

Among Others Study Guide

Among Others by Jo Walton

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Contents

Among Others Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Pages 13 through 40.....	4
Pages 41 through 71.....	6
Pages 71 through 98.....	8
Pages 98 through 124.....	10
Pages 125 through 153.....	12
Pages 153 through 184.....	14
Pages 185 through 210.....	16
Pages 210 through 240.....	18
Pages 241 through 272.....	20
Pages 273 through 302.....	22
Characters.....	24
Objects/Places.....	27
Themes.....	29
Style.....	31
Quotes.....	34
Topics for Discussion.....	36



Plot Summary

Among Others is a fantasy novel centered on fifteen-year-old Welsh girl Morwenna. Morwenna is very different from other girls. She is quirky, precocious, rebellious and intelligent. She has a nearly unhealthy love for science fiction novels. Among her many quirks is the ability to communicate with fairies and the ability to cast magical spells.

Morwenna grew up with her twin sister Mor, whom she loved dearly and did everything with, including commune with fairies in old industrial ruins around South Wales. After a flashback to this period, the book properly begins with Morwenna having run away from her mother (who is a powerful witch) to live with the biological father she never knew, Daniel. Morwenna's leg has been crippled, and her twin sister is dead. The exact reasons are not yet specified.

Daniel lives in a grand old estate and is henpecked by his three sisters, whom Morwenna refers to as the three aunts. Morwenna is sent away to boarding school at a place called Arlinghurst. Her rebellious ways and weird qualities make her a loner who is mocked by the rich girls who attend the school, though she does make a couple of friends, including Deirdre.

Morwenna's constant love is reading, particularly science fiction novels, to the point she reads a novel or two a day. Much of the book is filled with Morwenna's commentaries of the merits of particular (real) novels by authors such as Robert Heinlein, J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Samuel Delany. In particular, Morwenna loves Tolkien and *Lord of the Rings*. The themes in the books help Morwenna understand what's going on in her own life.

Important people in Morwenna's life include her Auntie Teg, her grandfather Grampar (who is in a nursing home), and Daniel's father Sam, an elderly Jewish man who connects with Morwenna on an intellectual level.

Morwenna eventually joins a book club at the library after casting a "karass" spell which is supposed to create a magical circle of protection. Morwenna indeed discovers a circle of friends who share her passion. This includes Wim, a nineteen-year-old boy. Morwenna is warned to keep away from Wim because he allegedly got a girl pregnant, but Morwenna is deeply attracted to him. Eventually, Morwenna strikes up a romance with Wim and she reveals that she is a witch. She shows Wim fairies and Wim is able to see them (unlike most people).

In love with Wim and with much to look forward to, Morwenna is able to cast off the shackles of her past, including her grief for her sister and her contentious relationship with her mother. Morwenna rejects the fairies' pleas for her to kill herself in order to become whole again with her sister, choosing life over death. And Morwenna easily defeats her mother in a magical battle. By the end, Morwenna has found love, a new circle of family and friends, and a reason to embrace the future.



Pages 13 through 40

Pages 13 through 40 Summary

The narrator is a ten-year-old girl named Morwenna. Her twin sister, Mor, is also ten. It's 1975. There is a legendary "Phurnacite" factory in the town of Abercwmboi, which has apparently ruined the surrounding area with a foul smell and a blight which has killed trees and vegetation. At the start of the novel, Mor and Morwenna have traveled to this factory for the first time alone. They've traveled there at the advice of "faeries" to cast magical flowers into a pool at the heart of the factory. The girls have been assured the flowers would kill the evil factory. They throw the flowers in the pond and nothing happens. But the headline in the newspaper the next day informs them that the Phurnacite factory is closing its doors. So the magic did work. Morwenna steps outside the story to inform the reader that he or she should read the book as a memoir written by an unreliable and disreputable person.

Flash-forward four years later, to 1979. Morwenna (now fifteen) has run away from her mother, traveling from Wales to England to live with her father. Her father abandoned her when she was a baby and she has never met him before. Why Morwenna ran away is at yet unclear. Morwenna is crippled and must wear special shoes and walk with a cane. How this happened is also unclear, as is the status of her twin sister.

Morwenna meets her three half-aunts, whom she calls Aunts. England is a dreary and decidedly unmagical place with terrible food, and Morwenna is forlorn. Morwenna meets her father, and he seems kind enough. More importantly, the house's library is stocked with an amazing amount of literature, and particularly science fiction literature, which is Morwenna's true love. Morwenna's father has a deep knowledge of literature and suggests some titles to Morwenna, and she respects and admires him.

Morwenna is driven to her first day of school at the prestigious boarding school, Arlinghurst. No expense has been spared to fashion her with proper clothes and accessories. On the drive, Morwenna's father explains his family history: his father was a Polish Jew who lost his family in the Holocaust. His mother abandoned a wealthy man in order to marry the Polish Jew. The father's half-sisters now give him an allowance to live (otherwise he would be broke), in exchange for managing their large estate.

At Arlinghurst, Morwenna insists on not taking art and religious studies, which gives the headmistress a headache. A compromise is made for Morwenna's schedule. Morwenna compares the dreary, industrial, and boring countryside surrounding Arlinghurst with her childhood home, which was raw, wild, and magical. Morwenna spent many happy hours with her twin sister playing in various ruins and conversing with fairies.

Morwenna's first days at school are difficult. She is made fun of for her accent and her odd behaviors. She is called names and ostracized. She scores very high marks in all



classes but math. She discovers the school's library and spends many hours reading. One day, in a tree, Morwenna discovers a fairy. The fairy exclaims "Go! Danger! Find!" and Morwenna is puzzled as to what that could mean. The next day, Morwenna receives a letter from her mother, letting her know her mother knows where she is.

Pages 13 through 40 Analysis

The initial pages set up a thematic juxtaposition between urbanity and the wilderness, technology, and nature. The Phurnacite factory is belching smog and foul odors, a sort of caricature of the pollution and unpleasant consequences of the industrial revolution. Morwenna is set against this quite literally, as in the beginning of the novel she is venturing to stop the factory. The theme of civilization versus wilderness is picked back up with Morwenna's time at Arlinghurst. Arlinghurst is structured, orderly, and boring, whereas Morwenna is a "wild child" who has little need for rules and civilization. Morwenna's time in Wales was a time of magic, nature, and joy, whereas her time at Arlinghurst is one of stifling conformity.

The beginning of the book creates several central questions that create tension and spur dramatic interest. Chiefly, the reader is left to wonder why Morwenna is running away from her mother, why she is a cripple, and what happened to her twin sister. The author has intentionally skirted these issues to engender drama and interest.

Morwenna is characterized as an eccentric and precocious girl who loves reading, particularly science fiction books. The book's autobiographical aspects are revealed in this way, as no doubt the author Jo Walton spent her childhood with her nose buried in science fiction books.



Pages 41 through 71

Pages 41 through 71 Summary

Morwenna has befriended a girl named Sharon, a Jew, and Deirdre, an Irish girl. They are all "different" and so they have a bond.

Morwenna receives another letter from her mother. This one contains a photograph of herself and her twin sister, except that Morwenna's image has been literally burned from the photo. Morwenna treasures the photo only because it gives her an image of her sister to cherish, which she didn't have.

Morwenna describes the fairies she used to play and converse with in her earlier years. They spoke Welsh, didn't have names, and they often didn't have human bodies, sometimes blending in seamlessly with bark or leaves or other natural structures.

Morwenna next explains her complex family history, going back a couple of generations. Morwenna explains to the reader that it isn't important for the reader to remember the names and circumstances of her family's past. But it is important to realize that Morwenna was born into a complex situation that has helped to define her and that her family is big enough that she has always had someone to help her in times of trouble.

Morwenna's great-grandfather was a miner born with very dark skin due to Indian ancestry. There is a "dark skin" attribute in the family that has given the family a reputation for eccentricity or strangeness. Morwenna discusses other family members such as Auntie Maudie who "disgraced herself by marrying a Catholic" and Auntie Olwen, who was a lesbian. Uncle Clem went to prison for forgery. Morwenna is closest to Auntie Teg and her own grandfather, whom she calls Grampar. Morwenna has a letter correspondence with Auntie Teg.

Morwenna goes to the town library, as she has already devoured much of the school library, but she is turned away by the librarian, who requires her to have a note signed by the school and a parent. She finds a local bookstore and buys several science fiction books. Throughout the book, many author names are dropped and Morwenna has various opinions about books by people like Delany, Heinlein, and Le Guin. Science fiction books are truly Morwenna's sanctuary.

Morwenna manages to get her town library form signed by her teacher Miss Carroll as well as her father, and she checks out eight books. She then buys more books at the bookstore. She reads for many hours a day and so gets through "a couple of books most days."

One day, a dumb jock of a girl named Lorraine sees one of Morwenna's pictures (from her mother) and asks about it. Morwenna states that her mother is a vindictive witch (which is pretty much true). Morwenna enjoys scaring her schoolmates and playing up her strange persona, but she admits it gets lonely. She hates Arlinghurst and its



arbitrary rules and strict house divisions (girls are members of various houses and are not supposed to have relationships with girls of other houses). Morwenna does strike up a friendship with a girl named Gill, who has a scientific mind which prevents her from being afraid of Morwenna and her rumored witchcraft.

Pages 41 through 71 Analysis

This section lays the groundwork for a theme centering on Morwenna as being different/strange/eccentric, and what that means for a person socially, emotionally, and spiritually. Morwenna is conflicted about her eccentricity. On one hand, she revels in being different and she enjoys embracing the queerer sides of her character. But on the other hand, being eccentric opens her up to ridicule and social isolation, even from other "strange" girls like Sharon and Deirdre. In this sense, Morwenna's connection to magic and fairies is a sort of literary conceit for simply being different.

For several pages, Morwenna explains her family history and the many quirks and odd fates of her various aunts, uncles, and cousins. Morwenna was born into a strange family, and so it is no surprise that she is herself strange, a demonstration of the influence of one's family on one's self.

The most dominant personality trait of Morwenna is her love of reading. Reading is an escape for Morwenna but also a way for her to relate to her own life, and to help shape her opinions on things as various as sex, her mother, and being different. This love of reading has a meta-literary quality, as *Among Others* itself is a fantasy book like many of the books the protagonist reads. By making so many references to specific books and well-known authors in the sci-fi/fantasy genre, author Jo Walton is catering directly to the reader, whom she assumes is a voracious reader of these books like herself.



Pages 71 through 98

Pages 71 through 98 Summary

Morwenna creates a bonfire in a lonely part of the countryside with all of her mother's nasty letters. A few fairies come out and dance among the flames. A senior girl at Arlinghurst discovers Morwenna's fire and punished Morwenna with "ten order marks," quite a stiff punishment in the school's annual competition for good marks.

There is a break in the school term and all the children are full of excitement at getting away from school. Morwenna's father, Daniel, takes her away to meet his own father, Sam, in London. After that, Morwenna will stay in South Wales for a time to visit her aunt as well as her grandfather Grampar, who is sick in a hospital.

Morwenna is overwhelmed with her first trip to London, marveling at the city's size. Morwenna and her father meet Sam. Sam is a very old man with a strange accent and eccentric ways about him. Morwenna takes to him immediately and they appear to be kindred spirits. Sam encourages Morwenna to read Plato, and he gives her a copy of Plato's *The Symposium*. Sam speaks and reads several languages and is an intellectual, which Morwenna also respects.

That night, in a hotel, Morwenna's father Daniel slips into her bed and tries to kiss Morwenna. Morwenna pushes him away. Morwenna has conflicting feelings; she knows it is wrong and illegal, but she is starved for affection and considers herself unworthy of sexual attention due to her crippled leg. The next morning, Daniel behaves as if nothing had happened.

Morwenna travels by train to Cardiff to visit Grampar. She discovers he is out of the hospital and being cared for at a nursing home. Morwenna finds the nursing home extremely troubling, with its insane old men on the edge of death's doorstep. She vows to find a way to get Grampar out of the home.

In an old ruin Morwenna used to visit, Morwenna discovers a fairy she had named Glorfindel, after the character in the *Lord of the Rings* novels. He appears in human form of about nineteen years of age, a handsome elf-man with a flowing cloak of leaves. Morwenna is attracted to Glorfindel and fantasizes about having sex with him. Glorfindel instructs Morwenna that she must travel to a ruin nicknamed Minos' labyrinth the next day (which is Halloween), and she must gather oak leaves for a ritual there.

The next day at Minos' labyrinth, Morwenna collects the asked-for leaves and scatters them in a spiral shape around the ruins. With Glorfindel by her side, Morwenna watches as the spirits of the dead (mostly working-class Londoners) appear, take the leaves, and then disappear through some trees. Glorfindel explains the dead, enthralled by Morwenna's mother, can now experience relief.



In the procession of the dead, Morwenna sees her dead sister, Mor. She clings to the spirit, desperate for her sister again, but Glorfindel instructs her she must let the spirit go or else join her in the afterlife. Morwenna lets her sister go back into the afterlife, which she admits is the hardest thing she's ever had to do.

After visiting Auntie Teg and visiting Grampar's old house, Morwenna returns to Arlinghurst for the start of school again.

Pages 71 through 98 Analysis

Among Others is an epistolary novel, a novel told through discrete correspondences, in this case diary entries. This section is a good example of author Jo Walton's prose style and narrative structure. Much like a real-life diary would behave, Morwenna's diary reflects a hodgepodge of thoughts on life, memories, reflections on the day's occurrences, and carefully observed details about a book she's reading or an encounter with a girl at school, etc. Among Others does not have a straightforward narrative style; it is free to meander in a modern way, to go off on tangents, and the proper "plot" only reveals itself when the reader digs through unrelated material.

Morwenna's encounter with the spirit of her dead sister is a metaphor for dealing with grief in real life. Glorfindel instructs Morwenna that she must literally let go of her sister (whom Morwenna is clinging to) so that Morwenna can continue to live her earthly existence. In the same way, the author is stating that the dead must be "let go" in real life so that the living can lead productive lives instead of being stuck in the past.

As a fifteen-year-old, Morwenna has blossoming sexual feelings she must deal with and explore. This is a situation that is typical for a coming of age novel. Two sexual situations thus far are hazardous for her. In one case, Morwenna's own father has tried to kiss her and Morwenna instinctively pushes him away because of the blood tie and the age difference. In the other case, Morwenna is attracted to the fairy Glorfindel, but such a union would appear to be impossible or at least very strange. In both cases, Morwenna's sexual energies are frustrated and denied.



Pages 98 through 124

Pages 98 through 124 Summary

The Arlinghurst school has a bonfire, and Morwenna sees fire fairies dancing in the flames. Morwenna explains that people stop seeing fairies when they stop believing in them, and she has never stopped believing. Morwenna explains how her cousin, Geraint, sadly stopped believing in fairies and became interested in football after a certain age. Morwenna receives correspondence from her grandfather Sam about whether she had read Plato yet.

There's a poetry competition at school, a nationwide contest. The best hundred poem writers will be published in a book, received a hundred pounds, and win a typewriter. Everyone in school thinks Morwenna will win the competition. However, Morwenna is not hardly familiar with modern poetry. She writes her friend Deirdre's poem, and then writes a modern poem herself, but is not pleased with it.

Morwenna explains that her favorite series of all time is Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, and that when she retreats to Tolkien's remarkable fantasy land of Middle Earth, she feels happy and at peace.

Morwenna must continue burning her mother's letters (which come frequently) in a fire secretly at night. Morwenna is compelled to read the letters, even though she knows they are filled with hate. At school, the poem Morwenna wrote for Deirdre wound up being chosen to compete in the national competition. Despite the fact Morwenna wrote the poem, she feels publicly embarrassed that the one with her name on it didn't win.

In the communal showers, Deirdre remarks to Morwenna that she is "getting breasts" (that is, she is developing as a woman through puberty), and the two have a humorous conversation about whether Morwenna's new breasts are oddly-shaped or not.

Morwenna spends a journal entry explaining that she is mad at God about her sister's death, and that fairies are easier to have faith in, because she can see them plainly.

Over the next weeks, several things occupy Morwenna's time and attention. Chiefly it seems is acquiring more books from the library to feed her voracious appetite for books. She is also concerned about getting a bra for her new breasts, and she writes to Auntie Teg about how bras are sized. Morwenna also writes to her father Daniel about the books she reads, and to Daniel's father Sam about Plato. Morwenna feels Plato is nice, but that his ideas don't really measure up in the real world. Additionally, Morwenna is dealing with increased pain and discomfort from her crippled leg, and she sees the school nurse about it.

There is also the ever-present specter of her mother, who continues to write Morwenna nasty letters. And one night, Morwenna swears that her mother visited her in the dorm room in spectral form, hovering over her bed and literally paralyzing her so she couldn't



move. Morwenna feels helpless and is desperate for some way to conjure up protection magic so her mother can't get to her.

At the end of this section, Morwenna's science-minded female friend Gill visits her and puts her arm around Morwenna in a manner Morwenna interprets as sexual or romantic. Morwenna searches for a way to break it to Gill that she is not interested and that she in fact likes boys.

Pages 98 through 124 Analysis

This section continues elements related to Morwenna's coming of age. The shower scene, in which her friend remarks upon her developing breasts, is a physical reminder of Morwenna's changing self, and is related to the crippled leg which gives Morwenna constant pain. Morwenna injured the leg in her last encounter with her mother (how exactly is as yet unclear), and the crippled leg functions as a metaphor for how past life experiences can leave us scarred and irreparably harmed. Just as Morwenna cannot "ungrow" her breasts, she cannot undo her sister's death and the injury to her leg.

There are several windows into Morwenna's psyche as relating to religion and faith in this section. Morwenna prefers fairies to God. Not only can she plainly see fairies, but they behave without any pretense or ulterior motive. By contrast, God's plans are unknowable and shrouded in mystery. Morwenna doesn't want to believe in a God who planned for her sister to die in the way she did, for one example. So Morwenna is also undergoing a crisis of faith during this period.

Morwenna's mother's intrusions become more intense in this section, climaxing with an actual ghostly visitation one night in the dorm, during which Morwenna is temporarily paralyzed. This builds reader expectations for the inevitable day when Morwenna must face and defeat her mother, or else perish in the process. The fact that she is only a teenager, an outcast, and crippled, with a vague understanding of the magic her mother has already mastered, all make Morwenna a proper "underdog" character facing incredible odds.



Pages 125 through 153

Pages 125 through 153 Summary

Morwenna goes out into the night to conduct a magical rite in order to protect herself from her mother. She has little idea what she is doing, and she feels foolish. The rite involves natural things like an apple. She also used a bit of blood from her finger, which she feels is dangerous but also potentially powerful. Morwenna doesn't describe the exact steps she takes in the ritual, partially due to superstition (the magic might lose its power if written down), and also because it's very hard to describe.

Morwenna feels her magic worked the next day when the librarian suggests Morwenna join the library's science fiction book club, which meets every Tuesday. She calls the happy happenstance the start of a "karass," or a protective circle of friends created by good magic.

Morwenna tells Gill in an awkward conversation that she is not interested in her physically. The two are rushed but seem to end on a positive note.

Morwenna doesn't get a permission slip from Daniel in time, and it appears she will miss the Tuesday book club, but her young teacher Miss Carroll volunteers to go with her to town to attend the meeting. Morwenna is thrilled.

At the book club, Morwenna is disappointed that most of the attendees are older than thirty, and that almost all are men. One girl, named Janine, is a red-headed girl Morwenna's age. At the end of the meeting, a young man of seventeen stumbles in, and Morwenna instantly falls in love with his good looks and long blond locks. Morwenna talks at length at the meeting about the author under discussion, Ursula Le Guin. The meeting is led by an older woman named Harriet. Morwenna feels alive during the meeting, engaged as she is in something she truly cares about.

However happy she is about her new "karass," Morwenna has doubts about whether or not she should use magic for the express purpose of making her happy and enriching herself. Magic used selfishly almost always is bad magic that backfires in some way.

At a bookstore, Morwenna runs into Janine from the book club. They immediately hit it off, considering their mutual love of science fiction. Morwenna talks at length about her strange personal history and family history. Janine tells Morwenna about the boys in the book club, including her ex-boyfriend, Pete, and the blond-haired handsome boy, named Wim. Janine warns Morwenna that Wim is nothing but trouble. He got kicked out of school for making a girl pregnant. The girl is rumored to have had an abortion.

The girls go shopping to pick out Christmas presents. Janine helps Morwenna pick out Christmas presents for Daniel, Auntie Teg, Grampar, and others. Janine also helps Morwenna pick out a good bra.



Pages 125 through 153 Analysis

The nature of magic is an important topic in this section. The author uses magic to explore an aspect of the human condition, namely, the nature of free will versus determinism. Morwenna thinks that her new "karass" (a protective magical circle) of book club friends exists because of the magic she cast. But she is unsure whether she has only convinced herself of magic's efficacy when in reality there is no magic involved, just good fortune. Morwenna is struggling between the notion that the book club is the result of her own magical efforts (free will) or if the book club would have presented itself with or without her magic spell casting (determinism).

Meeting with Janine allows Morwenna to open up and to be unusually frank about her odd situation at school and her odd history. In fact, Morwenna comes to understand certain things about herself just with the act of conversing about herself with Janine.

The character Wim is introduced as a positive character (a young, endearingly clumsy, handsome teenager). But Janine's later statement as to Wim's character is negative (that he was kicked out of school for impregnating a girl). This serves to illustrate the several ways a reader can learn about a character. These include what a character says about himself, how the narrator presents the character, what a character does in the course of the story, and what other characters say about that character. In this case, how Wim is initially presented clashes with what another character says about him, presenting an interesting tension for the reader: is Wim really a bad person, or is he misunderstood by Janine and others?



Pages 153 through 184

Pages 153 through 184 Summary

Morwenna agrees to spend time with Janine and another teenager who attends the book club meetings, Hugh. Morwenna picks out additional Christmas gifts with Janine and Hugh, then they travel to Janine's home. Janine has her own room she designed herself, and Morwenna wishes she had that kind of privacy.

Hugh and Janine give Morwenna a series of books she hasn't read, as the author is the topic of discussion at the next book club. Hugh and Janine inquire as to what happened with Morwenna's leg. She lies and says it was from a car accident, and when they press Morwenna further, Morwenna cries from a feeling of helplessness. Toward the end of the gathering, Hugh speaks with Morwenna privately and says that Wim may not be the villain Janine makes him out to be. Wim saved Hugh from some bullies a couple years back, and Hugh feels Wim deserves the benefit of the doubt, as the whole story has not been told yet about Wim's girlfriend Ruthie and the pregnancy and abortion.

Morwenna takes her final exams, and her final marks place her third overall in her class. She excels in English, physics, and religious study, but barely had a passing mark in math, her weak spot.

After a successful pre-Christmas book club meeting, Morwenna meets with the others at a local pub to unwind. She happens to sit next to Wim, and she is again blown away by his gorgeousness. Wim speaks intelligently about one of Morwenna's favorite authors, Samuel Delany.

The school has a holiday celebration. Morwenna receives several books as gifts for scoring high marks. A school assembly involves more awards, and Morwenna's "house" wins the semester competition, for which she has zero enthusiasm. Morwenna then is picked up by Daniel to spend the majority of her Christmas vacation with Daniel and his sisters. Unlike Morwenna, the sisters are thrilled at Morwenna's house winning the competition. Doing Christmas decorating at Daniel's mansion, Morwenna is homesick for South Wales, and the season is dampened by the fact that Russians have invaded Afghanistan (1979).

On Christmas day, the family (including Daniel, Morwenna, and the three aunts) open their gifts. Morwenna receives three pairs of earrings from the aunts, and an offer to drive her to town to get her ears pierced. This terrifies Morwenna; she knows instinctively that piercing her ears would cause her to lose touch with magic. Morwenna immediately suspects that the aunts are actually witches who are trying to stifle her own magic ability. She realizes that layabout Daniel has been largely under their spell. Morwenna is horrified and wants badly to go back to Arlinghurst. Morwenna refuses to get her ears pierced, getting hysterical eventually after repeated demands from the aunts.



On the drive to drop Morwenna off at the train station, one aunt (Anthea) driving the car stops at a jeweler's advertising ear piercing. Morwenna again refuses to get her ears pierced, threatened to yell and scream. Anthea reluctantly stops insisting and drives Morwenna to the train station.

Pages 153 through 184 Analysis

Hugh's account of Wim (as a misunderstood hero who saved him from bullies) contrasts sharply with Janine's account of Wim, and Morwenna (and the reader) must discover who the real Wim is. Wim sparks sexual and lustful feelings in Morwenna, one more aspect to her coming of age that the book explores.

The book club marks an important change in Morwenna's character. While in the beginning she freely admitted she hated most people and felt most at peace with her nose in a book, she is discovering the joys of close friendship found in Janine, Hugh, Wim, and the others. She is growing as a person.

The revelation of Morwenna's aunts being witches intent on sapping Morwenna's magical power is a plot twist—a sudden change in the direction of the narrative that spins the story into a significantly different direction. The author depends on a reliable stereotype of witches - a trio of older spinsters, such as the witches (Weird Sisters) in MacBeth and the Moirae (The Fates) in Greek and Roman mythology. That said, there was no previous hint that the aunts were witches, so the revelation is both surprising and justified given their characterizations.

Morwenna now has a close and very real danger in the aunts. The author has "upped the stakes" from the previous dangers in order to build the story.



Pages 185 through 210

Pages 185 through 210 Summary

Morwenna takes the train to South Wales to meet with her Auntie Teg for ten days or so. Morwenna resolves to save up some "running away" money in case she needs to flee from her witch aunts. Auntie Teg's warm, cozy, and decidedly nonmagical home is a welcome sanctuary for Morwenna. Morwenna explains some of Auntie Teg's story, including that she is having an affair with a married politician. Auntie Teg keeps the affair under wraps because to expose the affair would be to ruin the politician's career.

Morwenna visits Grampar in the nursing home, who greets her warmly. Morwenna spends the next few days visiting old haunts she and her sister used to go to. She also meets up with Moira, her childhood friend, finding the two have little to talk about. Morwenna visits a wild place called Croggin Bog in search of fairies, and she also visits several industrial ruins. But she finds no fairies. Morwenna rings in the New Year by visiting her Aunt Flossie.

A visit to a final wild place, nicknamed Dingly Dell, results in magic. Dead sister Mor appears in ghostly form, unable to speak and frozen in time as a fourteen-year-old girl. Morwenna has a one-sided conversation with the spirit. At the end, a fairy speaks to Morwenna, saying the cryptic "Doing is doing," and gives her a magical staff in place of the cane Morwenna uses to walk around.

Morwenna attends a party put on by her hometown former friend Leah. At the party, a boy named Owen flirts and cuddles with her. Morwenna is not romantically interested in him, but she enjoys the warmth and contact, so she lets him continue. Soon Owen has his hands between Morwenna's leg, and Morwenna grabs Owen's penis. Owen jumps away and calls Morwenna a "slut" for this transgression. Morwenna is sad and confused.

After another tense night and day with the witch aunts, Morwenna returns to Arlinghurst for the spring term. Morwenna reconnects with her schoolmates, including Deirdre. Everyone has Christmas gifts to show off. But Morwenna is much more excited about the continuation of the book club. The club has another meeting Morwenna describes as great, and she gets advice for new books to order through the library.

Pages 185 through 210 Analysis

The coming of age theme is continued and expanded upon. Though it has been only nine months since she lived in South Wales, Morwenna finds it difficult to relate to her old friends, including Moira, with whom she has little to talk about. Morwenna has grown and matured, and her inability to relate to old friends reflects this. And Morwenna's maturation is poignantly on display when her dead sister appears once again. The dead sister is stuck forever at fourteen years of age, while Morwenna is now nearly sixteen



and becoming a woman. Morwenna takes an adult look at the situation, stating that she should and must grow beyond the little girl she was at the time of her sister's death. This realization in itself is a sign of maturation.

In this section, Morwenna is given a magical cane by a fairy in the woods. This item is a "hero prop," an important piece of property associated with the protagonist. Its presence is a "setup" which creates the expectation of a matching "payoff." The reader wonders what the cane will be used for and how it will factor in to Morwenna's fight against the evil witches opposing her.

Morwenna's unfortunate sexual encounter with Owen demonstrates the author's interest in exposing inequality between the sexes and gender discrimination. In the societal patriarchy, Owen has been given tacit approval for his sexual urges and behaviors, but when Morwenna demonstrates the same urges she is labeled a "slut," a clear double standard.



Pages 210 through 240

Pages 210 through 240 Summary

In early January 1980, Morwenna's leg pain becomes so bad she must go to the hospital. The doctor advises that she be kept in traction for a week. Morwenna spends a hellish week in the hospital suffering the indignity of bedpans and intense pain from the forced stretching of her leg. Miss Carroll visits Morwenna in the hospital and offers her books from the library, and Morwenna is very grateful.

Morwenna's friends from the book club visit her in the hospital, as does Daniel. Then, Morwenna's mother visits her again with another night attack. Morwenna is paralyzed and unable to move. Morwenna casts the Litany Against Fear, and it works to drive her mother off. Morwenna wonders why her protection circle spell is not effective, and how her mother knew she was vulnerable in the hospital.

The next day, Wim visits Morwenna. He expresses desire to go to a science fiction convention in Bristol and Morwenna hopes she can convince Daniel to give her enough money to go on the trip. Wim heard rumors that Morwenna is a witch and that her mother is a witch. Though Morwenna doesn't want to talk about it, Wim presses her, and Morwenna admits that there is magic and that her mother is a bad witch. The conversation ends with Morwenna promising to show Wim that magic is real by taking him to see fairies.

Morwenna is let go from the hospital, and she spends a couple days bedridden in the library and doing schoolwork remotely. Then, Daniel and Aunt Anthea (one of the three witches) arrive and take Morwenna to rest up at home. Morwenna spends the next days mostly bedridden but able to struggle around on her throbbing leg, which she is convinced has been made worse from the hospital treatment. Morwenna informs Auntie Teg of her condition, and she also calls Sam (her grandfather). Sam says he will visit her the next day.

Sam visits. Morwenna senses that Sam is unmagical but strong nonetheless. The aunts seem put off by him, probably because they know they cannot manipulate him. Sam tells old stories, and he ends by inviting Morwenna to go to an acupuncture session for her leg.

Morwenna goes to acupuncture and she is amazed at its effectiveness. She considers it a strong body magic. The acupuncturist recommends Morwenna go once a week for six weeks. Daniel cannot always drive her, so Morwenna will have to take a long bus and train ride to get to the acupuncture clinic.

Morwenna returns to Arlinghurst, and she notices that attitudes have changed and that most everyone seems friendlier to her. She theorizes that it's because they thought she was faking her leg injury. Now that she was in the hospital, everybody knows her leg



injury is real. Morwenna gets back into the school schedule, which includes watching a presentation of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Pages 210 through 240 Analysis

This section marks a departure, in that Morwenna is faced with a concrete physical challenge (the worsening of her crippled leg), rather than the mental anxieties (including fears that her mother will find her, fear about the witch aunts, and being ridiculed and treated differently at school) that have dominated most of the book. The fact that the book club members, Daniel, and Miss Carroll all show up to wish her well and comfort her is immensely important to Morwenna (insofar that she is creating circles of friendship and making her way socially in the world). In this way, it is equally as revealing for the reader, who is seeing Morwenna come into her own and grow up.

The author creates chemistry between Morwenna and Wim in their scene at the hospital. They have much in common—they are misunderstood, intelligent loners with a great fondness for science fiction. As revealed, Wim also believes in magic, which means he is a believer in instinct, faith, and spirituality.

Sam functions as a mentor figure for Morwenna. In contrast to the witch aunts, Sam's life is proof that one can live happily while living fiercely independently and by one's own rules. Sam accepts Morwenna for who she is completely and without reservation, and he is an anchor in the tempest that is Morwenna's family. Sam is also coded as a genuine, "real" person. While the girls at Arlinghurst obsess about the house competitions or with Christmas gifts, Sam lost his entire family in World War II, so he has a deeper sense of what is really important in life.



Pages 241 through 272

Pages 241 through 272 Summary

The book club meets to discuss a woman writer named Tiptree. Some of the men feel Tiptree is misogynistic, while Morwenna and others feel her writing is brilliant. Afterwards, they convene at the local pub to celebrate the birthday of a club member. Morwenna suggests a wooded place called Poacher's Wood to Wim as a place they can go to possibly see a fairy. Poacher's Wood happens to be owned by Harriet in the book club, and Wim gets Harriet's permission for them to visit there. At the end of the meeting, the librarian (Greg) warns Morwenna about being alone with Wim, given his reputation.

Wim meets up with Morwenna prior to their heading out to Poacher's Wood. Morwenna reveals she is aware of Wim's reputation and the story of his getting a girl pregnant. Wim states that the girl was never pregnant, but he dumped her because she told everyone she was pregnant except him, to the point a private matter became fodder for the whole town. Morwenna and Wim also argue about the merits of the work of writer Robert Heinlein. Morwenna feels Heinlein's stands up for dignity and humanity, while Wim feels he is a fascist.

Morwenna and Wim travel to Poacher's wood, and Wim indeed does have the spirit of belief in him. He sees a fairy. Wim asks Morwenna about her past, and she reveals what the reader had long suspected—Morwenna's sister died in a battle with their mother. She was hit by a car, but the magic battle is what really did it. Morwenna also suspects her mother of giving Grampar a stroke. Wim tells Morwenna that she has to face down her mother, maybe even kill her, but Morwenna doesn't think killing is the right thing to do. Before parting, the two kiss, and the girls at Arlinghurst are buzzing with rumors of Morwenna's new boyfriend. For her part, Morwenna feels conflicted about Wim because she feels his feelings aren't real due to the fact she cast a spell (the "karass") on the book club in order for people to like her and protect her.

Wim accompanies Morwenna on her journey to the acupuncture clinic. Morwenna confesses that she made a karass and that Wim's feelings might not be entirely his own, but rather the product of magic. Their relationship continues to blossom, with Wim holding Morwenna's hand. They discuss the fairies. Wim feels they might be the altered forms of dead humans, but Morwenna doesn't think so.

Back at Arlinghurst, Morwenna is told by a catty schoolmate that Wim was seen with his old girlfriend dancing at a disco. Morwenna is hurt and confronts Wim. They get to the point of breaking up and never speaking again, and Wim reveals that he went dancing just to test out Morwenna's theory that magic was keeping them together. Since they came to the precipice of breaking up and because they agree not to break up, Wim has proven that magic has no power over their relationship.



Morwenna and Wim go to Poacher's Wood once more. Wim touches Morwenna's walking stick that the fairies gave her, and he is suddenly able to see all the fairies in the glen clearly. They end the trip by kissing passionately.

Pages 241 through 272 Analysis

In these pages, Wim reveals the truth about his relationship with his girlfriend, answering the "is he or isn't he a bad person?" question set up earlier. Even before this revelation, however, Wim has demonstrated himself to be a kind and intelligent soul, a kindred spirit with Morwenna, and so the truth of the relationship is only a confirmation of Wim's innate decency.

The fact that Wim is able to see the fairies when most people don't is a nice metaphor for love. Wim and Morwenna experience fairy magic, and also too the magic of love. They are made for each other, and they experience the world in the same way. Morwenna is learning that ordinary things (like love) can be just as magical as the fairy world.

In fact, Wim forces a large change in Morwenna with regards to her magic. He danced at the disco with his ex-girlfriend to force Morwenna to see that the magic she knew had no hold over their relationship. Wim has given her a new magic (love) to take the place of her childish, lonely world of fairies. In this way, Morwenna is set up to sever her relationship with the magical world in favor of her embrace of the mundane world. The fairy world has come to represent many things for Morwenna in the novel - loneliness, selfishness, the hurtful past, memories of her dead sister, and confusion. She must cast all of this aside in order to move ahead with her life.



Pages 273 through 302

Pages 273 through 302 Summary

Morwenna spends the next days in relative normalcy, attending classes. She goes to the doctor and gets a birth control pill prescription and she buys a package of condoms at the drug store, in anticipation of a sexual relationship with Wim.

The next week, Wim is set up to attend acupuncture with Morwenna again, but Daniel makes a surprise visit to take Morwenna by car instead of train. This forces an awkward meeting between Wim and Daniel, as Daniel had no idea Morwenna was romantically involved. However, Wim and Daniel have similar sensibilities and a love of books, so they impress each other.

It is Valentine's Day. Wim gives Morwenna a package of three books, and Morwenna gives Wim a poem she had written for him. Daniel invites Wim to the house, and Morwenna, Wim, Daniel, and the witch sisters spend a day together. Morwenna decides the aunts aren't truly evil, just set in their ways and afraid of change. In other words, "English" in Morwenna's word.

Daniel drives Wim and Morwenna to an old castle. There, Wim and Morwenna see a fairy, who speaks to them. The fairy's message is cryptic, but they deduce the fairies want Morwenna to go "into the Valleys" (South Wales, where Morwenna's mother is) for something important. Wim wants to go with Morwenna, even if it means potentially great danger.

In South Wales, Morwenna visits her Auntie Teg and Grampar once again. At Grampar's nursing home, Morwenna runs into Auntie Gwennie, whom she hates because she is on the side of her mother and very rude.

The next day, Morwenna arrives to an industrial ruin she calls Ithilien, after a location in Lord of the Rings. There, the fairy Glorfindel along with a great many fairies are waiting for her. Also there is the ghost of Mor, the dead sister. Glorfindel instructs her to go to another favorite site to perform a ritual that will make Mor whole again and able to fully join the fairies.

Morwenna goes to the ruin the next day, alone. A huge party of fairies are there. One fairy turns Morwenna's walking stick into a knife and instructs Morwenna to commit suicide by plunging it into herself. According to the fairy's logic, this is the way for Morwenna and Mor to be together and whole again. Morwenna adamantly refuses, having Wim and everything else to live for in life, and even as the fairies crowd her and urge her to use the knife, she refuses. She becomes the embodiment of flame in order to burn the wooden knife and show the fairies she doesn't want to follow their instruction. Mor catches fire as well, and the sisters have a sort of final goodbye as these flaming entities.



At that moment, Morwenna's mother shows up after having followed the commotion of the fairies. She attacks Morwenna by tearing pages from a beloved edition of *Lord of the Rings* and hurling the pages at Morwenna like magical bullets. Essentially, the mother is using Morwenna's love of books against her.

Calmly, Morwenna transforms the pages into their more essential nature - trees. A huge forest grows up around Morwenna and her mother. Morwenna's mother is soon enveloped in nature and defeated.

The book ends with Morwenna surrounded by the people who mean something to her - Sam, Daniel, Wim, and Grampar. Morwenna vows to live life to the fullest, and to only use her magic sparingly and for the side of good in the future.

Pages 273 through 302 Analysis

Book endings are naturally crucial as they must tie up all of the plot and thematic elements of the book. And that is done here. By enveloping her walking staff in fire and rejecting the fairies' pleas to join their world, Morwenna is successfully bidding goodbye to the past and embracing the bright present and future of love with Wim. Morwenna's magical world was in many ways a crutch, as literalized in the wooden walking stick - an excuse for not participating in the world, a way to absolve herself from personal responsibility, a license to be weird for weirdness' sake. The crutch is destroyed in cleansing fire.

Morwenna also has her climactic fight with her mother which had been building for nearly the entire book. However, Morwenna's most important decision came with rejecting the fairies and resolving her grief over her sister. Appropriately enough, Morwenna vanquishes her mother with almost trivial ease, showing how far she has come as a magician as well as a woman. Because she has rejected the past, and her mother is an agent of that past, her mother can no longer harm her.

In the end, Morwenna resolves to go on living a full life. She will continue to be magical and she will use her magical powers, but only on occasion when the need arises. Here, "magic" is essentially "the past." Morwenna vows to use her past life experiences in order to keep growing and progressing, but she will not let the past consume or control her.



Characters

Morwenna

Morwenna is the protagonist of the book. She is a fifteen-year-old girl living in 1979 England and Wales. She is also a witch capable of seeing and communicating with fairy beings, and of casting magical spells. At the start of the book, Morwenna has run away from her mother (also a witch) and is now living with the father she never knew and attending a preparatory school for rich girls. Grief over her recently dead sister is a constant source of pain for her.

Morwenna is eccentric and precocious, rendering adult opinions on a great many subjects, including religion, sexuality, friendship, and family. She is not content with the usual trappings of a middle-class life, and she is most content with her nose in a book. Her love of science fiction novels consumes most of her time, and she is constantly commenting on the books she is reading.

A misunderstood and loner figure, Morwenna begins to grow and open up when she attends a book club at the library, where she is able to converse with like-minded people about her passion. One of these attendees is Wim and Morwenna eventually has a romantic relationship with the older boy.

By the end of the novel, Morwenna has matured physically, emotionally, and spiritually. She is able to say goodbye to her sister and not let her memory rule her life. She is also able to vanquish her vindictive mother in order to embrace the future.

Wim

Wim (short for William) is nineteen years old and Morwenna's romantic interest. He comes in fairly late in the novel, after Morwenna casts a "karass" spell and attends the library's science fiction book club. Like Morwenna, Wim is intelligent and sensitive, and he loves reading science fiction. He has long blond hair, and Morwenna considers him very handsome and falls for him instantly.

Wim has a misunderstood past that he will not discuss with others. Rumors around town are that Wim made his girlfriend pregnant and then encouraged her to get an abortion, revelations which shocked the town and which made Wim an outcast in many sectors of the society. Morwenna is warned by a couple of acquaintances to steer clear of Wim because of these rumors, but Morwenna's attraction wins out. In reality, Wim did not impregnate his girlfriend, and he only refused to speak about the incident because he considered it a personal matter and not a proper subject for rumormongering.

Like Morwenna, Wim is in tune with the magic world, though not as strongly as Morwenna. With Morwenna's help, Wim is made to see many of the fairies which populate the more natural and untamed sections of Great Britain. He sees the fairies



much better when he is holding Morwenna's walking stick, which is imbued with magical power.

Wim is very interested in Morwenna and her world, and by the end of the novel they have cemented their relationship and are strong romantic partners.

Morwenna's Mother (Liz)

Morwenna's mother is a vindictive and powerful witch. In an effort to stop her mother from casting a spell to gain even more power over nature and people, Morwenna's leg was crippled and her twin sister was killed. Throughout the novel, Morwenna's mother is on a hunt to locate Morwenna and harm her with magic. In the end, Morwenna bests her mother in a battle.

Daniel

Daniel is the biological father that Morwenna never knew until the start of the novel. He is a caretaker for his family's mansion. It is revealed that he has long been under the magical control of his witch sisters, and so he is a rather unmotivated, milquetoast individual. However, Morwenna strikes up a friendship with him, as they both love science fiction.

Auntie Teg

Auntie Teg is Morwenna's aunt and sister to her mother. Unlike other aunts, Auntie Teg has rejected Morwenna's mother absolutely, and so Morwenna and she get along very well. Morwenna visits Auntie Teg in South Wales on a few occasions.

Grampar

Grampar is Morwenna's grandfather on her mother's side. He is in a nursing home after suffering a stroke, and Morwenna wishes she could do something to get him into a better living environment. Morwenna suspects that her mother intentionally gave Grampar a stroke through magic.

Sam

Sam is Morwenna's grandfather on her father's side. He is Jewish and decidedly unmagical. He introduces Morwenna to Plato, and they become close due to an intellectual compatibility.



The Three Aunts

Morwenna comes to live with three aunts when she runs away to her father Daniel. After a time, Morwenna realizes with horror that they are in fact witches. They try to get Morwenna to get her ears pierced, an action that would sever her ties with magic, and so Morwenna resists them strongly.

Mor

Mor is Morwenna's identical twin sister. She died in a magical battle with their mother about one year prior to the start of the book. Morwenna is in constant grief, and she must learn to resolve that grief in order to grow as a person. Mor appears in spectral form in several instances.

Glorfindel

Glorfindel is a human-looking fairy who befriends Morwenna. He appears as a handsome teenager, and Morwenna is attracted to him. Unlike most fairies, Glorfindel is able to communicate fairly clearly in English about things the fairies want Morwenna to do.



Objects/Places

South Wales

Morwenna is Welsh, as is most of her family, and she initially lives in South Wales before fleeing to London. The author characterizes Wales as a wild place, a perfect habitat for magic to flourish.

Arlinghurst

Arlinghurst is the name of a fictional preparatory school Morwenna attends after her flight to her father in London. It has a high tuition and many of its attendees are snobbish and rich, making Morwenna feel out of place. It is also a very rigid place with no room for individuality.

Acupuncture

Morwenna receives acupuncture treatments for her leg after her leg becomes so bad she is hospitalized. Morwenna is greatly helped by the treatments, and she considers acupuncture a form of magic.

Science Fiction Book Club

Morwenna eventually joins a book club at the library. Here, she is able to spread her proverbial wings, blossoming by exploring her passion and striking up friendships with like-minded people.

Magical Walking Stick

Morwenna is given a walking stick by the fairies which is full of magical power. She uses it to walk with her crippled leg, and she feels more comfortable with it than with other canes. The fairies turn the walking stick into a knife and try to get Morwenna to stab herself with it, which she refuses to do.

Abercwmbi

This city in Wales is the site of a "Phurnacite" factory which is harming the natural environment (and thus the fairies). Morwenna and her sister perform a ritual which successfully closes the factory. Years later, Morwenna returns to the place where she is confronted by fairies and where she defeats her mother in a magical battle.



Lord of the Rings

This seminal fantasy trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien is Morwenna's favorite piece of literature. Morwenna's mother uses a beloved edition of the book to attack Morwenna in the story's climax.

The Symposium

Sam gives Morwenna a copy of Plato's *The Symposium*. The book represents the affection and intellectual connection between grandfather and granddaughter.

Earrings

For Christmas, Morwenna's aunts give her three pairs of earrings, along with an offer to go to the jeweler to get her ears pierced. Ear piercing prevents magic-users from properly using magic, and so the gift reveals to Morwenna that her aunts are in fact witches trying to attack her in a subtle way.

Karass

To protect herself from her mother's spectral attacks, Morwenna casts a karass spell, a magical protective circle. The next day, she finds such a circle in the form of the science fiction book club. The timing has Morwenna wondering whether the book club members are friendly to her just because of the magic of the karass.



Themes

The Many Uses of Magic

Among Others could be categorized as magical realism, a literary genre that injects a magical element into an otherwise recognizable, modern world. In this case, only very few people in the world can recognize and use the latent magic which exists in nature. Since Morwenna is a witch who can do this, she is different from the other children and an outcast. However, this is a role which she initially embraces, feeling that others are superficial or intellectually inferior and not worth her time or attention.

Magic functions in the book as a kind of insulation and an excuse to ward oneself off from the rest of the world. Magic is also associated with Morwenna's past; she associates magic strongly with her hateful mother she has run away from, with her childhood in the wilds of Wales, and with her deceased twin sister. For these reasons, magic is both a source of pride (Morwenna is exceptional and special because of this power) and a source of pain (because it creates divisions and because it summons up feelings of regret and grief). Morwenna is conflicted about magic; she can't tell whether the things in her life happen because of magic or because of the actions she takes as an ordinary girl.

In the end, Morwenna doesn't entirely reject magic, but she does contain it and shape it for her own purposes, indicating her growth into womanhood. Joining the modern world and rejecting her magical and painful past, Morwenna finds her identity in her relationship with Wim and her newfound family (Daniel, Sam) and friends (the book club).

Love of Science Fiction

Morwenna's dominant characteristic is an unapologetic obsession with reading science fiction books. There are countless references made to actual science fiction books appropriate to the time period (1980 and before), and Morwenna discusses the merits and drawbacks of various volumes at some length. No doubt this is an autobiographical element borrowed from the author's own love of these same books. The remarkable number of references will either be a delight for devout science fiction/fantasy fans, or somewhat nauseating and next to meaningless for the more casual reader.

Regardless of whether the frequent references resonate with readers who may have read the same books, more interesting is what this obsession reveals about the character of Morwenna. Science fiction functions much like magic for Morwenna; it is a different and special thing that insulates Morwenna from other people. It allows her to create distance in order to more carefully examine her own life through the lens of these authors and their stories. Science fiction is escape from the "reality" of her murderous mother, her crippled leg, the taunts of "Commie" or "Peg Leg" at school, and the anxiety



of living in a strange place (with a father who abandoned her at birth) and going to a strange school.

But it is clear that Morwenna (and the author) feel that science fiction literature is nothing but a positive. It provokes thinking and a sense of wonder, the same sense of wonder Jo Walton harnessed to create *Among Others*. And if it fosters physical loneliness, it actually creates mental connectedness in the form of the conversation on a great many life subjects between the reader and writer.

Coming of Age

Among Others is a coming of age novel, a novel in which a boy or girl grows up in significant ways and takes important strides toward becoming an adult. As a precocious teenager of fifteen years, Morwenna is right on the cusp of womanhood. Some of these changes are physical, such as when Morwenna devotes several entries to searching for a bra for her developing breasts.

But more important are the emotional changes Morwenna endures. This includes romantic feelings as well as sexual lust, which she exhibits with the fairy Glorfindel and later with Wim. Morwenna is not shocked by her new feelings, being an intelligent girl knowledgeable about sex, but still she must grapple with them.

Morwenna's emotional journey takes her from an eccentric misanthrope to a more fully-developed social being, including being in a romantic relationship with Wim. This includes being able to give a final goodbye to her dead sister, to grow up past the mental age of fourteen when her sister passed. Morwenna comes to realize that her future is more interesting than her past, even when that past is filled with magic and fairies and the companionship of her sister. At the end of the book, Morwenna resolves to shed the harmful aspects of the past, only keeping those aspects of the past she can use in a positive way. With that kind of wisdom, Morwenna has fully entered adulthood.



Style

Point of View

Among Others is told from a first-person perspective, from the point of view of fifteen-year-old Morwenna. Morwenna is dealing with many typical issues a girl of that age would face, including changes from puberty, fitting in at school, finding her place in life, and dealing with romantic and sexual feelings.

However, Morwenna is also a very atypical girl. She is a witch capable of wielding magic, and she is in tune with the magical world of fairies. At the start of the novel, she has also run away from her mother after a battle in which her sister was killed. So, Morwenna comes from a world (the wilderness of Wales, as opposed to the stifling urban jungle of London) where magic is more commonplace. Perhaps appropriately, Morwenna is a "wild child," an eccentric teenager who does not fit in to the rich preparatory school of Arlinghurst.

By using first-person point of view, the author has clearly made the book a story of Morwenna's journey into womanhood. The reader is privy to Morwenna's private struggles with her identity, her grief, and her fears and uncertainties. By the end, Morwenna battles her demons and is able to find the confidence and forward-looking spirit she will need to have a happy and fulfilling life.

Setting

Among Others takes place in the fall and winter of 1979 to 1980 in the United Kingdom. Morwenna flees from South Wales (her hometown, where she was born and raised) and travels to London, England to live with her father Daniel in a large estate home.

Wales is characterized as a wild place that is particularly influenced by magic. As such, it is the perfect spot for wizards and witches to exercise their powers and to commune with the magical creatures, the fairies. The Wales of *Among Others* has several industrial ruins that have been long abandoned and have regrown some foliage, making it a ripe environment for fairies. It is these ruins that Morwenna and her sister play in, and to which Morwenna returns.

In contrast to the wild and untamed Wales, London is characterized as stifling, conformist, and crowded. Morwenna is a child of Wales, also wild and untamed, and so she bristles against the conformity expected of her at Arlinghurst.

There are a few mentions of topical events, such as Russians invading Afghanistan, but mostly the setting is devoid of elements that would specifically date the material. Whether true or not to late 1970s England and Wales, *Among Others'* setting feels depressed and lifeless, as if the land was struggling to come back from a economic recession or similar.



Language and Meaning

In trying to emulate the private journal entries of a precocious fifteen-year-old, author Jo Walton employs several strategies. The narrative's vocabulary is advanced and certainly at an adult level, which is appropriate given Morwenna's high intelligence and love of reading as well as writing. Morwenna tackles serious adult subjects with a wisdom beyond her years.

Secondly, there is a stream of consciousness quality to the writing, demonstrating the jumbled mind of a busy fifteen-year-old struggling with juggling school, books, her romantic feelings, her search for self-identity, and her efforts to protect herself and continue hiding from her mother. Morwenna might mention her thoughts on a specific novel by Ursula K. Le Guin, and then jump to what she had for lunch, and then jump to thoughts on Daniel or recollections of her twin sister. This happens sometimes in the span of a single journal entry or even a few paragraphs. This "jumbled" quality has the additional effect of evoking the unrehearsed, casual act of recording the day's events in a journal entry intended just for oneself, and not really for public consumption.

The book includes touches of slang/vernacular, as might be appropriate to British teenagers in the late 1970s. One example is using "brill" (brilliant) to describe something pleasant or agreeable.

Structure

The novel is in epistolary form, meaning it is written as a series of discrete entries. In this case, the entries are intended as the private diary entries of Morwenna, who is writing the night after many of the events are taking place. The dates of the entries allow the reader to piece together a chronology as well as to determine the exact time (fall and winter of 1979-80).

The novel begins with an entry dated 1975, which is essentially a flashback as the rest of the novel takes place in 1979. The author chose this structure as a way to show the reader what Morwenna has lost, namely the companionship and love of her sister. It is important to show Mor alive and vital, so that the reader understands Morwenna's grief at her death.

After this brief flashback, the reader is given an entry directly after Morwenna's running away from her mother. The author withholds crucial information—such as why Morwenna is running away, and what exactly happened to her twin sister—increasing dramatic interest and compelling the reader to read further to discover the answers to those obvious narrative questions.

Throughout, the author builds expectations for a final showdown between Morwenna and her mother. After the initial flight, Morwenna's ominous contact with her mother builds, first with nasty letters, then with visits from her mother in a magical, spectral

form. Given this build-up, the novel rightly climaxes with an actual physical confrontation.

Quotes

"We grew up playing freely in the ruins and had no real sense of this history. It was a wonderful place for children. It was abandoned and grown over and ignored, and once you slipped away from the houses it was wild" (p. 33).

"You can never be sure where you are with magic. And you can never be sure if you've really done anything or if you were just playing. And in any case, I shouldn't do anything at all like that, because it will draw her [Morwenna's mother's] attention and I have too much of it already" (p. 43).

"I loved Mor, but I never appreciated her enough. I never really understood how wonderful it was to always have someone to talk to who would know what you were talking about, and someone to play with who understood the kind of things I wanted to play" (p. 67).

"Fireworks and a bonfire last night in the school grounds. I saw some of the fire-fairies clustering. Nobody else saw them. You can only see them if you already believe in them, which is why children are the most likely to. People like me don't stop seeing them. It would be insane of me to stop believing in them" (p. 98).

"What I mean is, when I look at other people, other girls in school, and see what they like and what they're happy with and what they want, I don't feel as if I'm part of their species. And sometimes—sometimes I don't care. I care about so few people really. Sometimes it feels as if it's only books that make life worth living [...]" (p. 119).

"It seemed a cruel trick of the gods that such a glorious creature should have to go about on a bicycle. He sat down directly opposite me, so close that I could see the raindrops beading on his hair. He must be eighteen or nineteen. I wonder why he isn't in university? He has somewhat the look of a lion, or of a young Alexander the Great" (p. 135).

"I don't think I am like other people. I mean on some deep fundamental level. It's not just being half a twin and reading a lot and seeing fairies. It's not just being outside when they're all inside. I used to be inside. I think there's a way I stand aside and look backwards at things when they're happening which isn't normal" (p. 169).

"If [Mor had] lived, we would have become different people. I think. I don't think we'd have been like the aunts and stayed together all the time. I think we'd always have been friends, but we'd have lived in different places and had different friends. We'd have been



aunts to each other's children. It's too late for that now. I'm going to grow up and she isn't. She's frozen where she is, and I'm changing, and I want to change" (p. 197).

"It's just, the first time I saw you, I felt as if you were seeing right into me. And when I heard you'd said your mother was a witch, I thought—you know, did you ever read so much SF that you start thinking you don't know quite what's impossible any more? Where you're ready to start admitting hypotheses that you know are screwy, but" (p. 220).

"For an instant, I felt wonderfully happy, and then I remembered about the karass magic. I'd cheated. I'd made it happen. He didn't really like me, well, maybe he did, but he liked me because the magic had made him like me. That didn't mean he didn't really think he liked me now, of course, but it made it much more complicated" (p. 250-51).

"I looked at him. He was rarer than a unicorn, a beautiful boy in a red-checked shirt who read and thought and talked about books. How much of his life had my magic touched, to make him what he was? Had he even existed before? Or what had he been? There's no knowing, no way to know. He was here now, and I was, and that was all" (p. 265).

"Things will happen that I can't imagine. I'll change and grow into a future that will be unimaginably different from the past. I'll be alive. I'll be me. I'll be reading my book. I'll never drown my books or break my staff. I'll learn while I live" (p. 302).



Topics for Discussion

What are some theories for what magic symbolizes in the book?

What reasons does Morwenna give for believing her aunts are witches?

What is the nature of the misunderstood piece of Wim's past? What does the author communicate about human nature with this part of the story?

Why do the fairies give Morwenna a wooden walking stick? What does the stick symbolize, and how is it important to the resolution of the story?

Describe Morwenna's obsession with science fiction. Why does Morwenna like this literature so much? How does it help her to cope with or understand real life?

How does Morwenna describe the majority of the girls at Arlinghurst? Why doesn't Morwenna want to be like them?

What is the state of Morwenna's initial relationship with Daniel? How does it change by the end of the book? How do you imagine the relationship will be like five years from when the book ends?