

# **Blue Angel Study Guide**

## **Blue Angel by Francine Prose**

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# Plot Summary

Francine Prose's novel "Blue Angel" features a 47-year-old English professor whose infidelity is orchestrated by one of his students. The story opens up innocently enough, with Professor Ted Swenson conducting classes at a small liberal arts college in Vermont. He is a creative writing professor and he has 9 students for the semester. One student, Angela Argo, a girl that would hardly have turned his head even in his younger years, manages to capture his attention with pages from her novel, "Eggs."

When Angela first asks to see Ted in his office to discuss her work, it is completely aboveboard and not out of the realm of propriety. Ted gives her good feedback and tells her that it is very, very good. He later has lunch with Magda, a colleague of his, who is shocked that he likes Angela's work as the work that Angela turned in for Magda was subpar and disturbed. Ted doesn't think that they are talking about the same girl.

And so begins the slippery slope effect. First he continues to read her work in the confines of his office, instead of in class as the rest of the students must do. Then, he takes the work home with him. He takes it to another blurred line when he starts calling her and leaving messages for her on voicemail. Each installment of Angela's novel becomes more graphic and more inappropriate in its content. Then, when he attends a faculty dinner meeting at the Dean's home, and after much alcohol, Ted reacts horribly and vocally to the stringent sexual harassment rules that the university has.

The reader learns that Ted loves his wife deeply, but that their relationship has become boring to him. His daughter, Ruby, has started college, herself, though not at Euston. She is upset with her father and mother for thwarting Ruby's attempts to date a notable ladies' man in town. Upset, Ruby had left to attend college where she wouldn't be under her parents' watchful eyes.

The fact that Ted doesn't really talk with his wife anymore is part of his problem as he continues to play with the fire that he sees in Angela's work, and in Angela. He wholeheartedly is ready to believe anything that she tells him, even that his book is her all time favorite. His ability for self-preservation is overcome by his desire to be near Angela.

For most of the book Ted doesn't act on his inclinations and thoughts. However, when Swenson agrees to take Angela off campus to a computer store to get her new computer, then comes back and carries it up to her dorm room for her, he's already crossed the line in his own mind. In a blink of an eye he is not smart enough to see what is happening and before he knows it, he and Angela are having sex.

After the encounter Ted notes with some consternation that Angela has locked the door when they entered, though Ted hadn't noticed at the time. This shows forethought on Angela's part, and should have been a warning bell to Ted. It is shortly afterward that Angela begs Ted to take her manuscript to his agent in New York. He tries to talk her out of it but she is insistent. To keep her happy he agrees to try. When he sees Len, his



agent, his agent cuts to the chase quickly asking Ted if he's sleeping with Angela. Ted denies it, but Len warns him that this type of liaison is lethal to his reputation and career.

Ted goes home but in his haste leaves Angela's manuscript sample lying on the table. He tries to retrieve it but it is gone. On Monday he asks Angela to come to his office where he tells her that the agent wasn't interested in reading it. She accuses him of lying to her, that he never even gave it to the agent. He assures her that he did but that the agent had refused. Incensed, she tells him that she only let him have sex with her so that he would pass along her manuscript. Shocked and hurt, he sends her out of the office. Unbeknownst to him, she has taped the entire episode and takes the tape promptly to the dean, who the next day asks Ted to resign. Ted refuses stating that he is the victim in this case. The Dean doesn't believe him.

Knowing that it is going to hit the airwaves shortly, he takes his wife, Sherrie, out to eat and breaks the news to her. She does not seem surprised and even preempts his disclosure to her. She says that she has watched him for many years struggle to keep his pants on around the students, and that she figured that sooner or later he would just give in. She says that she hopes the school crucifies him. She tries to stay at their family's house to keep up appearances, but after two weeks she can't stand it.

There is a hearing at the school where a committee is convened to hear statements. A long list of witnesses parade forward to support Angela's claim of sexual misconduct while Ted has none to vouch for him. Angela's carefully laid trap has been plotted to perfection, and even the innocent meetings are now made to look obscene. In the end, Ted realizes that he should never have tried to fight the system in the first place, a system, he realizes, that never really wanted him in the first place. While this part of his life is over, including his career and his marriage, he feels as if he's gained some clarity and some self forgiveness for having abandoned his actual career as a novelist.



# Chapters 1-3

## Summary

### Chapter 1

The novel opens on the fifth week of classes at Euston University in Vermont. Dr. Ted Swenson, a creative writing professor, begins class. He has only 9 students in his class and his attempts at humor go right over their heads. It is, in fact, slightly inappropriate (he wonders out loud why the manuscripts he's been evaluating seem to all be focusing on people having sex with animals). At age 47, Ted finds himself watching his students as they begin working and wondering how time could have so rapidly passed him by.

The school has been implementing many new protocols, all designed to keep the college from entertaining numerous lawsuits. As a result, faculty have been subjected to all sorts of new meetings, outlining environmental safety, blood borne pathogens, and emergency procedures in case of a terrorist attack. Most of the buildings are being upgraded to include better handicap access, and the sidewalks and hardscapes were getting all of the repair dollars so that no one will slip and fall and sue the school. Ted thinks all of it is a gigantic waste of resources, and of his time.

Clariss, one of his creative writing students, whom Ted admits is a stunning beauty asks him if everything is all right. He assures her that it is. The reader is introduced to the rest of the class which consists of seven girls and two boys. Danny, one of the only boys, is having his manuscript evaluated by the class. There is a graphic and shocking ending to his story, where the protagonist has sex with an uncooked chicken.

The group is appalled at the section. Nancy, who has a crush on Danny, tries to rescue him by stating that it just needs a little fixing. The group chimes in, and everyone but Angela thinks that the suggestions for revision are excellent. Angela is vehement in her argument that the solutions being offered are pedantic at best. Ted inwardly agrees, but doesn't commit to any of the suggestions, stating that as the author, Danny is the one to make the final decision. Ted tells Angela that her manuscript can be evaluated next. Angela pleads for more time, saying that it isn't finished. She asks if she can come and see Dr. Swenson in his office to discuss it first. He agrees and the bell rings.

### Chapter 2

This chapter shows Swenson having a conversation with an advocate for the school. Her name is Kelly and she regales the professor with the history of Euston. Swenson lets her talk, but doesn't comment. The reader learns that for a small liberal arts college the dropout rate among women is extremely high. Swenson attributes it to the fact that the girls catch on quicker than the boys that they are wasting their parent's money.

Ted goes to the campus's health clinic where his wife works. When he walks in there is no one there, so he pretends to be an emergency victim, calling for help. His wife



comes running and after she calms down, she laughs at his antics. The reader sees that Ted is still very much in love with his wife, Sherrie, whom he describes as an Italian goddess. Since there is no one around, they go back into one of the exam rooms and have sex. He laughingly tells her that the meeting that they have to go to in a few minutes is on sexual harassment and that this impromptu sexual rendezvous would definitely qualify as such.

Shortly after their conjugal visit they go to a faculty meeting across campus. They sit behind Lauren Healy, a feminist literature professor. She has an obvious dislike for Ted. Ted only half listens to the lecture on sexual harassment. He notes that there have been many instances where he could have taken advantage of the obvious advances from former students, but he'd been smart enough not to go there and do that.

### Chapter 3

The reader learns that Ted has a daughter named, Ruby, who is attending a college (not Euston). The reader also learns that because of a disagreement about a boy that Ruby had been seeing, Ruby no longer speaks to her father. As he wakes and realizes that he's spent the night on the couch, he becomes concerned that somehow he'd ended up on the couch as a result of having had a fight with his wife that he doesn't remember. Just as he's about to call her, the phone rings. He answers it thinking it is his wife, but shockingly, it is Angela. He has missed his appointment with her to review her story. She wants to know if he needs to reschedule and apologizes for interrupting him if he was writing. He apologizes and tells her that he will be there in fifteen minutes.

He arrives at his office and is immediately stricken by Angela's attire. In his own words, she looks like a garish tasseled party favor, with her orange ponytail piled on her head, her ripped jeans and white knobby knees, and her fingernails painted purple. Ironically, she is reading a dog-eared copy of "Jane Eyre" while sitting on the floor, propped against his office door. He holds out a hand to help her up. He asks her why she likes Jane Eyre, and she says that she likes how angry Jane is throughout the whole novel.

Angela continues to divulge personal information about herself, that her grades are tanking, and that she just doesn't know how she is going to fit in. Swenson is uncomfortable as he never encourages his students to share their personal lives with him. It is safer that way, he tells himself. She's very nervous and can't manage to sit still for long. Finally, she drags out a beat up orange folder and hands the first chapter of her novel, Eggs, over to him. He attempts to usher her out of the door and only half listens to her as she tries to apologize for waking him, for having typos in the manuscript, and for taking up his time. He smiles and walks her to the door, glad and relieved when she is long gone. He admits that talking to her was also uncomfortable for him as she only reminded him of his own failed attempts to write a novel.

## Analysis

Chapters 1-3



The theme of Regret permeates all three of these first chapters. Swenson regrets not having followed his dream of being a full-time novelist, of having to face his students' terrible writing, and of having alienated his own daughter, Ruby. The only thing that he doesn't seem to regret is his relationship with his wife, which is all that it should be.

As he attends yet another meeting, one of dozens the college has required of the faculty and staff, Ted regrets talking about the chicken in class with the students. He hears from the speaker that even off colored remarks about works of art can lead to law suits and that faculty members must learn to guard against any suggestions of impropriety. Ted only half listens to it, because with more than twenty years at the college, he feels that his position is mostly safe.

The symbol and imagery of the uncooked chicken in the opening chapters, sets the tone for the rest of the story in that the protagonist, Ted, will eventually be found in a compromising situation with his attacker looking down on him (much like the helpless chicken in his student's story). Likewise, there is the symbol of Angela's story, Eggs. The fact that it is also related to a chicken leads the reader to want to make some sort of connection between the two, but there just aren't enough facts to do that yet.

Angela's clothing is an interesting image here as well because comparing Sherrie, Ted's wife, to Angela provides a stark contrast. They are nothing alike, not in temperament, style, or obviously, age. Angela's attire screams rebellion and anti-establishment. The reader learns that Angela might not have had an exactly endearing childhood and that her resolution to cling to a dog-eared copy of Jane Eyre indicates her desire to buy in to the notion of love as a result of extreme anger. Her interpretation of the novel is striking in that she doesn't view the novel as a love story, but as a feminist anger story, where the protagonist eventually has the upper hand in everything.

The environment and setting that the protagonist inhabits sets the tone as well. The school is one that caters to the children of the extremely wealthy who have flunked out of, or disqualified from getting in to, any Ivy League schools. As a result, many of the students fall into categories of those who truly don't care or those who are looking to find the earliest opportunity to leave. Likewise, the school itself is a miasma of unrest, both for the faculty and the students, as the institution is so afraid of a law suit that they've gone overboard in an effort to project compliance.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe the students that are in Professor Swenson's creative writing class.

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss Swenson and why he is dissatisfied with his life.



## Discussion Question 3

Describe the symbolism of the chicken in the first novel and how the author uses it additionally as potential foreshadowing.

## Vocabulary

nostalgia, disintegrating, unglued, protracted, adolescence, pretzeling, quivering, bodice, indistinguishable, intensity, conspired, collaboratively, ensconced





# Chapters 4-6

## Summary

### Chapter 4

In this chapter, Ted goes to his favorite bookstore cafe in Montpelier. He orders his usual, the barista asks how his writing is going (and he inwardly cringes), and how Sherrie is. He gets his coffee and goes to a table in the back. He pulls out Angela's manuscript and decides to have a look. It is a riveting first chapter about a girl hoping that the eggs that she has in an incubator (for a science project) will hatch. The details of how the family came to have the eggs and the incubators is discussed as well. The layers of imagery and symbolism within the novel are exquisitely mature and spellbinding. Ted is shocked, and amazed, and confused. Surely she couldn't have written this, he tells himself. She must have plagiarized it.

The barista sees Ted's disquiet and brings him another coffee on the house. He asks him if everything is okay and Ted tells him he has just been reading student papers. The barista commiserates and shares that he would be an herb farmer if he didn't have to pull cappuccinos for a living. This is a more intense conversation than Ted bargained for and he soon leaves.

### Chapter 5

Two days later, the reader sees Ted racing up the stairs to his classroom. He'd called Angela a few days ago and now is convinced that finally he has a student whose ability makes her worthy of his full attention. He recalls telling her in his phone message, left on her machine that it would be okay with him if they wanted to keep the manuscript out of classroom study for the time being. They could meet in his office during office hours to discuss her progress, he remembers stating. As he opens up the door to go into his classroom, he hopes that he hasn't inadvertently opened up a can of worms for himself with that offer.

He asks the class for their feedback on the next manuscript: Courtney's work. Carlos tells Ted that they never received copies of the work, so none of them had it to review. Courtney, embarrassed states that she has copies but that she'd forgotten to distribute them. She hands them out and everyone begins reading. Ted inwardly groans at the title: "First Kiss...Inner-city Blues." Makeesha gives the story scathing reviews, claiming that it is racist in that it supposes that all people of color belong to gangs and kill babies. Many of the students begin to flay the manuscript, and its author, alive.

Before Swenson can step in Angela comes to Courtney's rescue. Ted is amazed at the confidence that she seems to have gained, almost overnight. He still finds it surprising that a "ferret" of a girl could have written the prose that he read the other day in the



coffee shop. However, watching her spur on an intellectually charged discussion makes him change his mind.

Class ends and Angela asks if he has time to discuss her manuscript. He does. They walk across the quad to his office, but he sends her up the stairs ahead of him, claiming that he wants to check his mailbox first. In reality, he didn't want to have her walk up in front of him, giving her an excuse to accuse him of watching her rear end. He praises himself for being so proactive. Once he comes into the office, Angela quickly tells him that she kept his phone message and has even replayed it a dozen times because it just makes her feel so special. Ted isn't sure how he feels about that.

Angela confesses that she'd read his first book, "Phoenix Time," and that it had deeply moved her, like he had taken a page out of her own diary. Ted inwardly groans, but thanks her for sharing. "Phoenix Time" depicted abused children, suicides, and alcoholic parents, and as a result at most of his signings he'd drawn people who'd been there and done that (on either end). Angela grows still and asks if she can ask Ted a question. He guardedly says yes.

She wants to know if what he wrote in his novel really happened in his real life. He confesses that most of it did happen. She scoots her chair closer so that they can look at her manuscript. He shows her lines that can be taken out, edited, so that the work is stronger. The session ends and she hands him four more pages, then leaves. As soon as she's out of the door he begins reading them. They are golden. Impulsively, he picks up the phone and calls his agent. He only gets the secretary and he hangs up. What was he thinking, he chastises himself. Then, he calls his wife.

## Chapter 6

At home, having dinner with Sherrie, Ted finds that he is restless and discontented. His wife's attempts at humor, something that ordinarily would have amused him, now just grates on his nerves. He looks around his house and realizes that literally nothing has been moved in a decade. It is the same old, same old. As Sherrie rambles on about her day at the clinic, Ted's mind drifts to the first time that they'd met in the ER.

Ted recalls that when he'd been in the hospital it was as if his creative spirit was unfettered. He'd started writing a novel that he'd titled, "Blue Angel," about a doctor who fell in love with a jazz singer, who as it turned out was more in love with drugs. He found, after he'd left the hospital, that he'd found he need more medical information that he could use to make the writing more authentic.

He and Sherrie fell in love so completely and so quickly that still, to this day, it makes his mind spin. They had gone to see a movie called, ironically, "Blue Angel." It was an old classic, where Marlene Dietrich seduced her college professor. It was the only time in his life where he'd been writing because he'd wanted to, not because he had to. And, on top of that, he was in love, not wanting to be in love. He had been happy.

His ear catches something his wife has just said and he comes back to the present. Sherrie tells him about Arlene at work telling her that her cousin's child was nearly



abducted at a theme park. The abductors had changed her hair by dyeing it and had changed her clothing. But, the shoes were still the same and that's how she was found and rescued the little girl. Because Arlene is always telling one sensational story after another, Ted doubts the validity of it happening to Arlene, or maybe anyone else for that matter. Sherrie agrees that sometimes reality and fantasy are blurred where Arlene is concerned.

Ted goes into his study, determined to actually be the writer he claims to be. However, when he reads what he's written he is depressed. Angela's work is better and makes his look like scribble. He gives up and calls Angela. He tells her that they should meet the next day to discuss the additional pages.

The next day in his office, Ted finds that he enjoys watching her think, working out phrases and fixes for problems he'd found in the new pages. Ted asks if she's shown the manuscript to anyone yet. She says that except for her boyfriend that Ted is the only other one. After she leaves, he calls Magda, his best friend at the college, and asks if she wants to have lunch.

## Analysis

### Chapters 4-6

The theme of Regrets continues as Ted finds that his own work lacks the life and excitement of Angela's work. The reader also sees the theme of Infidelity starting to indicate itself in Ted's discontent with his wife. Though he logically tells himself that Sherrie is being no more annoying than usual, for some reason it still bothers him to the point that he tunes her out.

His trip down memory lane shows how the novel received its name, "Blue Angel." The author has used a novel, within a novel, within a novel, to add layers of meaning and double symbolism into the work. On the one hand, ironically, he derived the name for this own novel from a movie that he saw with his wife, a movie that was about a teacher and a student having an affair. Then, of course, there is Angela's novel, Eggs, which features an inappropriate relationship between a student and a teacher.

The theme of Fact versus Fiction arises many times in these chapters. First, there is the lecture that Ted gives his students about how an author doesn't have to be in the profession that they write about. Mystery writers, for example, don't have to be real private investigators to write convincingly about it. Later, there is the discussion between Sherrie and Ted about Arlene's dramatic story about the child being abducted at a theme park. Ted states that Arlene blurs the lines between real and imagined. The author is setting the stage for more lines to be blurred in the future. Then, Angela asks if the things that happened in Ted's first book, "Phoenix Time," really happened. He confesses that many of them did. He asks her if the things in her book were true and she denies it. Ted doesn't say so, but he doesn't believe her.



Ted's novel, "Phoenix Time," is Ted's fictional story (based on fact) about a man so upset by the Vietnam War that he conflagrates himself in the middle of town. This really happened to Ted and it so changed the course of his life that it, and many other details from that time, had made its way into his writing.

Angela states that his novel really spoke to her, and Ted finds himself feeling kindly towards her that she would praise his book. The book itself hadn't met with much critical acclaim, however, so Ted doesn't talk about his work to anyone anymore. The fact that Angela has brought it up makes him willing to work that much harder with her to make her manuscript sing. The book, "Phoenix Time," then, is a symbol of Ted's past glory and hopes/dreams for a literary career.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of Ted's first novel, Phoenix Times?

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the recurrence of the theme Fact Vs Fiction in Chapters 4-6.

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the irony of the novel's title: "Blue Angel."

## Vocabulary

priority, babyish, elite, blared, spongy, mumbled, writhes, scowl, smeary, flunked, eclipse, grammatical, technically, plausibility, contorted



# Chapters 7-9

## Summary

### Chapter 7

Ted waits for Magda at their usual meeting place, a steakhouse dedicated to Joan of Arc. Magda had once told him that women love him because he has an obvious lack of hostility that set him apart from most other men. Magda is very perceptive and after only being in his presence for less than an hour she warns him that if he sleeps with Angela Argo she will never speak to him again. Ted is shocked at her brazen announcement and vehemently denies that he has had any such thoughts.

Magda tells Ted that the writing that Angela did in her poetry class was crap. She also tells Ted that the girl is very, very troubled, and that he'd better be careful. Ted asks her to elaborate, and Magda tells him that she is a pathological liar, and a thief, having borrowed some books from a fellow student in class, then never returning them. Then, the poems that Angela had written were nothing more than transcribed phone sex dialogues. She tells Ted that since Angela was a freshman last year that she didn't want to squash her creativity, so they just neglected to discuss them openly in class. She tells Ted that the realism was too accurate to be fictional. She believes that Angela is still employed as a phone sex worker.

Ted and Magda begin comparing notes as far as Angela is concerned, and both have received different details about Angela's background. Magda was under the impression that her father committed incest, and Ted was under the impression that her father killed himself. Ted asks if Magda kept any of the poetry and Magda says that she personally did not, but that at the end of the year Angela had typeset them all, printed them out, had them bound, and presented them to the librarian as a dedication to her freshman year. Fearing a lawsuit if they didn't shelve it, the collection is now sitting in the library. Magda and the librarian agreed that as soon as Angela graduated they would toss the book.

### Chapter 8

Ted goes to check out Angela's poetry collection. He finds it and then becomes hyper-aware of his surroundings. He's hoping that he can just take it into a corner of the library somewhere and read it in peace. The cover has a picture of the Venus de Milo on it, with arms drawn in, covering her pelvic area. The title is: "Angela 911." He finds a table in the back and opens the cover to read. It is a graphic depiction of a father seducing and having sex with his daughter.

Ted is appalled doubly because of the content, and the fact that he has become aroused. He is upset that he has become aroused and wonders what kind of monster finds himself turned on by work like this. He calms himself down and acknowledges that



it isn't the content that has turned him on, but the raw talent of the author. He checks out the book and leaves the library.

## Chapter 9

Sherrie has accepted an invitation to dinner for both of them at the dean's house. They arrive at the large Victorian home to find that dinner has been burned. There are several other faculty members from the English Department there, Ted sees with some relief. They all begin talking and then the conversation turns to Ted's book that is supposedly in progress. Everyone wants to know how it is going but Ted refuses to talk about it. They wheedle him until he agrees to at least tell them the title. Impulsively he says, "Eggs." Sherrie looks at him and says that she thought it was being called "Black and the Black." Ted tells her that he changed it recently.

During the course of the evening, and after the alcohol has flowed freely, Ted thinks to himself that just maybe he's developed the tiniest of crushes on Angela. Then, upset when the conversation seems to be turning against Magda, Ted speaks up and suggests that the entire faculty needs to quit knuckling under to the repressive political correctness that has been crammed down their throats. He offers the suggestion that they should just all be desensitized to inflammatory words, and then everyone would be okay. This is met with embarrassed smiles and averted eyes. The topic is changed quickly to discuss the upcoming dessert. Ted knows that he has just blown it.

## Analysis

### Chapters 7-9

There are two allusions made towards historical figures or works of art in these chapters. First, there is the mention of Venus de Milo, often touted as the image of female beauty, and in modern times the image of female bondage and male oppression. The fact that Angela has drawn arms on the Venus represents that fact that she's given Venus back the ability to protect herself. The title of the book, "Angela 911," also represents Angela's Rescue or Emergency from abuse.

The other allusion is to Joan of Arc, a woman who was burned alive at the stake because of her "heretical" beliefs and for daring to go against the establishment. This is the name of the steakhouse that Magda and Ted eat at one afternoon for lunch. The fact that such a historical and tragic figure would be the name of a restaurant seems almost profane.

The novel itself continues to address sexual deviancy and abuses, and as a theme this is touched upon heavily in the section that includes Angela's poetry. There is the confusion as to whether or not Angela really was or wasn't sexually abused by her father, because both Magda and Ted have received startling different stories from Angela about her past. Additionally, she has presented herself one way in Magda's class, while in Ted's she acts in a completely different way.



In earlier chapters there was mention of sex with a raw chicken, then a colleague mentions a book called "My Life with Tulip," which speaks about a man's untraditional attraction to his dog. Later, another student of Ted's has one of his characters in a short story sodomize a German Shepherd. All of these occurrences are either intended by the author to "desensitize" the reader, much as Ted suggests be done to the politically correct advocates, or the author is beating the poor reader over the head with the sexual abuse and the violence perpetrated on the innocent as a forerunner to the truth about Angela's past.

At the dinner party, Ted's choice of titles for the novel he is writing is shocking, even to him. It shows that deep down, he wishes that he had Angela's creative fire, and that in some way, which he finally admits, he finds himself drawn to her. Despite the warnings from Magda, it is clear that Ted is toying with the idea of starting some kind of relationship with Angela.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the author's purpose in presenting the theme of Sexual Abuse in the novel?

## Discussion Question 2

Address and discuss the use of the iconic figures of Joan of Arc and Venus de Milo that are present in Chapters 7-9.

## Discussion Question 3

What does it indicate that Ted uses Angela's title as his own?

## Vocabulary

candidate, menacing, interacted, coital, neurotic, miscalculations, squalling, narcissistic, oeuvre, scatological, bestiality, eroding, coddle, Tourette's



# Chapters 10-12

## Summary

### Chapter 10

Leaving the party, Sherrie climbs into the driver's seat of the car and remains silently seething until they are blocks away. Then, it dawns on Ted what he's done. He apologizes to Sherrie. Tersely, Sherrie tells him that she dislikes the way that Magda looks at him, and that she has an unhealthy crush on him. Ted tells her that Magda is not his type. They share a moment and Ted knows that he is forgiven. He also knows that he's had more to drink than he should. Sherrie goes before him into the house to get the door unlocked, then comes back to help him walk down the driveway. When they get into the house, it is clear that they both want to continue their connection in the bedroom, but instead, Ted tells her that he needs to jot down an idea that he had for the book before it is lost. He quickly goes to the study, reads some more of Angela's poetry, then stumbles back into the bedroom where he has sex with his wife.

The next day in class all of the students are in a foul mood. They've all had to read Carlos's next short story, titled, Toilet Bowl, about a pasty-faced geek getting dunked in the school's toilet bowl. The entire class hated it and can barely wait to unload on Carlos. Meg is particularly vehement about hating the work, and Ted has to remind her of the rules of the class.

Angela leaves more of the novel with him, just as before. He eagerly goes to his office to read them. Half way through the new entries he begins to see striking similarities between his own novel, "Blue Angel," and the new section in Angela's novel. It is uncanny how details that Swenson never even wrote down, are there in Angela's entries. There had been a man, a musician who had preceded him in the ER the day that he'd met Sherrie. Could it be a coincidence? Could the musician be somehow related to Angela?

As he tends to do each time he reads Angela's passages, he reaches for the phone. This time, without thinking, he dials the number from Angela's book of poetry, the phone sex number. As the phone is ringing he begins to envision all of the trouble he could potentially get into if the school finds out that he's using the university's phone system to call a sex line. He convinces himself that it is research and almost hangs up when an operator answers the line. She asks whom he would like to speak to. Quickly he tells her Angela 911. The woman regrets to inform him that Angela no longer works for them. He hangs up.

### Chapter 11

It is parent's day on campus and everywhere Ted looks there are doting parents and nervous students giving them the grand tour. Ted is reminded of his own estranged





daughter and wishes that he and Sherrie had played their cards a little differently. Breaking up the romance and sparing their daughter the greater heartache had seemed noble at the time. Now, he's not so sure.

Ted goes into his office to await any parents and students that might want to come by to visit, as per the dean's request. He opens up the book he checked out from the library, "My Dog Tulip," and starts to read. Soon there is a knock on the door. It is Danny's parents who want to drop by since Swenson's class is the only one that Danny ever tells them about. Ted is complimentary towards Danny.

They leave and Claris's mother comes by to say, for reasons only known to her, that she can't fathom why her daughter decided to come to Euston when she was accepted into Yale. The mother leaves. Then Angela's parents arrive and it is as if Ted is suddenly on the hot seat. As Ted sees it, Angela's parents are stereotypical New Jersey residents who fight with each other as a way of showing affection. Ted wonders if this is the stepfather from Angela's poems, the one that molested her. He corrects himself by reminding himself that writing can't always be considered autobiographical. As they talk he is convinced that this isn't the man from Angela's poems. They leave.

## Chapter 12

The next day the story being read is Makeesha's. It is about a black girl who is dumped by her white boyfriend the day before prom because of the boy's parents putting pressure on him. Luckily, everyone likes the story and there is none of the usual bloodletting. After class Angela hangs back, as per usual, but the other girls give her a disgusted look. Angela is upset by it, and Ted thinks he knows what they are thinking. He dismisses them as immature and speaks with Angela. She thanks him for speaking to her parents when they visited. Angela tells Ted that her mother married her stepdad after her father died. He had been their neighbor for forever and immediately left his wife and two kids to marry Angela's mother.

Angela tells Ted that her father didn't really kill himself; he actually had emphysema and eventually died of it. She feels so guilty because toward the end she was terribly embarrassed to be around him, much less have to push him around town in the wheelchair. She tears up, hands the next section of the book to Ted, then leaves.

Ted goes to the office to read the next installment. He reads an entry about the eggs in the story not hatching. The protagonist in the story, a young teenager, states that she hadn't candled the eggs when she should have to see if they were viable. She didn't do it because she didn't want to know that there was no life in them. Her father comes out to help her figure out why the eggs aren't hatching and none of them are viable. They are all dead. There's no life in the eggs. Ted puts the manuscript down. It is brilliant and his first reaction is to call Angela, but then he remembers who he is, where he is, and he puts the phone down.



## Analysis

Chapters 10-12

The theme of Art versus Reality is offered in these chapters as Ted is left to wonder about the unnamed father in Angela's poetry, and more importantly, the musician that faints in the ER in Angela's novel. At one point Ted becomes upset thinking that Angela has somehow managed to read and recreate some of his own work from his story, "Blue Angel." However, after he speaks with Angela about the inclusion of the mother's point of view, it becomes clear that Angela was borrowing information from something that one of her friends had told her about a trip to the ER.

Also, Angela demonstrates the theme of Fact versus Fiction in that she confesses to Ted that her father didn't actually commit suicide. He died from emphysema. In a tearful confession that Ted doesn't shy away from, Angela tells him that she is embarrassed and ashamed of the way she felt about her father toward the end of his life. After meeting Angela's stepfather, he is convinced that Angela's longtime neighbor, and now stepfather, is Angela's true biological father, though no one is confessing to it. They have the same mannerisms and the same eye color.

The symbolism of the egg is expanded. In this section the reader sees that the eggs didn't hatch and that the girl in Angela's story believes that it is her fault, that she didn't candle them when she should have. This represents the budding of a new idea, or a new love, but that the signs of life that should have been occurring, weren't happening. This can also be applied to Angela's quest to attract Swenson, and the fact that she can't tell if he's interested in her or not. The writing is only slightly provocative, compared to the poetry that Angela wrote the year before. Still, Ted is even more intrigued than ever.

### Discussion Question 1

Discuss the symbolism of the eggs from Angela's story.

### Discussion Question 2

How are the rest of the students beginning to view Angela? What evidence supports your interpretation?

### Discussion Question 3

Why is Ted uncomfortable with some of Angela's story?

## Vocabulary

pedagogical, incubation, malnourished, pulsating, meshed, telepathic, improbable, transcription, denouncing, instinctively, forbearance



# Chapters 13-15

## Summary

### Chapter 13

Back at home Ted watches Sherrie as she prepares dinner. He is filled with the sight of her and can't imagine why he even considered having an affair with a student. Nothing is further from his mind and he's glad for that. Later that night he and Sherrie have sex and Ted thinks that things are back to normal, the way they used to be so long ago. He is happy.

His good feelings last into the morning and when he wakes he decides that he will work on his own novel for a change. He spends only a half hour with it and hits the same place that has been giving him trouble. Pushing it back until after he's had his shower, he walks out of the study. After his shower, and a shave, and dressing, he starts to settle down to his manuscript, but then he remembers that he was supposed to call Angela. She would be waiting for his assessment of the new section. Sighing, he picks up the phone. He almost talks himself out of making the call, but then a boy's voice answers the phone. Swenson hangs up. Angela calls him right back, tells him that she's going crazy over a section of the book and will he meet her in his office sometime soon. He tells her that he will be in his office in twenty minutes.

Angela comes in and they begin discussing the last portions of the text. She confesses that she wondered if he was reading the erotic parts and thinking about her. Embarrassed she doesn't wait for his reaction and she runs from the room. She shoves the next installment under the door.

Ted reads it and finds that he is frustrated on all levels because the next installment ends mid-sentence. Thinking about Angela is very distracting and he purposely pushes down on his tooth that has started to bother him, a back molar to be exact. The pain from that shocks some sense back into him and he is able to put everything aside and go home.

His cell phone rings on the way to the house, but he can't answer it in time. When he arrives home he picks up the phone hoping that it is Angela, and is surprised to see that there is a message from Ruby. But there is another message after Ruby's—from Angela. Ted decides to keep Angela's phone message so that he can replay it whenever he wants to. Instead of calling his daughter back, which he knows he should do, he calls Angela, instead.

Angela apologizes for the last part of the manuscript stopping midsentence, but she says that her printer died, and then her computer died. She starts crying because it means that she can't write. Ted tells her that she can do it the old fashioned way with a pencil and paper, but then Angela asks him for a huge favor. Can he possibly give her a



ride into Burlington to pick out a new computer? She tells him that her stepfather gave her the credit card to get a new one, but that she doesn't have a way of getting to the city.

She says that none of her friends have cars, or they have been grounded and can't drive. Either way she thought she would ask. At first Ted tells her no but then he agrees to take her first thing the next morning. He calls Ruby but the call goes straight to a voice machine. He leaves a message and goes into his study to try to write.

#### Chapter 14

Swenson doesn't sleep well all night. He berates himself for not telling Sherrie about taking Angela to get the computer. Why hadn't he, he wonders. What does it say about him, really, he tells himself. After a very long night he gets up, showers, pays particular attention to what he wears, hates the old man he has become that he sees in the mirror, then gets in the car to go pick up Angela. Sherrie has long left for work.

He picks up Angela. She's wearing a very short miniskirt that Ted can't help noticing. As they are leaving the campus Lauren Healy sees Ted, then sees Angela. The stiff wave that she gives Ted says it all. Angela intuitively says, "That was close." She tries to shrug out of her jacket and Ted reaches over to help her. They briefly touch, then Angela flinches. She tells him that she's gotten a tattoo of his name on her arm. Ted is horrified. She laughs and tells him that it is really of an egg, cracked open with a chicken peeking out.

They get the computer and drive back to the campus. She asks if he will help her carry it into her dorm room and set it up. He says he can't set up computers, that he leaves that to his wife. Angela says that he could just carry it up for her, then, and stay for moral support. Then, she says, she can print out those last few pages so that he can have them. It makes total sense to Ted and so he stays.

He carries up the computer equipment with her and sits on her bed as she attaches it. She excitedly pushes print, but the paper jams and she becomes frustrated and teary. Ted stands up to go stand behind her, to comfort her, he tells himself. Before either of them know it, he's kissing her.

They have sex in her dorm room. In the middle of this encounter, the bad tooth disintegrates in his mouth. He loses his erection and the moment is definitely over. Certain elements of the event come back to him, even as he lies there semi naked in her room. She'd locked the door when they came in. She'd dressed in a short skirt and a thong, as well as leaving out all of the jewelry in her face that would make kissing difficult. He dresses, Angela prints the last three pages, then he leaves. On the stairs as he is leaving he passes Claris.

#### Chapter 15

Back at home Sherrie is cooking dinner and Ted asks her to cook something soft because of his tooth. She fixes him soup and Ted sits there feeling miserable. He tells



her that he feels miserable because of his tooth, but it is really his conscience that is bothering him. What if Angela tells someone? What if Claris mentions seeing him in the stairwell? He feels sick.

As he waits for dinner to be ready he goes back into his study. There are Angela's new pages. That was the one and only time that the sex will happen, he tells himself. They won't ever talk about it again. They will strictly work on her book, and nothing more.

He reads the last pages of the Angela's book and it describes an erotic scene between the older music teacher and the young student in the hen house, surrounded by the incubating eggs. They crack an egg open and use it as lubricant. Ted is alternately disgusted and aroused by the pages. After he reads them, he wonders at how similar the love scene in the book is to the lovemaking session that he had with Angela in her dorm. Does life imitate art, or the other way around? He's not sure anymore, about anything.

## Analysis

### Chapters 13-15

The reader sees Ted struggling to resist the urges that have begun to suggest themselves to him in regards to Angela. When he is with Sherrie after dinner one night, Angela is the furthest thing from his mind and he's sure that he has the strength to resist the feelings that he has developed for her. However, the morning after he has been with his wife, all Angela has to do is call and act as if she is in distress and he is, once again, enthralled.

The introduction of the bad tooth was touched upon in earlier chapters, almost as a passing detail, but now in these chapters the tooth has begun to take a more permanent position in the story as a symbol of the growing "infection" to his marriage and his life. He presses down on it whenever he needs a jolt of pain to remind him of who he is and what he needs to do.

The trip to the computer store is obviously a ruse to get Ted to recommit to her again, though Ted is not clever enough to see it. He is willing to cross many lines where Angela is concerned because he admires her ability as a writer, and in some way, he's trying to recapture that passion for his own writing by being with her. When they return from the store with the computer and then they make love, it is a continuation of Ted's determination to return to his earlier creative self. However, in mid-session he is gritting his teeth so tightly that the molar shatters. The molar shattering makes him lose his erection and the entire event ends rather abruptly. Thus, the molar as a symbol has represented that he has shattered his own moral code, and that the infection has finally gotten to the point where it has completely destroyed the tooth (or in this case, his self-worth and his relationship with his wife).

The theme of Regret is poignant in these chapters as Ted flagellates himself for his actions with Angela. What is most interesting to note is that he's not sorry for having sex



with a student, but rather is afraid of the consequences should it ever be made known what he did. He begins to count what the cost would be if the information were to be made public. He is very worried, and for good reason.

The theme of Infidelity is also blatant in this section, though it must be stated that Ted's infidelity began when he continued to pursue and contemplate having inappropriate relations with Angela. Until Angela he'd never considered being with a student. He doesn't hate his wife, still enjoys satisfying sex with her, and yet, there's Angela. The author seems to be suggesting that in many ways Ted is more naïve about himself and his appetites than Angela is.

The theme of Art Versus Life is also demonstrated in this novel, when in Chapter 15 Ted reads the latest installment of Angela's novel. He sees so much of himself in it that he becomes afraid that in some way what they are doing together is being played out in the book, and vice versa. He wonders and becomes confused as to how things are playing out. Obviously, Angela has written the pages prior to the events that take place between he and Angela, and yet, when he reads the pages they are so reflective of the events and situations taking place between himself and Angela that it can't be easily explained.

Angela's last installment is highly erotic and features the music teacher having sex with his student in the chicken coop. The symbolism of cracking the egg open, of using it for a sexual lubricant is graphic and highly symbolic on several levels. First, the student in Angela's story has not had sexual relations with a man before, so in graphic fashion the author is showing the cracking open of the girl's hymen. Next, the use of an egg for lubricant for a sexual act shows the literal use of new life, of hope, of new beginnings, and of fertility, being used and twisted in a way that depicts the teacher as the predator and the aggressor, and the student as the innocent, albeit willing, participant.

## Discussion Question 1

Discuss the themes of Infidelity and Regret in these chapters.

## Discussion Question 2

Discuss the symbolism of the molar (tooth).

## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbolism of the egg in Chapter 15.

## Vocabulary

incense, reconfigure, primitive, deformed, flirtation, distraction, heroine, semiadulterer, revival, quixotic



# Chapters 16-18

## Summary

### Chapter 16

The next day in class Ted can scarcely look at Angela. He does notice that she has now reverted back into full armored regalia, complete with nose and lip rings. She looks more like a ferret than a human at that moment, Ted thinks. To make matters worse, the writing for that day from the students is particularly mundane and hellish. He is struck by the fact that all the kids seem to write about, all love seems to be to them is rape, incest, or abuse. It sickens him and he wishes that he'd taken Magda's advice to distance himself from this sort of thing in his classes.

Ted also can't make eye contact with Claris, who is singularly quiet. Ted wonders what must be going through her mind. He's so distracted that he knows his teaching is going to suffer. Meg's story, the one they are focused on, presents a cat being dropped off of an apartment building by an ex-lover. Yet another animal abuse story, Ted sighs inwardly. He is seriously worried about this generation.

Angela gives Meg an earful about her story, but then Claris speaks up and says that it is very easy and convenient for Angela to shoot her mouth off when none of Angela's stories are brought up for evaluation. The rest of the class agrees that Angela seems to be getting preferential treatment. Ted can feel his face going red with embarrassment, and he hopes that it doesn't show.

After class Angela stays behind and they dance around the real topic, their encounter in her dorm room. Finally, Angela says that she is upset that he didn't call once over the weekend to talk to her about the last scene that she'd sent him. Ted is fairly relieved that she is only talking about the manuscript, but her vehemence is real. She is extremely upset that he hadn't called and it backs Ted into a corner. She wheedles him into getting her an appointment with his editor in New York. Angela leaves.

As Ted is leaving he runs into Magda who asks him about class. She asks him to introduce her to his editor in New York. Ted is stunned that two women in thirty minutes both want introductions. He makes his excuses and walks to his car. On the way he calls his daughter, Ruby, who finally answers the phone. She tells her father that she's really enjoying her psychology class on abnormal psych.

### Chapter 17

Before class even starts the next day Ted can tell that something bad is going to happen. He almost turns around and cancels class the feeling is so palpable. Angela haltingly reads the first lines of her story to the class. After she's finished the first few pages, they open up for discussion. The class has been waiting for their chance to flay her alive and they do. Finally, seeing that Angela is nearly in tears, Swenson steps in.





While he lectures about recognizing new and fresh presentations in materials, it dawns on him...he's in love with Angela. When class ends Angela doesn't stick around but bolts for the door.

Ted leaves class electrified and ready to call his editor for Angela. He gets to his office, picks up the phone and places the call. He gets his agent on the first try and they agree to meet the Friday before Thanksgiving break. Ted inwardly worries that Ruby will consider it a betrayal for him to take one day off to go into New York, but he thinks that she will just have to get over it. Angela needs him.

## Chapter 18

Several weeks have passed. Sherrie and Ted make their home ready for Thanksgiving and Ruby's visit from school. Ostensibly, the reason she'd reached out to Ted initially was to get her old boyfriend's number from the campus records. At first Ted had been hurt, but then he decided that if Ruby wanted to get herself hurt by Matt the player, then she would have to do so and learn the lesson the hard way. He got the number and is ready to give it to her when she comes home.

Sherrie picks Ruby up at the bus station and brings her home. Ruby immediately goes to her room, and when Ted goes up to see her and speak with her he sees that she's pulling down things off of the wall. It feels as if she's moving out permanently and it upsets Ted, though he doesn't say anything.

Over dinner Ruby tells them that she's been taking a keen interest in the trial of the teacher accused of sexual harassment because of his casual remark about the Venus de Milo. Ruby tells her father that it is a clear case of battery and the abused, something she's been studying in her psychology course. Ted is galled and all of a sudden his Thanksgiving turkey tastes bitter in his mouth.

## Analysis

### Chapters 16-18

The theme of Abuse is demonstrated in this chapter in several instances. First, there is the instance of Angela's abuse at the hands of her classmates. Then, after class, there is the abuse of Ted by Angela, albeit verbal and emotional abuse. The idea of abuse is not anything new to this novel, but in these chapters it takes on a different definition, including that of psychosocial abuse. The fact that Ruby is studying abnormal psychology is the author's nod to the reader to think along those lines when trying to understand Ted's growing dependence on Angela and Angela's manipulation of Ted.

The theme of Manipulation is clear in this chapter, too, when Angela plays Ted to perfection. She knows that Ted likes to rescue damsels in distress so she purposely places herself in that position in class, allowing her classmates to take shots at her. Her tears are real, but she uses them to her own advantage afterward. She has wanted him to introduce her to his agent, and until that day after class, he'd always said no.



Additionally, she bullies him into admitting that he'd wanted to call her many times over the weekend but that he had made himself behave. Angela knows, at this point, then, that she has him exactly where she wants him. Ted will literally do whatever she asks of him.

The author shows foreshadowing in the mentioning of the ongoing court case of the teacher's sexual harassment case. Prose would seem to be suggesting that there is some parallel between the sexual harassment charges of the one professor and the charges that may come against Ted if his affair with Angela were known. The fact that Claris alludes to this fact in class upsets Ted and makes him even more paranoid than he already is.

## **Discussion Question 1**

How has Angela managed to gain the upper hand in the relationship?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss the notable parallels between Angela's novel and Angela's relationship with Ted.

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why are the students so harsh in their evaluation of Angela's manuscript?

## **Vocabulary**

effusive, protocol, demoralizing, acceded, dignified, compromise, blurriness, drastically, debilitated, hovering, incuriously, cinematic, decor



# Chapters 19-21

## Summary

### Chapter 19

Ted goes to meet his agent at a very nice restaurant in New York. He arrives a half hour earlier than the reservation but the hostess seats him anyway. Ted notices that there are other people already there and he is mildly disgusted by the rare slices of meat that load their plates. In the back of the restaurant is a cigar lounge where he states everyone goes in there to pollute and be polluted.

Len, his agent, finally arrives and Ted thinks that he definitely looks older. They order wine and both have the lamb, served rare. Over their meal, Ted broaches the topic of Angela's manuscript and Len asks what the author is like. Ted tells him and Len astutely tells Ted that he'd better not be screwing her. Ted sidesteps the inquisition and they continue talking. Len wants Ted to write a memoir for his next book. Ted redirects the questioning back to Angela's book and Len tells him to tell her that he's not looking at new works, but not before Ted gets a chance to have sex with her. Ted tells him that nothing is going on between he and Angela. Len isn't convinced but still won't read the manuscript.

### Chapter 20

As he's waiting to board his plane, Ted realizes that he doesn't have the manuscript with him any longer. In a panic he calls the restaurant, but they can't find it either.

Despondent, he gets on his flight. When he returns home he finds Sherrie sitting in a chair in the dark. It startles him but then he asks her if everything is okay. She says she was just thinking about things. She tells him that a student, who wouldn't leave her name, called and said that she needed his help on her novel. The girl had left a number for her home in New Jersey. Ted tries to gloss over the incident and moves on to other topics of conversation. But inwardly he's excited that he has an excuse to call Angela.

The next day he takes Ruby to Burlington to get a new computer, to the same computer store where he took Angela. Ted's tooth aches the entire way to the store.

### Chapter 21

Ted calls Angela and tells her to meet him in his office early Monday morning. She does so and instantly tells him to quit looking at her like she is a piece of meat. He apologizes and says that he was unaware that he was looking at her like that. He lies to Angela, telling her that Len had agreed to look over the manuscript. Angela wants to know when she can call Len and Ted tells her that she can't, that it isn't done. Angela grows angry and swears at Ted. This shocks him and he starts swearing back at her, telling her that he gave up Thanksgiving weekend to run all the way into New York on her behalf. She retorts that the only reason she let him have sex with her was so that he would help her



get her book published. Ted is devastated but can think of nothing else to say before she storms out of the door.

Later, after class, one where Angela is noticeably absent from, Ted receives a call from the Dean's office. They are requesting that he come to the Dean's office at nine o'clock the next morning. Ted is filled with dread.

## Analysis

### Chapters 19-21

One of the central images depicted in Chapter 19 is that of animal flesh placed on plates, cooked medium well. An example is; "...giant slabs of charred meat, slopping over their plates, staining the virgin white tablecloths with their gory juices" (212). From this, the writer continues to produce and keep forefront the imagery of slaughter of innocents, of the consumer and the consumed.

The fact that the men both order lamb is significant in that it indicates their willingness to sacrifice and consume innocence. The author would seem to be suggesting that among the sexes, men are more willing and readily able to take advantage of, and consume, innocence without giving it a second thought.

When Len asks about the author and what she's like, he gives Ted some advice by saying: "Watch out for the spacey ones," Len says. "With women writers, I mean. They're the killers" (220). This may potentially be a case of foreshadowing, though the type of killer isn't clear. Angela could be a marriage killer, a career ender, or a killer of dreams.

Ted's tooth is still bothering him, which indicates that his conscience is still bothering him. His moral compass might be spinning, but it isn't broken, yet. Spending time with Ruby doesn't feel right or good to him and he can't quite put his finger on why that would be. They return home without incident.

In Chapter 21 the reader sees an underlying layer to Angela's personality in her violent outburst in Ted's office. She admits to using sex as a tool to get Ted to give her manuscript to the agent. The theme of Manipulation is demonstrated in her conversation with Ted, outlining all of the ways in which she has ingratiated herself to him so that her manuscript would have a chance to have some life.

It is also evident in this last chapter that Angela's withholding of her presence and her affections have a deep impact on Ted's emotional state as his students all think that he's not getting enough sleep. Claris, of course, knows why he's distracted and treats him coolly. Ted's paranoia plays out when he is called to the Dean's office for the next morning.



## **Discussion Question 1**

Discuss the theme of Manipulation and how Angela has carefully orchestrated all of the events that have led up to this point.

## **Discussion Question 2**

Discuss the foreshadowing that occurs in these chapters.

## **Discussion Question 3**

What does Ted's molar hurting represent?

## **Vocabulary**

impassioned, oration, unbiased, critical, steely, pseudoliberal, gangbanger, afflicted, blight, teensy, parody



# Chapters 22-24

## Summary

### Chapter 22

Ted goes to the Dean's office the next morning, nerves singing. Bentham, the Dean, ushers him into the office, then tells his secretary to hold all of his calls. Bentham slides a recorder onto the top of the desk and presses play. It is the conversation from the day before, where he'd told Angela that Len wouldn't read her manuscript. All of the discussion is there, including the admission of their sexual liaisons.

Bentham tells Ted that Angela is accusing him of sexual harassment. She's threatening to sue the school. Bentham wants Ted to resign, to save what's left of his dignity and the school's reputation. Ted asks what his options are and Bentham tells him that aside from quietly resigning, he can fight the allegations, which will bring everything out into the open. Ted is angry and says that it was consensual. Bentham regrets to inform him that according to the handbook, that won't matter. Ted angrily tells him to convene a tribunal, then, as he wants due process. He refuses to shake Bentham's hand when he leaves the office. He is told that he will not be teaching any more of the classes for the rest of the semester, that he will continue to be paid while on leave, and that he's not to contact Miss Argo (Angela) until the trial.

Despondent and in shock, Ted drives around campus thinking about things. He ends up in the clinic's parking lot. He goes in to see Sherrie. He decides to tell her after a nice dinner out somewhere. He invites her to a very upscale restaurant in Burlington. She agrees and says that she will meet him at the house. Sherrie returns home, grabs a shower, has sex with Ted, and then they go to the restaurant.

There is hardly anyone at the restaurant, which makes him happy. But, the waitress looks too much like Angela, and it unnerves him. Sherrie pre-empts his disclosure by telling him that she knows that he has slept with a student. Ted is floored. He tries to tell her that he screwed up, but she is hurt and incensed. When she learns that the girl's name is Angela Argo she becomes enraged and tells Ted that the girl is always in the clinic because she's under suicide watch. She's the most vulnerable girl on campus she tells Ted, who is astounded and appalled that she thinks that about him.

The last thing she says to him is that she hopes the committee makes him pay, that they crucify him.

### Chapter 23

Sherrie remains in the home for a couple of weeks, and then she can take it no longer and moves out to live with her secretary, Arlene. There are demonstrations all over campus. Sherrie's work environment has become difficult. Ruby calls and berates her



father for betraying her mother. He wishes that Magda would call him, but after so long, he figures that even she has decided to consider him untouchable.

He decides that he's going to make himself some eggnog and at least celebrate the holiday in some fashion. He goes to the video store, first, and rents the film "Blue Angel." It is the same video store that he knew Angela rented the movie from. He watches the movie, drinks eggnog, and falls further into a drunken despair.

## Chapter 24

The night before the hearing, Sherrie calls Ted to wish him good luck. Ted notes that she does it because she is a nice person and they have history, not because she has feelings for him any longer. He walks into the hall where the academic committee will be hearing his case. He notes that Angela is there in the front row, having dyed her hair all one color and is wearing demure looking clothing, something she would never have put on prior to that day. He states that her head is bowed and looks almost egg-like and fragile. The fact that she's now dressed like a preppy college co-ed upsets him because he thinks that now he's seeing the true Angela, and the other Angela, the one that wore spikes and leather, was the costume. Her parents are with her, looking the concerned part. Maybe they were all in on it together. At this point, Ted has no idea what to believe.

The hearing begins and it is clear that Bentham is going with his own preconceived notion of Ted as the predator, instead of the other way around with Angela as the orchestrator of the entire jumbled mess. He is living the sordid B version of the movie, "The Blue Angel." A long line of witnesses and testimonials provide damning evidence of Ted's predatory harassment of Angela, of his ongoing pressures for her to have sex with him, including checking out the book of poetry from the library. There are mentions of a faculty member seeing him with Angela in his car, people testifying that they'd seen the professor coming out of her dorm room, and the special sessions in his office. It is all very convincing testimony.

To add insult to injury, near the end of the hearing, Angela takes the stand and it comes out that Len did read her manuscript after all and is going to publish it when it is finished. At the end of the hearing, Ted is asked if he has anything he wants to say. He's mulled over in his mind what he might possibly say, in fact it had kept him awake the night before. In his defense he only says that the facts presented don't come close to the truth of what really transpired, but that he is well aware that his fate had already been decided before he came into the room. The novel ends, as does Ted's career.

## Analysis

### Chapters 22-24

The worst thing has now happened to the protagonist. His worst fears have been realized. Not only do his colleagues despise him, but his family as well. The theme of Regret and the theme of Manipulation are both examined in these chapters as Ted realizes how thoroughly he's been manipulated into playing a role in Angela's real-life



novel. He is angered and ashamed that he has thrown away a perfectly good marriage and that his daughter won't even speak to him anymore.

The theme of Abuse is examined in a parallel fashion in that there are two types of abuse going on. First, there is the obvious abuse of Ted with Angela. Then there is the abuse of Angela toward Ted, using all of her earlier events to build a case against Ted that is ironclad.

The motif/symbol of the egg returns again, in Chapter 23, as Ted makes himself some eggnog with rum in it. As a symbol the egg has continually been one of something growing, coming to fruition, but in this instance, the egg is being mixed with alcohol to provide temporary relief from Ted's problems. He says that he will drink so much that he pukes, which symbolically relates to the choices he's made thus far in regards to Angela. The foreshadowing so many chapters ago are coming to fruition as well. Magda warned him about Angela, the library book of Angela's poems were a warning, Len warned him, and in the end, his own body rebelled against the choices he was taking.

His decision to rent the videotape of "Blue Angel" from the video store, the exact store that Angela had rented it from, is most likely another nail in his coffin, but Ted can't help himself. It is as if he wants an alternate ending to the one that he is experiencing.

Fact versus Fiction, as a theme, is explored in Chapter 24 as Ted views Angela in new clothing and sporting a new preppy all-college look. He begins to question whether or not Angela ever truly showed herself. The symbolism of the egg resurfaces to indicate that Angela is presenting herself as fragile and needing of protection. The entire thing is completely distasteful to Ted, and he once again wishes that none of it had happened, demonstrating the theme of Regret.

The theme of Manipulation surfaces again in the last chapter when Ted clearly sees how he's been used like a puppet by a masterful puppeteer and he unwittingly went along with it. The evidence as it is presented is so firmly slanted against him that after awhile he doesn't even bother to pay attention to what is being said, even when Ruby's ex boyfriend testifies that Ruby had told him that Ted had sexually molested her when she was younger. Ted's shock and horror render him paralyzed.

## Discussion Question 1

Describe the hearing and the presentation of the evidence against Ted.

## Discussion Question 2

Why doesn't Ted even try to fight for himself?





## Discussion Question 3

Discuss the theme of Regret in these chapters.

## Vocabulary

preemptive, rangy, melodramatic, collusion, despondent, proprietarily, irrelevant, penalty, inadmissible, arsenal,



# Characters

## Ted Swenson

Theodore Swenson, Ted to his closer associates, is a creative writing professor at Euston College, located in Vermont. The school has a reputation for paying homage to troubled rich children who've been dismissed from other colleges. At the time the story opens, Ted has been teaching for about 20 years, and during that time he has slowly become quite bitter about the lack of academic prowess of each successive generation of students.

Ted is also burned out and disillusioned by the campus politics and the political correctness that hampers the educational process. On top of that, in his middle years, he feels as if his creativity and creative years, have been sacrificed to a career and an institution that does not appreciate him.

He is happily married, and has been for many years, without even a hint of trouble. It is after he attends a mandatory seminar about sexual harassment that he allows his mind to entertain the idea of having an affair with a student. Just as he is about to dismiss the idea as ludicrous, he spots Claris.

## Angela Argo

Angela sets out to entrap a professor, and she finds Ted an unwitting victim. She stands out in her choice of clothing which is a cross between punk rock and science fiction. Interestingly, her favorite book, or so she says, is "Jane Eyre."

She is in Professor Swenson's creative writing class. The novel she is working on is titled "Eggs," and Ted finds the writing unnerving and complex. The style intrigues him, and after a while, so does she. The topic of the story revolves around a girl who has an attraction to her music teacher.

## Sherrie Swenson

Ted Swenson's wife. She is tall and Italian and works in the college's health clinic as a nurse. She met Ted when he came into the Emergency Room when she worked in a city ER. She treats Angela for depression and suicide prevention in the clinic. When she finds out that Angela and Ted have had sex, she accuses Ted of taking advantage of a highly vulnerable student.



## Carlos

Carlos is one of the students in Ted Swenson's creative writing class. One of the first stories that he writes involves a boy sodomizing a raw chicken from the fridge. Later, he testifies against Ted and states that the only reason that there were so many references to animal sex was because it seemed to be the only thing that caught their professor's attention.

## Claris

Claris is a beautiful girl taking Swenson's creative writing class. He states that she is a nubian (referring to her African American ethnicity) beauty and of all of the possibilities for having an affair, she should have been the choice. Claris is one of the first to suspect Angela and Ted of being inappropriate with one another. She testifies to seeing the professor coming out of Angela's dorm room.

## Meg

Meg generally starts the discussions in Swenson's classes, but she rarely interjects anything of substantial use to anyone. She likes to stir things up and sit back and watch things unfold.

## Danny

A sensitive student in Swenson's creative writing class, his story is dissected to the point that it nearly paralyzes him. Then, when Nancy suggests a quick fix, one that would explain an explicit act with a chicken, he shoots her a thankful smile. He has feelings for Nancy, too.

## Makeesha

Makeesha is in Swenson's class and is one of the only other African American students, besides Claris. Makeesha derides Claris for writing typical downtrodden African American woman stories.

## Courtney

Courtney is originally from Boston and is in Swenson's creative writing class. She finds most of the writing that the others do to be disgusting. She makes a point of continuing to wear high-end clothing in contrast to the "tree hugging" apparel of most of the student body. Makeesha and Claris don't like her.



## **Nancy**

Nancy is in Professor Swenson's creative writing class. She is very shy and has a crush on Danny.

## **Jonelle**

Jonelle is another student in the class. She is usually very vocal when it comes to speaking out against men and the use of gender bias in literature.

## **Arlene**

Arlene is the secretary at the clinic where Sherrie works. When Sherrie leaves Ted she goes to stay with Arlene in her house. Arlene left her husband many years prior due to abuse.

## **Dean Bentham**

Dean Bentham is British and the Dean of Faculty. He invites Sherrie and Ted to the faculty dinner at his house. He also presides over the hearing where Ted is accused of sexual harassment. He encourages Ted to resign and save his dignity.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## Uncooked Chicken

One of the students (Danny) has written a story where a young man pulls an uncooked chicken from the refrigerator and has sex with it. After the class discusses this element in the short story, the class is dismissed. However, the image that sticks with Dr. Swenson is that of the chicken's head looking up at the protagonist in the story, viewing its attacker. This is a symbol for what eventually happens to him through the hands of his student, Angela. This symbol also serves as a foreshadowing of that event.

## Eggs

This is the title of Angela's story. It symbolizes new life, new birth, and the fact that it carries a type of "new life" within it. It should also be noted that the first initial symbol is that of a chicken, which a character is sodomizing. It is a graphic image that the professor can't seem to get out of his head. Therefore, the fact that Angela's story should be called "Eggs" is also telling.

## "Jane Eyre" Book

This is the book that Angela is reading when she comes to Swenson's office for help on her short story, "Eggs." She says that she likes the book because of how angry Jane is. This symbolizes Angela's own internal rage. Later, Arlene reads the book, and eventually, Sherrie. This indicates all of their rage against perceived wrongs by men.

## Chicken References

There are a number of references to chicken throughout the novel. In essence, chicken is the most used of all of the consumable commercial meats on the market. All of the bird is used for something along the way. The many mentions include: chicken in Danny's story, chicken for dinner, there are chickens in Angela's story as well in the form of eggs, and the title of Angela's book is "Eggs." Angela gets a tattoo of a chicken cracking out of an egg, Angela's story uses cracked eggs as a sexual lubricant.

## The Color Tangerine

The choice of color is interesting in that this is the color of the folders that Angela uses for her manuscript. The color Orange, or Tangerine, as they call it, is also the Chakra color for sexual energy, located in the lower abdominal area. Furthermore the yolk of an egg is tangerine-colored, and the egg yolk and white are used as lubricants in Angela's provocative story.



## Ted's Bad Tooth

Ted has a bad tooth that only mildly aches at the beginning of the novel. However, as the novel moves forward and he begins to become involved with Angela, the tooth grows worse, until it finally shatters. The author uses this device to indicate Ted's self respect, and his moral direction. Once he has crossed that line with Angela and fallen subsequently into her trap, there is no fixing the tooth, or the problem.

## Animals

There are many references to animals and the abuse of animals throughout the novel. First, there is the reference in the student's story to the raw chicken being sodomized. Then, there are the references to eggs, cows, dogs, and a cat. In each instance, the animals are being abused or tortured. The author uses this to symbolize the use and abuse of the stronger over the weaker, the using of innocence and trust for one's own gain.

## Lamb

There are references to raw uncooked meat in several instances. Toward the end, when Ted is taking Angela's manuscript to his editor, he notices the lamb meat on restaurant patron's plates and describes it as, "...giant slabs of charred meat, slopping over their plates, staining the virgin white tablecloths with their gory juices" (212). The use of the word "virgin" and "stain" bring to mind the breaking of a woman's hymen during intercourse. This is a new manuscript that he's bringing to be viewed, and in many respects, a virgin manuscript. Likewise, it is a reference to the butchering of animals and the consumption of them.

## Deer

Both at the beginning of the book and the end of the book, there are references made to the deer that graze on or near the campus. Ted wonders why the bells from the school don't scare them. At the end of the story, when Ted wonders this again, it is suggested that they don't run because they've become desensitized to it. In many respects, the author is suggesting that often people allow themselves to be railroaded because they are used to being the scapegoats, for one reason or another, and are desensitized to the very things that they should be afraid of.

## Posters on the Wall

When Ruby comes home for Thanksgiving break she takes down all of the posters from her wall, signaling not that she was changing one phase for another, but that she is

simply taking them down for good. She's done with living under her parents roof and their rules.



# Settings

## Euston College

Most of the action takes place in Ted's classroom on the campus. Located in Vermont, most of the action takes place in the Fall and Winter of the year.

## Joan of Arc Restaurant

This is a restaurant where many of the faculty members eat. This is where Ted regularly meets with Magda to have lunch.

## Ted's Office

Ted has an office in a different building from his classroom. This is where Angela meets with him to discuss the novel she is working on.

## Angela's Dorm

This is where Ted and Angela have their one sexual event. It is also where Claris sees the professor leaving Angela's room.

## Dean Bantham's House

There is a faculty party at Dean Bantham's home, and after having too much to drink Ted spouts off about the inane rules and regulations surrounding the sexual harassment policies.





# Themes and Motifs

## Fact Versus Fiction

Within this novel there are many instances where the reader, and Ted, isn't always certain of the validity and reality of a situation or event. Angela, in particular, gives him false information on more than one occasion, to the point that he doesn't always believe what she tells him.

She tells him that her father is her stepfather, when in reality the man that comes to parent's day is in fact her father. The story that she writes about her father dying when she was young (like Ted's) is a complete fabrication.

Then, there is the disclaimer that the events in her story aren't based on reality, but when Ted finds the book of poetry he is convinced that Angela has been sexually abused as a child. This doesn't exactly jive with the story that Angela had told him about her father being wheelchair bound and dying of emphysema.

There are times when Ted views works of literature or movies and he begins to feel as if the lines are blurred, such as with the film "Blue Angel." It is only when it is too late that he sees that he has been the unwitting subject of Angela's real life construction. She carefully crafted the tale, then inserted him in to it.

## Art Versus Life

Because the main character is a writer, the art world figures prominently. The age-old question about whether life influences art, or vice versa is posed subtly to the reader. In many instances, the author would seem to be suggesting that often it is the art that inspires and suggests life.

In Angela's case, this is clearly evidenced. She uses movies, such as "Blue Angel," and her own novel to portray a series of events that she orchestrates to play out. By planning events in a way that is well thought-out and plotted, she manages to ensnare her professor to the point where he begins to see the parallels between what she's written, and/or read, and what happens.

On more than one occasion, Angela tells Ted about something that wrote, only to see it later on the television, or in a magazine, or saw it in a movie. She would seem to be suggesting, then, that life had influenced the art. However, it is clearly her own experiences in her earlier years that influenced her stories and her poetry.

Many of Ted's students critique the propensity for their fellow classroom writers to place their characters in unlikely or unbelievable situations within a story's framework. Their most common complaint is that it doesn't seem as if it could happen. Clearly, they wanted the art to imitate the life.



## Infidelity

The theme of infidelity is treated in an interesting way in this novel. Not only is there the usual definition of infidelity, but there is also a more subtle definition offered by the author.

First, there is the traditional offering of the definition. Clearly, Ted cheats on his wife. He enters into a relationship (at least in his mind) with a student, even though he is obviously happy with his wife and his life. His dalliance costs him dearly, but in the end also frees him from some of the things that had been holding him back from achieving his own goals.

Secondly, there is the more subtle definition of infidelity in that many of the people involved at the Euston School have not stayed true to their vows toward their profession, their academic integrity, nor their duty as ethical human beings. Those that convene for the hearing, though they have known Ted for decades, are more than willing to convict him without hearing his side of the tale.

Then, there is the infidelity many of the characters have toward their own self-worth. Angela doesn't see her own self worth, certainly, but there is a greater infidelity by the university itself. The very staff that requires its protection and benefit of the doubt, removes this from Ted, leaving him to flounder on his own...a figurative sacrificial lamb.

## Manipulation

Angela is a master manipulator and does so to such a degree that she manages to lock down the entire campus to rally on her side. From the beginning the reader sees the subtle ways that she plays to Ted's vanities, his likes and dislikes. Ted, if at some point he surfaces long enough to notice, isn't able to extricate himself from the carefully woven web of lies that he falls prey to.

Additionally, there is the manipulation that is done by the University toward the faculty. Because they are so afraid of being sued, for one reason or another, they've set up all of these proscribed meetings, lectures, and workshops about those situations most likely to end in a law suit. This is so they can cover themselves from a liability standpoint and claim that the teachers were told how to act in various situations.

At the beginning of the story Ted notes that so much money has been shoveled into political correctness ventures that the life has been sucked right out of the academic environment. The author seems to be making a pointed statement about the manipulation of the academic process.

In many regards, there is a parallel between the job that Angela does on Ted and the expectations and requirements of the university of its professors. That the system is so one sided so as to allow a person to be railroaded and for the system to be so manipulated and used, is satirically pointed.



## Regret

Ted regrets almost all of his decisions throughout the course of the book. Interestingly, he doesn't regret having sex with Angela, at least not at first. He's more worried about the possible ramifications should he be caught.

Many of his regrets predate Angela, however. He regrets a fight that he had with his daughter over her choice of boyfriends. He regrets that he and his wife are too tired for one another recently. He also regrets not being further along with his book, and he struggles to produce a book that he doesn't believe in for his editor's sake.

With each step that Ted takes down Angela's carefully laid trail he regrets taking the step. As a metaphor for pursuing one's art, and having that art turn on you, the work clearly depicts Ted's thought processes as he tries to recapture his own passion for writing. The way in which he pursues it, however, leads to self recrimination and self loathing.

In the end, what Ted regrets the most is that he gave almost twenty years of his life to a university that is so willing to cut his throat. He also regrets not following his own writing path, instead of succumbing to the pressures of his editor and agent.

## Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is rampant within the pages of this novel. Many of the students believe that this is what "serious" writing calls for...a romp to expose the ugly side of sex and perversion as a noble cause. Unfortunately, what it really uncovers is violence and loss of innocence.

Angela, if one can believe all of the stories she presents about herself, was abused as a child by either her father or stepfather. She later became a phone sex worker and eventually went on to write about a girl being taken advantage of by an older man. She replayed this scenario over again when she seduces Ted.

The abuse is ramped up however, when the reader, in the first chapter, witnesses the character in one of the student's stories sodomizing a raw chicken. The fact that the chicken's head is still on the naked body indicates sexual debasement of something unable to fight back, relegating the sexual misuse as subhuman.

Then, there are the countless stories involving the sexual abuse of animals, such as dogs and cows. Ted himself is offered a book by a colleague which depicts a dog being routinely sodomized by its owner, who calls it love. This perversion of the innocent at the hands of those who are supposed to care and protect is foremost in this theme. In the end, it is Angela herself who shows how this type of abuse produces people who are predatory in nature, thus continuing the cycle.

# Styles

## Point of View

The point of view in this novel is third person limited, in that the point of view is only given from the protagonist's viewpoint, with omniscient details thrown in. From this type of vantage point, then, the reader is able to feel the sense of betrayal and shock when Ted realizes that he has been used and manipulated the entire time.

## Language and Meaning

The language is graphic and many of the scenes offered for view are sexually explicit. As such, the language accompanying such depictions is strong and mature in its content. Additionally, upper vocabulary words are used, placing this work of literature in the college range. Because of the mature subject matter this novel should be studied only under the right circumstances in an academic setting.

## Structure

The chapters, 24 of them, are not given chronological order, only the first lines of the section are used by the author. The work is linear in nature, but employs the novel within a novel, within a novel format which adds great depth and volume to the work.



## Quotes

He'd dragged in Chekhov to tell the class that the writer need not paint a picture of an ideal world, but only describe the actual world, without sermons, without judgment."

-- Narrator (chapter 1)

**Importance:** This statement sets the tone for what will happen throughout the rest of the book; that what will be presented are the facts, but that the facts have a way of being skewed depending on who is looking at them.

As always, getting out of class, Swenson feels like an innocent man, sentenced to life, whose jail term has just been commuted. "

-- Ted (chapter 1)

**Importance:** This statement indicates not only a foreshadowing of the conviction that will happen at the end of the book, but how he feels about teaching in general.

When interviewers used to ask him how he pictured his ideal reader, he said he wrote books for nervous people to take with them on airplanes."

-- Ted (chapter 5)

**Importance:** This shows a more confident Ted, one who has had some success and who is sure of his abilities.

It depressed him that he was married to a person who would think that some self-help piece-of-shit bestseller had something to do with their daughter."

-- Ted (chapter 6)

**Importance:** In this quote the reader sees how Ted has some misgivings about his feelings toward his wife. He hates that they don't have a great relationship with their daughter and doesn't think reading a book about it is going to help.

How can these kids stand being greeted, every time they come home, by this oppressive fruity rotteness, this edge of saline decay?

-- Ted (chapter 14)

**Importance:** Ted has gone into the dorm where Angela lives and reports that the smell of the dorm is particularly horrible, and yet the students seem to love it.

He remembers a passage in an Isak Dinesen story, about how, in sex, the woman plays the part of the host and the man plays the part of the guest. The man wants what a guest wants: to make a good impression, to enjoy himself, to be amused. And what does the hostess want? The hostess wants to be thanked."

-- Ted (chapter 15)



**Importance:** He recalls his after he's had sex with Angela, and wonders if he shouldn't thank her, or at least show his appreciation for giving an old man some attention.

So what? Who cares if life copies art, or if life imitates art?"  
-- Ted (chapter 15)

**Importance:** This quote reiterates one of the main themes of the story: Life imitating art, and vice versa.

And this is what the movie has done, this is the power of art, to make him recognize himself, understand and forgive."  
-- Ted (chapter 23)

**Importance:** Ted is referring to the movie "Blue Angel" where a professor and a student have an affair, and eventually get married. It is after he's watched this movie a dozen times that he finally decides that he doesn't care what happens to him in the hearing. He just wants it over.

Swenson prefers the committee's version— its image of him as the predatory harasser — to the truer story of obsession and degradation, the humiliating real-life update of The Blue Angel."  
-- Ted (chapter 24)

**Importance:** Ted realizes just how masterfully he's been manipulated and played. He also knows that there's no way he can adequately defend against what's being said about him.

Did Ruby tell Matt that? He wants to believe she didn't. He can only pray that she didn't."  
-- Ted (chapter 24)

**Importance:** Ruby's ex boyfriend testifies that Ruby told him that Ted molested her when she was younger.

He's glad to be out of that future and headed into his own. Not that he's sure what his will bring. He'll just have to wait and see."  
-- Ted (chapter 24)

**Importance:** At the end of the novel, Ted knows that one life has ended, but he's hopeful that the new phase of his life will bring him more fulfillment than he's ever felt working as a professor at a college.

Even as their ghost echo fades, the doe calmly crosses the quad, delicate, flamingo-like, poking her nose in the snow. From farther away, she turns again, and looks through the mist at Swenson."  
-- Narrator (chapter 24)



**Importance:** The deer is another reference to an animal, but in this case, the author suggests that Ted is the deer, that like a deer caught in the headlights of a car, he has paralyzed himself. Likewise, deer are not predators; they are prey.