Found in chapters 13, 42, 53

Sublunary

Of this world; beneath the moon.

Found in chapter 53

Substratum

An underlying layer or foundation.

Found in chapter 8

Subterfuge

A trick or deception used to hide something.

Found in chapter 2

Suffragette

A woman who campaigned for women’s right to vote. The word was coined by a London newspaper in 1906 for militant British activists. Most American activists called themselves suffragists. See Women’s Suffrage.

Found in chapters 35, 36, 38, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52

Suffusion

A spreading through, as of color or light.

Found in chapter 12

Sulky

A light two-wheeled cart for one driver, used in harness racing.

Found in chapters 6, 49, 55

Sulphurous

Of sulphur; hellish.

Found in chapters 36, 48

Sultanate

A country ruled by a sultan.

Found in chapter 43

Sumac

A shrub with red autumn leaves and clusters of red berries.

Found in chapter 18

Sunbonnet

A wide-brimmed cloth bonnet that shades the face and neck.

Found in chapter 73

Sunday punch

A boxer’s hardest, best blow.

Found in chapters 17, 22

Sundered

Split apart.

Found in chapter 8

Superfecundation

The fertilizing of two or more eggs from one cycle in separate acts of intercourse, so that twins may have different fathers.

Found in chapter 73

Supernal

Heavenly.

Found in chapter 22

Supernumerary

Extra; more than the number needed. In the theater, an extra with no lines.

Found in chapters 13, 41, 42, 43, 46, 51, 52, 53

Supine

Lying face up; also passive.

Found in chapters 32, 35, 37

Supporters

Garters attached to a corset to hold up stockings.

Found in chapter 19

Supposititiously

Supposedly, by supposition; also, falsely.

Found in chapter 2

Surmise

A guess, without proof.

Found in chapters 2, 20, 54, 58

Surreptitiously

Secretly, by stealth.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 51, 54, 59

Surrey

A light four-wheeled horse-drawn carriage with two seats, often with a fringed canopy on top.

Found in chapters 7, 30, 43, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 55, 62, 82

Surrogate

A substitute who acts in another’s place.

Found in chapter 59

Susurrus

A whispering or rustling.

Found in chapter 61

Swaddling clothes

Strips of cloth wrapped snugly around a newborn.

Found in chapters 61, 78

Swallow-tail

A man’s formal tailcoat, with tails like a swallow’s.

Found in chapters 29, 56, 57, 61

Swallowtail

A man’s formal tailcoat with long, divided tails.

Found in chapters 29, 59

Swooned

Fainted.

Found in chapters 18, 36, 41, 42

Sycophant

A flatterer who seeks favor. As an adjective, fawning and flattering.

Found in chapter 1

T

Tacitly

Silently; without being said.

Found in chapter 25

Taciturn

Habitually silent; saying little.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 25, 27, 61, 70, 82

Tactician

One skilled in tactics.

Found in chapter 36

Tactlessly

Without tact; bluntly.

Found in chapters 11, 27, 43, 53

Taffeta

A crisp, shiny silk.

Found in chapters 24, 54, 63

Tallow

Animal fat used for candles and soap. Tallow-colored is a dull, yellowish white.

Found in chapters 4, 18, 22, 52, 53, 56, 61, 62, 63, 64, 77

Tallyho

The huntsman’s cry on sighting the fox.

Found in chapters 40, 53

Taloned

Having talons, the sharp claws of a bird of prey.

Found in chapters 1, 30, 36, 52

Taper

A slender candle.

Found in chapter 42

Tapestry

A heavy cloth woven with pictures, hung on walls.

Found in chapters 2, 4, 9, 16, 19, 29, 34, 41, 42, 43, 48, 49, 55, 61, 64, 65

Tares

Weeds among the grain.

Found in chapters 9, 65

Tarpaulin

A heavy waterproof cloth for covering things.

Found in chapters 19, 22, 23, 54, 64

Tatterdemalion

A ragged person; tattered.

Found in chapters 14, 54, 82

Taw

A large marble used for shooting; the line from which marbles are shot.

Found in chapter 58

Teamster

A driver of a team of horses; later, a truck driver.

Found in chapter 6

Teething ring

A ring for a baby to bite on while cutting teeth.

Found in chapters 73, 78, 80, 81

Tempera

Paint made with egg yolk, or a picture painted with it.

Found in chapter 49

Tempestuous

Stormy; violent in feeling.

Found in chapters 25, 42, 47, 60

Temporize

To delay or evade in order to gain time.

Found in chapter 32

Tempus fugit

Latin for “time flies.”

Found in chapter 18

Ten cent store

A five-and-ten, a store selling cheap goods, such as Woolworth’s.

Found in chapters 1, 70

Tenacious

Holding fast.

Found in chapters 8, 44

Tendon

A tough cord that joins muscle to bone.

Found in chapters 16, 55

Tenebrous

Dark, shadowy, obscure.

Found in chapters 38, 44

Tenement

A crowded, run-down apartment building.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 14, 22, 39, 49, 53, 54, 70

Tenpins

Bowling played with ten pins.

Found in chapter 18

Tentative

Hesitant; not certain.

Found in chapters 3, 6, 7, 12, 20, 21, 27, 28, 30, 31, 42, 43, 48, 49, 59, 63

Tenuto

A mark telling the player to hold a note its full value.

Found in chapter 62

Tergiversation

An evasion of straightforward action or a clear-cut statement.

Found in chapter 41

Tern

A slender, fork-tailed seabird.

Found in chapters 3, 49, 53, 54, 70, 82

Terra firma

Solid ground.

Found in chapters 3, 13, 35, 49, 63

Tertium quid

A third something, neither one thing nor the other (Latin).

Found in chapter 54

Testamentary

Of a will or testament.

Found in chapter 42

Testimonial

A formal statement given as evidence or proof of something.

Found in chapters 31, 42, 43, 51, 67

Tethered

Tied with a rope or chain.

Found in chapters 1, 30, 75

Tetrachord

A series of four notes, the building block of Greek scales.

Found in chapter 14

Thatched

Covered with straw or reeds, like a roof; of hair, thick and shaggy.

Found in chapters 5, 64, 67

Thimble

A small cap worn on the finger to push the needle in sewing.

Found in chapters 9, 12, 62, 65, 78, 81

Thorax

The chest; the part of the body between the neck and the belly.

Found in chapters 59, 72, 73, 76

Thoroughfare

A main road.

Found in chapters 27, 36, 71

Thralldom

Bondage; slavery.

Found in chapter 31

Threadbare

Worn so thin the threads show.

Found in chapters 19, 48, 54, 56

Threnody

A song or poem of lament for the dead.

Found in chapter 49

Throttled

Strangled.

Found in chapter 37

Ticking

A strong striped cotton cloth used to cover pillows and mattresses.

Found in chapter 19

Tiddlywinks

A game of flicking small discs into a cup by pressing their edges with a larger disc.

Found in chapter 19

Timbre

The quality or tone of a voice or sound.

Found in chapters 9, 18, 60

Timorous

Timid.

Found in chapters 34, 54

Tincture

To tinge.

Found in chapters 29, 64

Tinderbox

A box holding tinder, flint, and steel for kindling fire.

Found in chapter 36

Tine

A prong or point, as of an antler or fork.

Found in chapters 60, 62

Titmouse

A small songbird; a tit.

Found in chapters 62, 82

Titubation

Staggering; unsteadiness.

Found in chapter 34

Tonnage

The size or carrying capacity of a ship.

Found in chapters 22, 33, 42, 43, 49

Torpid

Sluggish; inactive.

Found in chapters 28, 43, 48, 49, 56, 61, 78

Torpor

A sluggish, heavy, half-asleep state.

Found in chapters 31, 42, 43, 49, 53, 72

Torrential

Rushing like a torrent.

Found in chapter 41

Tort

A wrongful act, other than a breach of contract, for which one may sue.

Found in chapters 47, 48, 53

Touch

Slang for asking someone for money, especially a small loan. To “make a touch” is to borrow or beg cash.

Found in chapter 43

Toupee

A small wig.

Found in chapter 64

Tousled

Untidy, rumpled.

Found in chapters 1, 7

Tout

One who sells racing tips.

Found in chapters 65, 68

Tracery

Delicate lacework of interlacing lines.

Found in chapters 6, 14, 52

Traces

The straps by which a horse pulls a wagon; to kick against the traces is to resist restraint.

Found in chapters 7, 18, 78

Trackwalker

A railway worker who walks the line to inspect it.

Found in chapter 24

Traipse

To walk about wearily or aimlessly.

Found in chapter 66

Tramontane

Beyond the mountains; foreign.

Found in chapter 12

Transact

To carry out or carry through. Young uses it for crossing a distance, as in “transacted the gulf between two worlds.”

Found in chapters 42, 43, 79

Transcended

Went beyond.

Found in chapters 6, 23, 34, 52

Transfixed

Pierced through; held motionless.

Found in chapters 21, 49

Transfusion

The transfer of blood into a person’s veins.

Found in chapters 1, 67

Transience

The state of passing away quickly.

Found in chapters 31, 34, 37, 45, 47, 52

Transient

Passing quickly; not lasting. As a noun, a hotel guest who stays only a short time.

Found in chapters 2, 14, 18, 20, 38, 41, 58, 63, 69

Translucence

The quality of letting light pass through without being clear.

Found in chapters 7, 15, 17, 19, 29, 50, 51, 53, 59, 62, 64, 65, 70, 81

Transmigration

The passing of a soul into another body after death.

Found in chapter 59

Transmogrified

Changed completely, often strangely.

Found in chapter 12

Transmogrify

To change into something strange.

Found in chapters 12, 47

Transmutation

A change from one form or substance into another, especially the alchemists' dream of turning base metal into gold.

Found in chapters 36, 38, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 51, 54, 59, 64, 82

Transom

A small window above a door, often hinged to open.

Found in chapters 2, 48

Transpired

Happened; took place.

Found in chapters 10, 25, 33, 40, 41, 42, 45, 50, 51, 52, 55, 57, 64, 79, 81

Travesty

A grotesque imitation.

Found in chapters 36, 56

Treacle

Molasses; dark syrup from sugar cane.

Found in chapter 79

Treble

The highest part in music.

Found in chapters 29, 37, 48

Tremolo

A rapid trembling repetition of a note.

Found in chapters 47, 58

Tremulous

Trembling; quivering.

Found in chapters 14, 19, 20, 26, 29, 51, 55, 56, 60, 75

Trenchant

Sharp, incisive.

Found in chapter 38

Trepidation

Fear and trembling.

Found in chapter 54

Tributary

A stream or river that flows into a larger one.

Found in chapters 4, 54

Trihedron

A figure formed by three planes meeting at a point, like the corner of a box.

Found in chapter 2

Trip hammer

A heavy power hammer raised by a cam and dropped again and again.

Found in chapter 60

Triton

A sea god of Greek myth, half man and half fish, who blows a conch shell.

Found in chapters 9, 12, 16, 43, 44, 47, 61

Troika

A Russian carriage or sleigh drawn by three horses abreast.

Found in chapter 54

Troubadour

A poet and singer of southern France in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries who sang of courtly love.

Found in chapters 40, 44, 46, 47, 52

Trousseau

The clothes and linens a bride gathers for her marriage.

Found in chapter 6

True bill

An indictment approved by a grand jury.

Found in chapter 49

True-lover’s knot

A knot of two interlaced loops, a token of lasting love.

Found in chapter 47

Trumpery

Showy things of no value; nonsense.

Found in chapter 3

Tryst

An appointed meeting, as of lovers.

Found in chapters 38, 49

Tuberose

A Mexican plant with heavily fragrant white flowers.

Found in chapters 6, 14, 25, 29

Tumescent

Swelling.

Found in chapter 61

Tumult

A loud, confused uproar.

Found in chapters 14, 18, 22, 42, 49, 52, 54, 55, 60, 61, 81

Tumultuous

Loud, wild, and disorderly.

Found in chapters 15, 22, 29, 35, 41, 52, 57, 60, 62

Tuning fork

A two-pronged steel fork that sounds one pitch when struck.

Found in chapters 5, 51, 71, 77

Turbid

Muddy, cloudy; confused.

Found in chapter 14

Tureen

A deep covered dish for serving soup.

Found in chapters 2, 22, 71

Turgid

Swollen; also, pompous in style.

Found in chapters 13, 61, 63, 72, 81

Turncoat

One who switches sides.

Found in chapters 3, 19

Turnkey

A jailer.

Found in chapter 38

Turnstone

A shorebird that turns over stones to find food.

Found in chapters 8, 14, 22, 40, 61

Turret

A small tower on a building or castle.

Found in chapters 1, 2, 3, 16, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 36, 38, 39, 40, 41, 43, 45, 47, 49, 50, 52, 55, 58, 59, 62, 70, 82

Turtle-dove

A small wild dove. The “turtle” of the Bible’s “voice of the turtle” is this bird.

Found in chapter 4

Turtleneck

A high, close, turned-over collar on a sweater.

Found in chapters 21, 63

Twaddle

Silly talk.

Found in chapters 22, 63

Tweed

A rough woolen cloth, often of mixed colors, first woven in Scotland.

Found in chapters 3, 19, 23, 53, 56

Tympanum

The eardrum; also the space within an arch above a door.

Found in chapter 55

U

Ubiquity

The state of being everywhere at once.

Found in chapter 40

Ulster

A long, loose overcoat, often with a cape.

Found in chapter 81

Ululation

Howling or wailing.

Found in chapters 34, 59

Unassuming

Modest.

Found in chapters 13, 14, 36, 63

Unconscionable

Unreasonable, excessive; without conscience.

Found in chapter 35

Unctuous

Oily and soothing. Young spells it “unctious.”

Found in chapter 29

Unctuously

With a smooth, oily, false earnestness.

Found in chapter 69

Undergrowth

Shrubs and plants growing beneath trees.

Found in chapter 13

Undertow

A current beneath the surface that pulls back out to sea.

Found in chapters 9, 15, 18, 27, 47

Undifferentiated

Not told apart; all alike.

Found in chapters 51, 55, 78

Undulating

Rising and falling in waves.

Found in chapters 2, 4, 29, 46, 47, 51, 61, 73, 74

Undulatory

Moving in waves.

Found in chapter 49

Unilateral

One-sided.

Found in chapter 26

Unprepossessing

Unattractive; making no good first impression.

Found in chapter 41

Unpresuming

Modest; not putting oneself forward.

Found in chapter 1

Untenable

Impossible to defend, hold, or live in.

Found in chapters 34, 43, 49

Untrammeled

Not restricted or hampered.

Found in chapters 2, 35

Urn

A tall vase; also a large metal container with a tap, for serving coffee or tea.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 6, 22, 31, 51, 53, 70, 71, 72, 73, 79, 80, 82

Usufruct

The right to use and enjoy another’s property.

Found in chapter 47

Usurping

Seizing without right.

Found in chapter 37

Uterus

The womb.

Found in chapter 77

V

Vagaries

Unpredictable changes or whims.

Found in chapters 3, 53, 63, 73

Vagary

A whim; an odd notion.

Found in chapters 3, 53, 63, 73

Vagrant

Wandering, with no settled home.

Found in chapters 3, 18, 38, 47

Vainglorious

Excessively proud and boastful.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 23, 48

Vanity case

A small case for carrying makeup.

Found in chapters 1, 6

Vanquish

To defeat thoroughly.

Found in chapter 17

Vapid

Dull and empty of life or interest.

Found in chapters 2, 4, 14, 18, 21, 25, 59, 70

Vaporous

Full of mist or vapor.

Found in chapters 6, 43, 47, 55, 56, 59, 62

Variegated

Marked with patches of different colors.

Found in chapter 39

Vaultless

Without a vault or arched roof; open, unbounded.

Found in chapters 47, 72, 74

Vaunted

Boasted of; praised highly.

Found in chapter 4

Velocity

Speed in a given direction.

Found in chapters 33, 37, 53, 54, 58

Venereal

Passed on by sexual contact.

Found in chapter 69

Ventriloquist

One who throws the voice so it seems to come from elsewhere.

Found in chapters 63, 69

Venturesome

Daring.

Found in chapters 34, 40

Verbatim

Word for word.

Found in chapter 14

Vertiginous

Dizzy; causing dizziness.

Found in chapter 72

Vestibule

An entrance hall.

Found in chapter 32

Vestments

Robes or garments, especially ceremonial ones.

Found in chapters 3, 4, 18, 28, 49

Vicariously

Experienced through another person.

Found in chapters 6, 14, 25, 33, 34, 45

Viceroy

One who rules a province as the deputy of a king.

Found in chapters 29, 38, 47, 57

Vicissitude

A change of fortune, usually for the worse.

Found in chapter 48

Vigil

A period of staying awake to keep watch, especially at the bedside of someone sick or dying.

Found in chapters 23, 31, 43, 45

Viol

A bowed stringed instrument of the Renaissance and Baroque, usually with six strings and frets, held upright.

Found in chapters 32, 46, 55

Viola da gamba

The bass viol, an old fretted string instrument held between the knees.

Found in chapters 60, 62

Virginal

A small, legless harpsichord set on a table, popular in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England.

Found in chapters 2, 18, 32, 52, 55, 63

Visage

A person’s face or expression.

Found in chapters 3, 22, 27, 31

Visitant

A visitor, especially a ghostly or supernatural one.

Found in chapters 63, 73

Vivacious

Lively, animated.

Found in chapters 34, 35

Vivacity

Liveliness.

Found in chapters 6, 28, 49

Vizor

An old spelling of visor, the movable front of a helmet.

Found in chapters 21, 40, 63

Vociferously

Loudly and forcefully.

Found in chapter 3

Volatile

Changeable; quick to evaporate.

Found in chapters 14, 29, 37, 39, 40, 53

Volitional

Of the will; done by choice.

Found in chapter 53

Voluble

Talkative.

Found in chapters 12, 36

Voluminous

Large, full, or great in volume.

Found in chapters 5, 9, 22, 32, 34, 42, 47

Vortex

A whirlpool or whirlwind.

Found in chapters 2, 28, 45, 46, 64, 77

W

Wady

An old spelling of wadi, a desert valley that fills with water only after rain.

Found in chapter 20

Wainscoting

Wooden paneling on the lower part of a wall.

Found in chapter 34

Waistcoat

A vest.

Found in chapters 56, 81

Wake

A watch kept over the dead before burial.

Found in chapters 32, 45, 78

Wall-eyed

With eyes that turn outward, staring.

Found in chapters 10, 37

Wan

Pale and sickly.

Found in chapters 8, 21

Ward-heeler

A minor political worker who canvasses a city ward for a party boss.

Found in chapters 52, 53, 54, 59

Warp

The lengthwise threads on a loom, crossed by the woof.

Found in chapters 22, 51

Washwoman

A woman who takes in washing for pay.

Found in chapter 73

Wastrel

Wasteful; a good-for-nothing.

Found in chapter 28

Waterproof

An old word for a raincoat, as in Miss MacIntosh's "plaid, faded waterproof."

Found in chapters 1, 3, 63, 65, 70, 82

Wayfarer

A traveler, especially on foot.

Found in chapters 4, 18, 45, 48, 49, 51, 68

Wayward

Willful and hard to control.

Found in chapter 15

Weathercock

A weathervane shaped like a rooster; also, a person who changes with every wind.

Found in chapters 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 28, 49, 54, 63

Weathervane

A turning device on a roof that shows the direction of the wind.

Found in chapters 3, 15, 18, 32, 36, 47, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 59, 61, 62, 65

Weltering

Rolling and tossing, as waves.

Found in chapter 36

Wentletrap

A sea snail whose shell winds like a spiral staircase.

Found in chapters 35, 47, 48, 51, 52, 56, 62

Whalebone

Baleen, the flexible plates from the mouths of certain whales, once used to stiffen corsets.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 17, 19, 23, 53

Whaler

A whaling ship or a man who hunts whales.

Found in chapters 1, 3, 5, 13, 18, 19, 36, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66

Whelk

A large sea snail with a spiral shell.

Found in chapters 22, 56, 82

Wherry

A light rowboat.

Found in chapter 36

Whimsicalities

Odd, playful fancies.

Found in chapter 20

Whinny

A horse’s gentle neigh.

Found in chapters 16, 31, 56

Whippersnapper

A young and impertinent person.

Found in chapter 7

Whirligig

A spinning toy; anything that whirls.

Found in chapters 42, 53

Whist

A card game for four players in pairs.

Found in chapter 30

Whorl

A spiral or ring of leaves or petals.

Found in chapter 12

Widow walk

A railed platform on a coastal roof, from which to watch for ships.

Found in chapters 22, 35, 48

Widow’s walk

A railed rooftop platform on a coastal house, said to be where wives watched for ships.

Found in chapters 22, 35, 48

Widow’s weeds

The black mourning clothes of a widow.

Found in chapter 80

Wigwam

A domed dwelling of the Algonquian peoples of the Northeast and Great Lakes, framed with bent poles and covered with bark or mats.

Found in chapter 1

Will-o’-the-wisp

A flickering light over marshes that leads travelers astray; anything that deludes.

Found in chapters 3, 42, 43

Wind-broken

Of a horse: short of breath from damaged lungs.

Found in chapters 5, 16

Winding sheet

The cloth a corpse is wrapped in for burial.

Found in chapters 6, 14, 29, 41, 44, 45, 54, 61, 64, 65

Windjammer

A large square-rigged sailing ship.

Found in chapter 45

Windlass

A winch for hauling or hoisting.

Found in chapters 41, 47, 54

Windowpeeper

A peeping Tom.

Found in chapters 75, 76, 81

Winterbourne

A stream that flows only in winter.

Found in chapter 56

Woof

The threads woven across the warp in a fabric.

Found in chapters 22, 51

Woolgathering

Idle daydreaming.

Found in chapter 22

Woolpack

A bale of wool; a heaped white cloud.

Found in chapter 3

Wormwood

A bitter herb; bitterness itself.

Found in chapters 5, 8, 69

Wrack

Wreck or ruin, as in “wrack and ruin.”

Found in chapters 5, 7, 48, 59, 69

Wraith

A ghost; a faint, pale shape.

Found in chapters 3, 34, 36, 44, 47, 49, 54, 58, 73, 81

Z

Zenith

The highest point.

Found in chapters 10, 47, 49, 50, 62, 74

Zero hour

The hour set for an attack to begin.

Found in chapter 17

Zither

A stringed instrument with a flat soundboard, played lying flat.

Found in chapters 52, 55, 57