The Book of Evidence Study Guide

The Book of Evidence by John Banville

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The Book of Evidence is the account of Frederick Montgomery, an Irish scientist who has been imprisoned for stealing a painting and the murder of a young housemaid. It outlines his current experiences in jail and looks back on the circumstances that led to his crime.

Montgomery's tale is narcissistic and may hold little resemblance to the truth of his life. He starts as if he is addressing judge and jury at his trial, hoping they will understand his crime, but not asking for forgiveness. He often asks the judge or the jury to consider how they would have felt in his circumstances. There are undertones of psychological abnormality, sexual confusion and callous disregard for the girl Montgomery killed.

Montgomery details an experience on an unnamed Mediterranean Island that leaves him in debt to a violent crime figure and requires him to return to Ireland to find money to repay the debt. His return to his family home Coolgrange finds his mother and a young woman Joanne running a pony school. He argues with his mother because she has sold their paintings. Before he leaves in a rage, his mother tells him that Joanne is like the son she never had.

Montgomery then visits Whitewater, the family home of the Behrenses, who bought the paintings from his mother, and he spies a small Dutch master. He returns the next day to steal the painting. A young maid startles him, and he gives her the painting to carry as he marches her out to his car. She is screaming at him to let her go as he drives away. He stops the car and bashes her with a hammer. He continues driving and later realizes that she is not dead. He stops the car, throws the painting into a ditch and leaves the girl to die.

Montgomery hides out at the home of Charlie French, an art dealer and old family friend. He talks about his childhood, his relationship with Charlie French, his parents, his wife and his child, who has just been diagnosed with some rare mental disease that he can't remember.

Montgomery's solicitor advises him to plead not guilty to murder and at some later time to plea-bargain a lesser charge of manslaughter. Montgomery never maintains that he is innocent of the crime. He always intended to kill the girl. He just can't work out when he decided. He changes his plea to guilty of first-degree murder, and he knows that he will be given life in jail.

Montgomery's interviews with police officers lead the reader to understand that they don't believe his stories. They question his relationship with Charlie French and Charlie's sexuality. The story ends with the detective inspector asking Montgomery how much of it was true. He replies, "All of it, none of it, only the shame." The reader is left with a work of fiction within a work of fiction.

Part 1, Section 1 (pages 3-25)

Part 1, Section 1 (pages 3-25) Summary

The Book of Evidence opens with an almost dignified personal narration by a prisoner to the court. This person is covered with a blanket between the courthouse and the jail, and the narration includes a description of the remand cell where he is being held.

The novel switches to the calling of Frederick Charles St. John Vanderveld Montgomery to the stand. He says he would like to call his first witness, his wife Daphne, and he details a description of her and their relationship. He states that they have a son, who she neglects in a vacant-minded sort of a way. They lived as locals on a Mediterranean island, but he is vague about which one.

According to Montgomery's tale, he and Daphne meet an American who Montgomery calls Randolph. Randolph gives the impression that he is a dangerous character, but he is also a liar. Montgomery finds him interesting. When Montgomery finds out that Randolph is a drug dealer, he stores the information to use later in blackmail, thinly disguised as a loan.

Randolph borrows the blackmail money from a drug baron, and when Montgomery does not repay it, they cut off Randolph's ear and send it to Montgomery in a tobacco tin. It is only after this that Montgomery realizes that his "loan" must be repaid.

The narrative switches from the past to the present as Montgomery again addresses the court with comments on his history and thoughts about his own life. He details that he became a scientist to make sense of a world that seemed to make no sense to him. He joined the academics at an American university, and to him, they adored him. It was in America that he met Daphne.

On returning to the story, Montgomery meets with the man who gave Randolph the money to lend him. He is Senor Aguirre, a "silver haired hidalgo in a white suit." Senor Aguirre tells Montgomery that he intended to have his loan repaid. Montgomery says he will have to go home to find the money to repay him. Senor Aguirre replies that Montgomery must leave his wife and son there and that he must make a swift return.

Montgomery tells Daphne as little as possible and makes the journey home to Ireland, via Spain. On his journey, he feels that he is about to do something very bad, "something for which there was no forgiveness." He feels that in fact he is running away.

Part 1, Section 1 (pages 3-25) Analysis

Banville has set up a very complex character in Montgomery. He is at once pompous and naive, egotistical in the extreme and self-effacing, a criminal and a victim of his own

mind. There is little to like about him. There is no sense of remorse or of the effects his actions have on anyone else, except to strengthen impression of himself.

The reader must follow erratic changes of thought as Montgomery switches quickly from one time and place to another. This gives the reader a sense of exasperation at such a fragmented and narcissistic mind. Montgomery is setting himself up as victim of public opinion, hero of his own life and champion of free speech, as he addresses the court and narrates his life's tale.

Part 1, Section 2 (pages 26-39)

Part 1, Section 2 (pages 26-39) Summary

Montgomery arrives at Holyhead in Wales in rain, as he expected. He has already broken into his duty free alcohol, and the sunset is "lavishly laid on" as he sails to Ireland. He is startled to hear the Irish accents, thinking them a caricature of themselves.

Montgomery refers to Dun Laoghaire on the Irish coast by the old name of Kingstown, which his father always called it when he was a child. His father used to bring him here on Sunday afternoons and give him a shilling. His father "sloped off," leaving the young Montgomery to his own devices. His mother never accompanied them on these visits. He knows now that they were an excuse for his father to meet with his mistress. He describes his father as slight, with a neat frame and pale features. He goes to great lengths to describe his father's moustache. It was a small fair one that made Montgomery think it was hair displaced from other more secret parts of his body. It made his father's mouth red and vivid, "grinding and snarling." His father was "always more or less angry" but a coward behind the bluster.

Montgomery and his father had their distaste for the world in common, and they were wary of each other. The prisoner mocks that he had no ill feeling for his father, except that he wanted to kill him so that he could marry his mother, as his counsel would urge him to say.

Montgomery hardly recognizes Dublin as the place he left ten years before. Whole streets have been torn down, and the people are squalid, barefoot children begging for money, drunks in the street and a couple of outrageously dressed punks. He finds Wally's pub, a sleazy place frequented by homosexuals that he used to visit when he was student and when he worked for the government.

Montgomery finds it necessary to digress to inform the court that he is not homosexual, but that he liked the atmosphere. He has not been to Wally's in ten years, but he suspects that Wally remembers him, although Wally doesn't admit it. Montgomery speaks with Wally until Charlie French, an old friend of his parents, comes in. Montgomery switches to telling how he is sorry that his arrest injured French, since Montgomery was led out in handcuffs. He startles himself by calling Charlie a friend.

At first Charlie doesn't recognize Montgomery, but then he remembers. They sit drinking together. Montgomery again breaks in with narration, mentioning how he and Charlie would be thrown together when his parents were busy, usually fighting. French took him to the races as a boy, and he bought Montgomery his first drinks and often took him out for treats. The boy first got drunk with Charlie. French is now running a gallery, and Montgomery thinks of asking him for a loan but changes his mind.

The next day, Montgomery heads for Coolgrange, his family home. He diverges again to talk of himself, his lack of direction and how he seems to never catch up to himself. He says that none of what he is saying means anything, but that words are a luxury. He gets a headache after appealing to God to release him from his captivity and before he calls his mother, whom he calls the devil, into the witness box.

Part 1, Section 2 (pages 26-39) Analysis

Montgomery is aware of the psychological ploys that could be used in his defense. He outlines his relationship with his father and mother and their frequent fights which leave him in the care of their friend, Charlie French. He mentions that his counsel might suggest that he was in love with his mother, the classical Freudian Oedipal complex. Montgomery also talks of not fitting in to the world, and when he has a headache, he speaks of these symptoms coming with increasing frequency.

Montgomery is also aware of his concentrated use of words. He says that words are the only form of luxury in prison. He speaks as if a judge and jury are really listening to him, but the reader slowly realizes that he is alone and writing his thoughts.

Montgomery may not realize that he has a habit of digressing before he comes back to difficult parts of his story, usually parts that show him in a bad light. This may be through fear of his failings or a need to stay away from the pain of his reality.

Part 1, Section 3 (pages 40-52)

Part 1, Section 3 (pages 40-52) Summary

Montgomery arrives at his family home, Coolgrange, in the early afternoon. It is overcast. The sun comes out when his mother appears laughing on the front stairs. Montgomery describes his mother with the full knowledge that amateur psychologists will be lurking in the courtroom. He describes her simply. Her name is Dorothy, but she is called Dolly. There is nothing doll-like about her, though. She is large and vigorous, and he remembers her from childhood as being statuesque but distant "like a marble figure at the far side of a lawn."

As soon as Montgomery says hello to his mother, he is annoyed. She notes that he's grown fat and pinches his belly. It wounds his pride. The house is smaller and less well kept than he remembers. It looks as if his mother is living in the kitchen. She was doing accounts when he arrived. Through the kitchen window, he sees a stocky girl leading some Connemara ponies. They are his mother's business venture after the death of his father. He acknowledges a feeling of grief as he stands in the kitchen.

Montgomery's mother insists that he look over the place. She says that someday it will be his and then laughs a throaty cackle that he thinks is out of place and unseemly. The house is falling into disrepair. His old bed is broken, and something is growing out of the middle of the mattress. They go outside for him to see the stables and the paddocks. He meets the stable girl and thinks her name is Joan or Jean.

Montgomery returns to the house and begins drinking. When he goes to cellar to fetch more wine, he thinks of his father. He spent time tinkering down there in the days before his death. Montgomery starts to think of the day his father died, upstairs in the big front bedroom, but he quickly blots it out to return to talk about his mother.

When Dolly tells Montgomery that she no longer drinks, he looks a little harder at her and realizes that she's had a stroke. He teases her to have a little drink, and the stable hand, whom he now compromises and calls Jane, goes to his mother's side and cuddles his mother's head. Her act of kindness towards his mother shocks him.

Dolly mentions his "bad moods," which he explains are very black and even as a child could frighten people. He starts to speak of his schooldays and then thinks the better of it. He continues to drink until he realizes his mother and the stable hand have left the room. He wallows about the evening his father died, with him at his father's side holding his hand, and then he quickly stops to announce that he was not at his father's deathbed at all. His father died alone while no one was looking. Montgomery was called back from the city.

On the way to a bedroom, bottle in hand, Montgomery stumbles into Joanne's room and realizes that Joanne is the stable hand's name. She is startled and pulls the sheet up to

her chin. Montgomery withdraws and marches across the landing to the room he is to sleep in.

Part 1, Section 3 (pages 40-52) Analysis

Montgomery returns to his family home, and the reader realizes that he has contempt for his parents. There is an underlying annoyance with his contrived memories of his childhood. He starts and stops stories, changes what he has said and drinks himself stupid.

On meeting the stable hand, he is dismissive. He can barely recall her name and makes them up as he goes along, as he does with the American in Spain who "lends" him money. He only recalls the stable hand's name, Joanne, when he sees her in bed. He sees that she has long red hair and thinks that she might cradle his head as she had his mother's. By this point in the book, the reader is convinced that Montgomery was a spoilt and cantankerous child who never learned how to make his own way in life.

Part 1, Section 4 (pages 53-72)

Part 1, Section 4 (pages 53-72) Summary

Montgomery awakes at Coolgrange disorientated and hung over. He recalls he had a dream and wants the court to know that his dreams would be of interest to them. He dreamed he was gnawing on the ripped out sternum of a creature that may have been human. He also dreamed that some "nameless authority" was making him do this. While the dream made him nauseated, he also found it exulting. He looks for a suitable synonym for badness in his dictionary and finds them all too judgmental.

Montgomery gets up, goes to the kitchen and makes a pot of tea. Joanne comes in and pours a cup. He asks her to sit and chat with him, but she tells him that the cup of tea is for his mother and leaves the kitchen. He looks for his mother's account books, but they have been locked away. While walking through the house, he realizes that their paintings have gone from the walls. He goes from room to room searching for the paintings, which would have been part of his inheritance, and he realizes that his mother has sold them.

Montgomery finds his mother sitting up with Joanne in her bed. His mother and the girl laugh at him when he explodes, asking about the pictures. He tells his mother that he will speak to her downstairs, and as he leaves, he thinks he hears them sniggering.

The argument between Montgomery and his mother over the paintings brings up that Montgomery abandoned his widowed mother, skipped off to America and married without telling her. He never once brought her grandson to meet her and has been bleeding the estate dry for ten years. He enjoys the argument, stopping in his commentary to compliment how his mother would come back at him and saying it was just like the old days.

After Montgomery and his mother are sated from their battle, his mother tells him that she sold the paintings to Binkie Behrens and that he had already taken the money from the estate. She was left only with debts. Montgomery mentions as an aside that he is struck by the coincidence of the frequent appearance of paintings in his case. He goes on to detail that Helmut Behrens was an art dealer. He also met up with Behrens' daughter Anna Behrens through a painting when they were both in America. Through Anna, Montgomery met his wife Daphne. The three became a triangle in friendship, laughing at the Americans. Then they became lovers. On recalling their single *manage-a-trois,* he realizes he was almost superfluous to a parting between Anna and Daphne. Anna was the priestess in a ritual giving Daphne, the sacrificial offering, to him. He and Daphne married even though he doesn't recall proposing. He had a headache through their wedding, and they left America within the year and sailed for Europe.

Part 1, Section 4 (pages 53-72) Analysis

This section discusses the women in Montgomery's life. His mother has a relationship that Montgomery doesn't completely outline or seem to fully understand with the young stable hand Joanne. His wife Daphne, he believes, had a relationship with Anna Behrens before being "given" to him. He describes his love for Daphne as loving her on the surface. At first he thinks that will sound cold and inhuman, and then he decides it is the only way you can love another person.

Montgomery describes his argument with his mother as the good old days. There is a passion and enjoyment in their fight. At all other times, she seems to disgust him. The prisoner links his relationships with women and his court case with paintings because of Anna's father's business and his buying of the paintings from Coolgrange. Paintings become a symbolic motif throughout the work. They are, like Montgomery's writings, the painter's point of view, a depiction of reality instead of actual reality. When Montgomery says he loves Daphne "on the surface," this shows that Montgomery sees only a superficial image of people, like a two-dimensional painting.

Part 1, Section 5 (pages 73-87)

Part 1, Section 5 (pages 73-87) Summary

Montgomery introduces the reader to his counsel, Maolseachlainn Mac Giolla Gunna. He describes his solicitor's legal prowess, saying he is a terror in the courthouse, but the man also reminds Montgomery of a fat schoolboy who used to be in love with him and do his schoolwork for him.

Maolseachlainn has a trick of seizing on the small details in a case and questions Montgomery about why he went to Whitewater at all. Montgomery insists he went to see Anna Behrens. After all, they were friends, and he had been away for ten years. Maolseachlainn slips into court mode, asking about Montgomery's anger over the paintings. Helmut Behrens had those paintings, and maybe Montgomery felt he had not paid his mother a fair price for them.

Montgomery corrects Maolseachlainn, saying that the fight was not really about Behrens but about money, betrayal, his failing to look after his mother and finally, about Joanne. He lapses again into the retelling. Montgomery gives his mother a parting shot that it is inappropriate for a woman of her position to be so chummy with a stable girl. His mother retorts that Joanne is twenty-seven and is like a son to her, "the son I never had."

Montgomery leaves Coolgrange, arriving at Whitewater in the evening in a taxi he can't afford. He notes that the taxi driver is now a witness, an innocent bystander who will testify against him. He waits inside for Anna to be called. He realizes that the art treasures on display are without security when the butler leaves him alone.

Montgomery goes into a salon and sees a painting of a woman. He says the painting has been seen in all the papers. He describes the painting and then directs a jury that they know nothing of her. They have not come across her in a golden room, nor held her in their arms, nor seen her sprawled in a ditch, nor killed for her.

Montgomery remembers the taxi and turns to leave. He sees a maid in the open French window, one arm stretched above her head as if to defend herself. He turns and leaves the room. The taxi has already left, so he starts to walk. He realizes it is the pull of money that has led him to Whitewater. As he walks, a limousine and a sleek red sports car pass him. The sports car returns and stops beside him. Anna is driving, and she drives him back to Whitewater. He remembers that he stole an envelope of a letter she had once written to Daphne. He licked the gum where she had licked. He realized that he loved her.

Anna is returning from the hospital with her father, who had suffered a mild attack. While they were there, a car bomb had gone off in a crowded street. Anna leads Montgomery back to the gold salon and pours drinks. The taxi driver calls the house complaining that

Montgomery left him unpaid. Montgomery takes the phone and rebukes the driver harshly. Anna goes to fetch her father, and Montgomery surveys the house from the terrace. He wants a share of its richness. The chauffeur passes, and Montgomery mentions that he hates moustaches.

Montgomery dines with Anna and her father. He raises the issue of his mother's sale of the paintings. He says that his mother gave them the paintings, and Behrens quietly says "sold," not gave. He says he has sold them on. They were not suited to staying at Whitewater. He says he paid much more than market value for them, but Montgomery is not to tell his mother that.

This angers Montgomery, and he sees Behrens as a scoundrel and Anna as an aging spinster. He expects to be asked to stay the night and is offended when Anna calls for a taxi. It is the same taxi driver he did not pay earlier in the day. As they part, Montgomery tries to kiss Anna. She steps out of his way and tells him to go home. He realizes in the taxi that he has nowhere to go.

Part 1, Section 5 (pages 73-87) Analysis

Montgomery's visit to Whitewater is getting to the seat of his jealousy and his desperation. It is also coming closer to the connection with his crime. His description of the woman in the painting is as if she understands him. This is not merely an art object that Montgomery steals for money. The painting is a woman, and in a way, she is perfect because she only exists superficially. There is no reality underneath to contradict Montgomery's vision of her. At the same time, she also represents wealth, something that Montgomery covets. The description of the maid in the French doors seems a premonition of the future. Her arm is lifted as if in defense of herself, but Montgomery is walking in the opposite direction.

When Montgomery returns to the room with Anna, he keeps his gaze away from the painting. He covets the finery and riches at Whitewater. They are a complete opposite to his life. He wants someone to lend him money, and yet he has too much pride to ask. He seeks out Whitewater on a thin chance that maybe Behrens owes him or Anna will pity him. When it appears that neither of these things will happen, he becomes angry. As he is leaving Whitewater, he has the feeling that he's disgraced himself, but he can't think how.

Part 1, Section 6 (pages 88-101)

Part 1, Section 6 (pages 88-101) Summary

Montgomery has been in jail for two months, but it seems longer to him. He describes the little bits of outside life that he can see from his small window. It is autumn, and Montgomery relives a dream about his father that he says he always has at this time of year.

In Montgomery's dream, he has somehow rescued his father from a variety of dangers, and his father is in the hospital. He accepts an embrace from his son and appears sheepish. Montgomery had thought that it was death he had rescued his father from, but he now thinks it might be the "long calamity of his life" that Montgomery is "undoing at a stroke." He informs the reader that he has been told his mother has died today, and he thinks that he will now have a similar task to perform.

Montgomery returns to the night at Whitewater. The buses have finished running for the night, leaving him stranded. The taxi driver takes his fare to his mother's house, where she rents a room out to lodgers. Montgomery decides to give the taxi driver a name, Reck, and call his mother Mrs. Reck.

Montgomery lies sleepless in the dreary room, and an ill-thought plan begins to hatch in his mind. He thinks of the women in his life: Anna, Daphne, his mother and the stable girl. He thinks of Anna Behrens as a lonely prisoner in her magic castle in need of rescuing. He assures the judge that his plan originates from a confused muddle of knightly errantry and rescue. Still, it is the woman in the painting who hovers above his bed.

Montgomery eats breakfast and skips out on paying for the lodgings or the taxi. A madman rants unintelligibly at him, and he finds it somehow comforting. The prisoner returns to addressing the judge, telling him that the plan was not a real plan. He feels that if he had not been stuck in that place, he would have gone to Charlie French and asked for the money to repay Senor Aguirre. From there, he would have returned home with his wife and child and made peace with his mother.

Montgomery denounces the accounts of him that have been published in the papers and asserts that he distanced himself from his plan and his actions. He gives an account of a man disassociated from his senses, outside his own body and life. He also asserts that the person inside him is strange to him, not a stranger to him, but a different version of himself. He introduces the personality of Billy Bunter trying to get out from within him.

Montgomery finds himself at a hardware shop where he buys a ball of twine, a roll of brown paper and a coil of rope tied like a hangman's knot. Then he sees a stainless steel hammer that he cannot resist. He argues that the hammer is to indulge the boy

inside him, not Bunter, but the "true lost ghost" of his childhood. Montgomery realizes that it is midsummer's day, and instead of going to the bus stop, he goes to a garage on the outskirts of town and hires an old car for a five-pound deposit.

As an aside from the story, Montgomery details going his mother's funeral today. He is escorted in a closed car. He enjoys the ride, with the sirens blaring as they had at his arrest. It is sweetly melancholy but not in grief for his mother, more for things in general. He is not allowed to get out of the car and is surrounded by smoking policemen. There are few mourners, including a few aunts, a man who used to work for his father, Joanne and Charlie French.

Montgomery wonders if his mother was not as strong as he thought. He argued with her the last time that they met. He wonders if he ruined her life too and mentions, "all these dead women."

Part 1, Section 6 (pages 88-101) Analysis

In this section, Montgomery jumps around from his father, to his mother, to the day he hatched his plan. Each topic seems to be an effort to get away from the other topics, each in turn. He sounds unattached to himself, either indicating the disassociation he mentions earlier or simply callous disregard.

As a diary that Montgomery thinks he will read to a judge, this section is full of psychological symptoms of multiple personality, dissociative disorder, narcissism and delusions. Still, he mentions that he is not looking for any excuses for his crime.

Montgomery mentions the two child personalities he discussed before, his lost, innocent, ghost and the angry Bunter. Billy Bunter was a common schoolyard name for a character that was overweight and teased. He became so angry he became a bully himself. Montgomery feels that this character lives inside him and is trying to come out. The innocent ghost has a penchant for a hammer, not to be used as those in the court might think, but simply to have it.

Montgomery grieves not for his mother's death, but for things in general. This is another psychological pointer that he is not quite normal. Still, these symptoms seem to be noted in a calculated manner. This leaves the reader wondering whether the symptoms are real, imagined due to the stress of his situation or a ploy to divert his guilt.

Part 1, Section 7 (pages 102-119)

Part 1, Section 7 (pages 102-119) Summary

Montgomery continues his tale. He leaves the village in the all-but-stolen car, unknowingly leaving behind a trail of evidence rather than his troubles. He mentions that this is hardly the work of "careful premeditation" and then in brackets asks why "every other thing" he says "sounds like the sly preamble to a plea of mitigation." He goes on to say that he was not thinking at all, but enjoying the ride to Whitewater.

At the gates, he passes a tour bus, empty except for the driver. He muses that the driver will become a witness, and the police will not understand his brazen disregard. He thinks there will be a simple business transaction between him and Behrens, not a police investigation, headlines and "all the rest of it." He takes a driveway to the back of the house and walks across the lawn to the salon. He is about to steal the painting, Portrait of a Woman with Gloves, when a tour party comes into the room. Breaking out of the moment, Montgomery then speaks of his imagined life of the woman in the painting and says that Anna Behrens has sent him a reproduction to hang in his cell.

The tour leader chastises Montgomery and tells him that he must stay with the group. He tells how scared and timid he is when they leave the room. He tries to wrap the painting, but it is too big for the paper. He lifts it in his arms and walks towards the French window. Then, he senses someone else watching him. It is the maid, standing in the doorway as she did the day before.

Montgomery thrusts the painting at her, turns her around and marches her towards the car. He opens the boot and throws tools out onto the grass before putting the painting inside. He pauses to admire the history of the painting, the work that must have gone into its framing. Then he sees that the tourists are staring at them from an upstairs window. He pushes the maid into the backseat of the car and drives off with her.

The maid strikes out at Montgomery. He sees her as a "cornered heroine in a melodrama," and he becomes impatient with her. He starts driving and swings madly out of the driveway. They are shouting at each other, and then he stops the car. He finds the hammer in his hand and pauses to take in the details of her face and hair. She tells him to let her go, or he will be in trouble. Then, he strikes her. He describes the feeling of the blow in detached detail. He thinks one bash will do it, but she tries to fight back. He thinks that it is so unfair that this is happening to him.

Montgomery hits her again and again with the hammer, and she collapses. He gets out of the car and realizes that he is further from Whitewater than he thought. He expected to see cars coming after him, but the road is empty. He throws the hammer away and vomits.

Montgomery gets back in the car and drives, careful not to look behind him and conscious of the smell of blood. He drives to the city and feels free. He stops at a red light, and a woman who reminds him of his mother jumps at his window rapping and saying something about an accident, asking if he is all right. She sees the girl in the back and says, "the poor child." He looks around and sees blood all over the backseat and window. He wonders if there has been a crash, if something has plowed into the back of them, causing this mess. The girl is not dead and starts to grope at the window. He yells at the woman and drives away.

An ambulance drives up behind Montgomery and the girl, and when the passenger sees the mess he signals for Montgomery to follow them to the hospital. They too think they have come from an accident. Montgomery follows but keeps going when they reach the hospital driveway. He lets out "demented laughter" as he drives away from them.

The maid is now sitting up in the backseat. He drives to the seaside, goes down a steep hill near the railway tracks and stops the car. The girl looks at him and says, "Help me." He thinks that she also says, "Tommy" and "love," but he isn't sure. He can't remember feeling anything, except a sense of strangeness. He changes his bloodstained jacket for an old smelly one left in the boot. He pulls out the painting and throws it into a ditch. He feels that the woman in the painting expected better from him, that she is giving him a "dismissive stare." He walks back to the car, trying not to look. Then, he turns and walks away.

Part 1, Section 7 (pages 102-119) Analysis

Montgomery plants the seeds of psychological disturbance and justification and then counteracts them with his own knowledge of his guilt. He callously outlines the fear and pain that he inflicts on the maid and seems to be more empathetic to the painted woman in the portrait. The real woman is unreal to him, while the painted woman can have life in his mind.

Montgomery talks of his lack of remorse and feeling with a lack of remorse or feeling. Yet, he thinks he has some higher rationale and that he is above being all the things the papers say about him. He says he is a bumbling and an uncalculating criminal, and for the part of the robbery, that may be true. His concentration on the physical and inanimate aspects of hitting the girl with the hammer, though, shows a distinct disregard for life. He feels more reproached by the painted lady than a girl pleading for her life.

Part 2, Section 1 (pages 123-137)

Part 2, Section 1 (pages 123-137) Summary

The second part of the book starts with Montgomery detailing a recurring dream he says comes once or twice a year and disturbs him for days. It entails an unknown crime that he thinks may be stumbling on a corpse and covering it up. In the dream, the police come to question him even though there is no suspicion that he was directly involved. Montgomery describes a young policeman for whom he gives the performance of his life. An older man at the questioning is not taken in, and Montgomery panics. He awakes as he bolts for his life.

Montgomery returns to the day of the murder and describes hurrying away from the scene and realizing that the fat, foul-mouthed, inner man has burst out at last with Montgomery "slung helpless on his back." He feels the need to wash his hands and finds his way to an abandoned railway station. In the ladies' toilet, he finds dirty water in which to wash. Afterwards, he discovers a drop of blood between his fingers. He whined in dismay. Nothing he has seen, felt or heard so far has affected him like this. He is afraid to think of what he has done.

Montgomery sits at the abandoned station for awhile and realizes that everyone who sees him is a potential witness. He takes a bus to the city and thinks that he will be caught at any time soon. He expects the Behrenses will tell the police who he was. He wonders if the feeling that he has been given a large dose of local anaesthetic is shock, and he decides that it is just the fear of being caught.

Montgomery goes to Wally's pub and bangs on the door until Wally lets him in before opening time. Wally is with a young man with curls called Sonny. Others come into the bar, and eventually Charlie French arrives. Montgomery has told Wally that his car has broken down. He details the demeanor of Charlie French. He can extricate himself from his surroundings when the gay actors shriek. He looks like a man who has stumbled into the place unaware and is too polite to bolt. Montgomery details how fond he is of Charlie, especially as he keeps paying for Montgomery's gins. The drunker Montgomery gets, the fonder of Charlie he becomes.

Montgomery informs the reader that Charlie got him the job at the Institute. He says that Charlie liked to think of himself as the "wise old family friend" watching over him. Charlie kept in touch with him, kept an eye on him and took him out for treats. He says that their jaunts were always too contrived. Montgomery was always afraid someone would see him with Charlie, and this would make Charlie melancholy.

Montgomery briefly details his work providing research papers for the government in the job that Charlie arranged for him. He was not happy at the job, and he vaguely mentions something happening that left him on the outs. He never quite forgave Charlie French.

Montgomery and Charlie leave the pub, and Montgomery is drunk and retching. He remembers Charlie lives with his mother and asks after her, but Charlie replies that she is dead. Montgomery wants to hug Charlie, but Charlie walks away from him. They walk past the site of the car bomb blast. He realizes that it had happened yesterday, but that yesterday was the last day of his old world. Charlie leaves Montgomery to find a taxi, and Montgomery kneels, holding his arms and rocking back and forth.

Part 2, Section 1 (pages 123-137) Analysis

Montgomery struggles with his recurring dream of a crime that he believes he has nothing to do with. He is vague about his place in Wally's bar. The young man with Wally says to him, "You're new," and he replies, "No, you are," laughing at his own humor. His fondness and relationship with Charlie French is also vague, although Montgomery states that he is not homosexual, and Charlie denies that they met at Wally's Pub.

Montgomery describes the actors in Wally's bar and says that he should go home with one of them to hide out. He also says that Charlie is the best actor of them all. There are levels of charades going on in his narrative. The reader becomes increasingly aware that there are holes in his story, though his purpose is still undefined.

Part 2, Section 2 (pages 138-148)

Part 2, Section 2 (pages 138-148) Summary

Montgomery wakes in a big, sagging bed and thinks that he must be at Coolgrange. He remembers where he is and stands at the window looking out to sea. A seagull hits the glass, and from behind him, Charlie says that they must think his mother is there, since she used to feed them. Charlie is wearing an apron over his clothes and holding a frying pan. Montgomery realizes he is naked.

Charlie cooks breakfast, and Montgomery says that he is in a bit of a scrape. Charlie ignores him. As Charlie fusses, Montgomery feels the same "weepy regard" that he felt for him the night before. He finds Charlie quite maternal in his apron and old felt slippers and feels Charlie would look after him. A car horn toots outside. Charlie quickly dresses in his suit, appears with his briefcase under his arm and asks Montgomery where he is going to be based. Charlie then realizes that Montgomery intends to stay with him. Montgomery doesn't want Charlie to leave, waylaying him by asking for instructions on how to use the stove and where he can find a key. Montgomery watches Charlie from the upstairs window as a "no necked" driver drives him away in a black car.

Alone, Montgomery takes the remains of his breakfast and throws it to the gulls. Then he throws the plate as well. He wipes his hands on the bedclothes. He is both excited and disgusted. He has become a dangerous, unpredictable stranger to himself. He starts to poke through Charlie's things, fearing what he might find. He finds Charlie's secrets here and there and says they are no nastier than his own, although he feels ashamed for Charlie and himself.

Montgomery breaks into a roll top desk, where he finds bank notes, credit cards and letters from Montgomery's own mother, written thirty or forty years before. He does not read them. He puts them back "reverently," along with the cards and the cash, before locking the desk again. He shaves, bathes and dresses in a silk suit of Charlie's, borrowing an entire outfit except underpants, since he can't see himself wearing another person's underwear. He puts his own clothes into a plastic garbage bag and starts to wash up the breakfast dishes. He then sees the girl's face shoot up into his face, and he has to sit down. He is winded and shaken, but he keeps forgetting all about it. He looks around him and wonders if Charlie will notice the missing plate, asking himself why he threw it into the sea.

Montgomery switches to the present, discussing how much he knows about disgust. He goes into minute detail about the mites living on his skin and hair. Then he mentions that his wife came to visit him today. She comes every week. The prisoners fear that their visitors will make a scene, making them the pity of other prisoners. There is no fear about Daphne doing that, though. She is always calm. He is annoyed at her calmness when she speaks about the boy. She had not told him she was having the boy tested. His results have come back, showing a rare syndrome, a vital part missing from his

brain. He will not speak properly or do anything properly. It is no surprise to Montgomery, but he thinks Daphne should have told him she was having the boy tested.

Montgomery finally mentions the boy's name, Van, and that he is seven years old. He imagines the boy fondly being called a big child. He estimates that the boy will be his age by the time he gets out of prison. He tells himself that he will not weep and that if he did he would never stop.

Montgomery returns to his tale. He is still at Charlie's house. He takes cash from the desk and goes to the newsagent to buy the papers. He buys three morning papers, and the car bombing is still on the front page. He sees the girl behind the counter look intently at him, but he muses that might only be in hindsight. He returns to Charlie's and tries to stay away from the papers as if they were some erotica.

Montgomery goes to the toilet, finds some gin and drinks it, before finally finding a few paragraphs under photographs of the bombing. In another paper, there is a photograph of the boys he saw from the abandoned railway station. They have found her. There is also a picture of her. Her name was Josephine Bell, he reads. Inside there are more photographs. There is one of Whitewater House, a file one of Behrens and one of Mrs. Brigid Bell, her mother. A reporter has interviewed Mrs. Bell, and she said that her Josie was a good girl and that she didn't know why anyone would want to kill her. It comes back to him, and he hears her voice. It was Mammy she was saying, not Tommy. "Mammy" and "love."

Part 2, Section 2 (pages 138-148) Analysis

While Montgomery is hiding out at Charlie French's house, readers learn that Charlie is domesticated and lived with his mother before she died. He has "secrets" that make Montgomery ashamed of both Charlie and himself, but he never tells what those secrets are. Charlie also has letters from Montgomery's mother that he's kept for thirty or forty years, but readers are not privy to their contents either.

Montgomery knows that he is a fugitive. He considers growing a beard but doesn't want to lose any more of himself than he feels he already has. He takes an entire outfit of Charlie's, except the underpants. He wants the reader to know that he has limits.

Montgomery sees himself as a ghost in the empty house and then launches into a monologue about disgust, focusing on mites and cracks in skin, gobbling up globs in his pores. Then, Montgomery mentions that Daphne has come to tell him their son is not right in the head. He says he knew there was something wrong. The boy is seven and unable to do many things for himself. Montgomery pities himself, though, rather than the child when he realizes his son will be his age by the time he gets out of jail.

Montgomery learns the name of his victim from the paper. He realizes that she was calling for her mother when she was dying. He rattles the facts about the victim in the paper off with no opinion, whereas when he mentions things papers have said about him, he has a lot of opinions.

Part 2, Section 3 (pages 149-167)

Part 2, Section 3 (pages 149-167) Summary

Montgomery describes his time at Charlie French's house as a fugitive pacing floors and watching endlessly out the window for signs that anyone is coming to get him. He feels that his previous life belonged to another but that he knew it intimately. He cannot fully think about what he has done. Even when he says he "did it" he's not quite sure what it is that he is admitting to. Then he says that he admits freely that he killed, and given his time over he would do it again. He even says he can't say he didn't mean to kill her, only that he doesn't know when precisely he began to mean it.

Montgomery says he cannot think where in the whole process he decided she should die. Then, he quickly changes his claim to that he didn't decide, that Bunter inside him chose to come out at that time and settle his score with the world. She was world enough for him.

Montgomery then muses that the papers said he showed no sign of remorse when the charges were read out to him. He says that they are on to something. He claims that 'remorse implies the expectation of forgiveness' and that what he has done is unforgivable. It is the only thing he has done and finished in his life. He knows the full consequences of taking her life. He feels that jailing him would be a negative thing in the balance of things. The only thing that could redress the imbalance would be for her to be brought back to life.

Montgomery returns to his time at Charlie French's house. Charlie comes home and cautiously puts his head around the door. Montgomery says he hopes Charlie doesn't mind about the clothes. He feels Charlie would have rather that he had left. Charlie speaks about his day as he cooks dinner, and they eat it in the dining room. He mentions the "thing" about Binkie Behrens in the paper.

Montgomery's commentary side steps to what he would have done without alcohol in his predicament and that his life seemed to be a continual tipsy without the merriment. Now that he is forever sober, he knows he has woken up to a "hangover with a vengeance."

Montgomery returns to the evening with Charlie. Charlie tells him that his father was actually meeting his mistress, Penelope, on the afternoons he left the young Montgomery alone. They met here, under the eye of Mammy French. Charlie said his mother liked Penelope, and they exchanged knitting patterns. He coyly says that his mother also knew how fond Charlie had been of Dolly Montgomery. Binkie Behrens had also been keen on Montgomery's mother, and he would invite Montgomery's mother and father to Whitewater and ply his father with booze so he wouldn't notice his "gamy eye and wandering hands."

Dolly would laugh with Charlie French about it all afterwards. Montgomery half-asks "what about you and my - ?" Charlie gives him an "arch and sly look" and tells him to finish the bottle. Montgomery says he thought Charlie told him something else about his mother, but he can't remember what it was. Montgomery rings his mother with tears in his eyes. He wants to ask her how he can go home now. She tells him that he left his bag there and that Daphne called her. Montgomery realizes that he has not thought of Daphne for days. He starts to tell his mother he is in trouble, but she doesn't hear him, so he asks her if she knows who Penelope was. He wants to wound her, but she just laughs and says that of course she knows who Penelope was. His mother tells him that he is too hard on himself. He doesn't understand what she means. He realizes now that these are the last words they will say to each other.

Montgomery asks Charlie for a loan, and Charlie writes him a check. He feels like kissing Charlie's hand. Then, he goes to the bathroom and vomits. He goes to bed and awakes in a sweat. He dozes on and off in a fever. Charlie looks in on him and then retreats downstairs. When Montgomery awakes a day later, he feels that he has survived the first part of his life as a murderer.

Montgomery washes, dresses, steals Charlie's clothes, money and credit cards and goes out. He never cashes the check Charlie gave him. He goes to the newsagent and buys papers. Again he mentions the shop girl watching him. The story has replaced the car bombing on the front of the paper. There is a picture of the car with a guard pointing at something. A variety of descriptions have been given of him, each one getting more dramatic than the one before. He is disappointed and wonders if that means he wants to be caught. He realizes that he does. It is his greatest desire to be "pounced upon, beaten, stripped and set before the howling multitudes." He asks whether it is not the desire of the jury members to be unmasked. He says the days waiting for them to find him are the most exciting he has ever known. Once he is caught he is able to be himself, not the impersonation of himself that he has been so far.

Montgomery uses Charlie's credit cards to buy himself some new clothes and an ostentatious hat. He walks around, goes to a bar and finds it easy to move around unnoticed. He sees a mad young man in the bar rambling about everyone being afraid. When he leaves the bar, Montgomery follows the man. When he loses him, he follows a young fat woman who he thinks of as "brave and sad." Then, he follows a man with a strawberry mark on his face, a woman pushing a little dog in a doll's pram and a young man who marches along growling to himself. He feels brotherly to all these people who must feel his own separation from the world around them.

A group of tinker girls surround him, knock off his new hat and steal his new jacket. He continues to follow people. He is happy, like a child in an adult's game. When he gets back to Charlie's, it is late. He sleeps and dreams of his father, a doll-like version of him with a tall woman who fives Montgomery a "lewd, forgiving smile."

Part 2, Section 3 (pages 149-167) Analysis

This section of the book details Montgomery's madness while on the run. It discusses his sense of self. Information that Charlie gives to Montgomery about his parents confuses him, and he shuts out parts of it, denying the reader access to it as well. Montgomery goes into a fever that keeps him in bed for days. He makes small mention of similar fevers in his childhood. When he awakes, he knows he does not fit into normal society anymore, but he finds this exciting.

Montgomery also enjoys the attention he is getting in the papers. He would rather that people knew who he was. The dramatic descriptions of him do not do him justice. He contemplates being caught as an opportunity to throw off his pretensions. Montgomery follows a variety of characters that also do not fit into society and finds it thrilling and fulfilling. That night, he dreams of his father, who in effect is also living a lie, with his mistress.

Part 2, Section 4 (pages 168-183)

Part 2, Section 4 (pages 168-183) Summary

Montgomery learns that his counsel wants to make a bargain for a guilty plea and that his mother has left Coolgrange to her stable hand Joanne. She has left money for Daphne and for Van's schooling, but nothing for Montgomery himself. Montgomery thinks this is her retribution for their last fight and his crime, but he finds that she rewrote her will nearly eight years ago.

Montgomery returns to his story. He stays quietly at Charlie French's house. He sees little of Charlie and feels that Charlie is avoiding him. He often goes for rambles in the town, exhilarated that no one knows what he has done. He comes back early one night and finds Charlie having a dinner party that he wasn't invited to. He plays waiter while a nervous Charlie watches his every move.

Among the guests are important-looking Max Molyneaux and his wife, supported by two henchmen. There is also a "foxy" lady with short red hair. Max embarrasses Charlie by asking if he is still "buying cheap and selling dear." He then asks Charlie if he has acquired the "Dutch job" for him yet.

As Montgomery helps Charlie's part-time housekeeper in the kitchen, he makes up a fantasy that he is Charlie's manservant. He fantasizes that Charlie has saved him from a sordid life and that he is now loyal and possessive of him. The guests would wonder at their relationship and then remember that Charlie is not inclined that way inclined and that he has the love of his life in a horsy woman down in the country.

The foxy lady speaks to Montgomery, and they later meet under the stairs for a brief anonymous sexual encounter. She cries, and he laughed and then asks her forgiveness. It was not really a laugh.

Montgomery meets again with his counsel, and the talk of pleading guilty is stronger. Montgomery tries to figure out why opposing counsel would want him to plead out his case. He thinks it is to protect Charlie's reputation. If Montgomery goes through with the trial, his being at Charlie's would somehow implicate him. He thinks he would do anything to save Charlie any further embarrassment. Once Maolseachlainn outlines that they will plead guilty to manslaughter and hopefully get a lesser sentence, Montgomery realizes it has nothing to do with Charlie. It is to prevent any evidence being heard.

Montgomery rants in his head to the judge. He does not like that he will not be able to give evidence, to hold the court in his "moment of drama." He thinks they are going to prevent him from having his say because of the reputations of important people involved with Max Molyneaux, although he barely thought to notice him.

Part 2, Section 4 (pages 168-183) Analysis

This section brings a new sense of insignificance to Montgomery's life, and he does not like it. His mother's will has been read, and she has disinherited him. He would have understood if she had done it after his crime, but it was changed many years before that. She has left his family home to her stable hand Joanne, a girl she told him was like a son to her.

Montgomery's counsel wants to plead out his case for a lesser charge to prevent evidence being heard. The evidence will damn him completely, but he doesn't see that, thinking they are trying to protect the reputations of Charlie French and Max Molyneaux. He sees only the lack of opportunity to have his say in court and is wounded to the core.

In inventing a fantasy about being Charlie French's manservant because Charlie rescued Montgomery from life in a sleazy bar, Montgomery speaks of them being like father and son. He says that Charlie is more forgiving than a father, and he is more steadfast than a son. There is a blurred line in their relationship, as there is in his mother and Joanne's relationship and in the relationship between Charlie and his mother.

Max Molyneaux asks Charlie if he has secured the "Dutch job" for him yet. The painting Montgomery steals from Whitewater is a Dutch master. This is a hint that the crime may be an ordered robbery gone wrong, with Montgomery the thief, Charlie the go-between and Molyneaux the customer. This would explain the police's later curiosity about Charlie French and Max Molyneaux and their certainty that Montgomery does not really know Anna Behrens. It may also explain why Montgomery threw the painting into a ditch. The murder would make it too hot to pass on. Maybe Montgomery's fantasy relationship to Charlie French is closer to the truth.

Part 2, Section 5 (pages 184-204)

Part 2, Section 5 (pages 184-204) Summary

Montgomery recounts his capture. It is the morning after Charlie's dinner party. There is a man across the road, looking out to sea, when Montgomery awakes with a hangover. He speaks of having a "wild-eyed euphoria" with mad ideas of taking hostages and making a stand. Instead, he sinks into a kind of trance and relives childhood memories. Charlie rings from down the road to tell him the guards are there and want to speak to him. Charlie comes home, and Montgomery cooks an omelet. Charlie tells him that the police got him up early and took him to the station. At first, Montgomery thinks he means the train station. At it sinks in, Montgomery mentions the treats that Charlie used to give him and tells him that he enjoyed them. Then he realizes that there is an "ancient, unimportant" lie in it. It is as off as the sour milk he took from the back of the fridge and is drinking.

Charlie asks Montgomery what he has done. As Montgomery is apologizing, a policeman with a machine gun comes into the doorway of the kitchen. More police follow. One is the man who was across the road earlier in the day. Montgomery is impressed with the array of guns they have brought with them. The police line up along the walls and wait for the arrival of a young detective, Detective Inspector Haslet. Montgomery writes a "Hello" to the Inspector in brackets, saying that he hopes he doesn't mind Montgomery mentioning his dainty hands.

Montgomery names the policeman with the machine gun Sergeant Hogg. The sergeant puts handcuffs on him and leads him out to the police car. Montgomery feels elated, full of energy, and he makes jokes about the situation. His only sadness is the look on Charlie's face. Hogg reads him his rights in the car, and Montgomery thanks him. Montgomery then interrupts the narrative to announce that Helmut Behrens has died, saying this is turning into the Book of the Dead.

Montgomery details his enjoyment of the speeding journey to the police station. He is intimidated by the anger only just being kept in check within the police officers in the car with him. The police station is quiet, since it is a Sunday afternoon. When Montgomery first arrives he feels nauseated, and an old guard takes him to the toilets, where he vomits. He asks Haslet how they found him and is told that the girl in the newsagents noted that he only ever looked for one story in the papers. He doesn't know whether to believe Haslet. He wonders whether he is covering up for the Behrenses and then puts in brackets that he wasn't. They had kept quiet to the end.

Montgomery relates his story to Haslet, Hogg and another man typing it up at a typewriter. They do not believe his story and bring in another man, a man of higher importance, he thinks. When he retells it, the man asks why he killed the girl. He is sick of getting caught up in the inconsistencies of his story. He replies that he killed her because he could. Another man asks if Charlie French is queer, a fairy, and

Montgomery laughs at the thought of Charlie prancing into Wally's and pinching boys' bottoms. Apparently, Sonny has been telling lies about Charlie. All his earlier euphoria has gone.

Haslet tells Montgomery that the police will let his solicitor know he is there. Montgomery doesn't have a solicitor and fancies the idea of representing himself. Another officer tells him that he had better straighten out his story. He advises that Montgomery leave all the "frills and fancy bits" out of it. Montgomery has no idea what he is talking about and is deeply offended.

The police take Montgomery to the cells, which are much like he expected and make him feel no longer human. Hogg comes back and hands him his statement on a grubby piece of foolscap paper. Montgomery looks at the "ill-typed page," and Hogg asks if he wants to sign it. Montgomery replies that they are not his words. Hogg leaves, telling him to suit himself and that he will be going down for life anyway.

Montgomery reads the confession, criticizing its conciseness. He describes it as the art of an artist that conceals art, a ruthless suppression of ego. They have pared down his confession to the stark essentials. They have made a murderer out of him. He spends a fitful night. He repeatedly masturbates using visions of women he has known: Daphne, Anna, the foxy lady, his mother, Joanne and others. He notes that the one woman who will not come forward is the one in the mysterious, dark doorway, yearning to appear and to live.

Part 2, Section 5 (pages 184-204) Analysis

Montgomery is exhilarated by finally being caught and by being the center of attention. His narcissism is fed by the dangerously attentive police officers. He ruminates about the gentleness and youth of Detective Inspector Haslet.

Montgomery's one concern for anyone but himself is for Charlie. He somehow needs Charlie's forgiveness, not for the murder, but for getting Charlie involved. He laughs and then is angry at the thought that the police have been told that Charlie is homosexual. He says he sometimes has a woman, and the police officers laugh, making him realize that is not the impression he meant to give them.

Montgomery envisions himself holding court, defending himself and orating to a captive audience. His ego is bruised when his confession is handed to him without his "frills and fancy" words. He sees they have painted him simply as a murderer and says he would sign it in his blood except that they have stripped him of anything that he could have written with.

Montgomery comforts himself with masturbation and fantasies of women in his life. These are all women who he thinks care for him. His actions are both a physical release and a psychological need to be recognized as a human being. He is aware of the ghost who will not come to him, hovering over the foot of his bed. It is not obvious whether it is the girl he killed or the woman in the painting.

If the crime is the plain burglary gone wrong alluded to in the previous section, it explains why the Behrenses did not tell the police about Montgomery. Charlie French may have known about the painting from Montgomery's mother's visits to Whitewater.

Part 2, Section 6 (pages 205-220)

Part 2, Section 6 (pages 205-220) Summary

Montgomery awakes with nausea and wonders if it will be with him for the rest of his life. The interviews continue and include two men intent on finding out what he knows about Charlie French and his associates. He feels it is all a sham to distract and intimidate him, but it only serves to make him grow bored.

Haslet returns, and Montgomery tells him he is worried about his wife. Haslet seems uninterested in him and asks why he hadn't signed his confession. Montgomery flies into a rage when Haslet doesn't answer him. He bangs his fist on the table and yells that he will sign nothing until he gets answers. His anger is soon spent, and he sits back down, biting on a knuckle. Haslet tells him that Daphne is getting on a plane about then.

Montgomery likes his counsel Maolseachlainn immediately. He says he was engaged by Montgomery's mother, but in truth Charlie is sending the money via her account to Maolseachlainn. He tells his counsel about the corrupted confession, arguing it is not his guilt he is contesting. He knows he is guilty. He is told to sign nothing. They will plead not guilty and then later plead guilty to a lesser charge of manslaughter. Montgomery says it doesn't seem right.

When Maolseachlainn asks if there is anything Montgomery would like, he asks for a razor and his belt, not to kill himself, but because he is missing them. In an effort to detain him longer, Montgomery tells Maolseachlainn that he meant to kill her and that he has no explanation or excuse.

Montgomery is disappointed by his court appearance. It is in a shabby room, not something grand like he expected. The session lasts only a few minutes. He notes that the audience is delighting in his distress, and the judge seems to be treating him with some amusement. Outside, a small crowd has gathered to jeer at him. He forgets himself and waves at them. Some of them try to get to him, and only then does he realize he has killed one of theirs. A blanket is thrown over his head in the police car, and he weeps.

Montgomery's first visitor in jail is Joanne, although he gets her name wrong again and calls her Jenny. She has brought his bag from Coolgrange. His mother is still alive then, and he asks Joanne to tell her he is sorry. He says that when Daphne visited him she said that he knew nothing about them. He realizes it was true.

Montgomery details his new friendship with another man, Billy, who is charged with murder and multiple rapes. Billy is nineteen, and their trials start on the same day. Montgomery thinks Billy is a little in love with him. Billy has been in and out of custody since childhood, and he makes Montgomery believe in the existence of the soul.

The things Joanne brought Montgomery give him a kind of grief for his dead life past. He decides to study to fight off the despair in jail. He will study Dutch art and asks Daphne to bring books on the subject. He becomes a minor expert in it, but he says it pales compared to the real knowledge gained by staring into the painting he stole. He looks at the reproduction on his wall but says something is dead in it. He also reads avidly about his case in the prison library. He learns about Josie Bell's life. He realizes she was never alive to him and wants to somehow make her live in his mind.

Daphne brings Montgomery a picture of him drawn by Van. He describes a huge clubfoot, sausage fingers and one cyclopean eye and says it is a good likeness. Daphne and Van have moved into Coolgrange with Joanne. He finds it amusing, and he will live there with him when he is released.

Montgomery tells Maolseachlainn that he will plead guilty to first-degree murder. He tells him that the girl was still alive when he left her. He says he would have finished off a dog. He then details a plot involving the paintings. Charlie bought his mother's pictures cheap, sold them dear to Binkie Behrens, bought them back cheap from Behrens and sold them on to Max Molyneaux. Montgomery then asks if it matters.

Montgomery says that he is eating time, consuming the future. He has his good days and his bad days now that he has been put on the side of criminals. He is still trying to bring the girl to life in his mind. His trial will take place in the next month, but it will disappoint the papers by being a quick affair.

Montgomery thinks of trying to have his testimony published, and then he decides to ask Inspector Haslet to put it into his official file, among the other lies. Haslet asks him how much of it is true, if he owed money, knew the Behrens woman or had been a scientist. Montgomery says, "All of it. None of it. Only the shame."

Part 2, Section 6 (pages 205-220) Analysis

In this section, readers learn that Charlie is paying for Montgomery's defense and that there was a plot involving the buying and selling of paintings. It is possible Charlie sold paintings to Behrens, stole them from him and resold them to Molyneaux. The possible meanings or truths behind this are unclear, though. As Montgomery wonders, does it matter?

Montgomery still has delusions of grandeur, acting like a celebrity at his court appearance and thinking a young prisoner is slightly in love with him, the way he thought his counsel also was when they first met. He imagines that his writings will go down as his defense. The reader is left to work out, much like the detective, just how much of his story has actually been true.

Characters

Frederick Montgomery

Frederick Montgomery is the narrator of his own testimony of his murder of Josie Bell. He outlines the details leading up to the crime, the crime itself and the events beyond the murder. Montgomery is narcissistic and shows strong signs of psychological antisocial behaviors.

Montgomery is also a liar, and his account cannot be taken as truth. He says that he married his wife Daphne in America and that they lived on a Mediterranean Island where he got into debt to a local crime boss. They have one son, Van. Montgomery also talks of other personalities within him. One is the innocent ghost child lost to him now, and the other is an explosive character called Billy Bunter. He blames Bunter for the murder of Josie Bell, but he also knows that he is Bunter.

Montgomery frequents a homosexual haunt in Dublin and goes there to meet Charlie French. Montgomery insists that neither he nor Charlie is homosexual. He has a great regard for Charlie, feeling safe in his company, and it is Charlie he feels most sorry for when his crime becomes known. He thinks of treats that Charlie used to pay for when Montgomery was a child, and he tells Charlie that he enjoyed them. Then, he admits to himself that is a lie. The true relationship between Montgomery and Charlie is never revealed. They are described a number of times as having a father-son relationship.

Charlie French

Charlie French is an art dealer who buys paintings cheap and sells them for more. He is a family friend of the Montgomerys, and he appears to have had a crush on or a relationship with Charlie's mother. He also used to spend time with the young Freddie Montgomery while his parents argued, and he would take Montgomery out for treats. Charlie arranged Montgomery's government job, which Montgomery says he'll never forgive Charlie for.

Charlie frequents Wally's Pub, a popular gay haunt, but he appears to not belong there. He allows Montgomery to stay at his house, not knowing his crime. Charlie is there when Montgomery is captured.

Josie Bell

Josie Bell is the maid at Whitewater. Frederick Montgomery kidnaps and murders her while he was stealing a painting, after he surprises her in the salon. He thrusts the painting into her arms and marches her to the car. She fights against him in the car and does not die quickly. She calls out "Mammy" and "love" as she is dying from her injuries.

Her mother says she was a good girl. She was quiet and well thought of by her friends and neighbors.

Daphne Montgomery

Daphne is Montgomery's wife. He says they met in America when she was sharing a house with Anna Behrens. Montgomery details that they were friends and that their first sexual encounter was in a threesome with Anna, who appeared to be handing over Daphne to Montgomery.

Montgomery describes his wife as beautiful but vague most of the time, even when their son needs attention or when they are making love. When he's in jail, she tells him that he never knew her or his son. She also tells him that she had their son Van tested and that he has a severe mental condition.

When Daphne becomes distraught about Montgomery pleading guilty to murder, she details how little he knew or understood of her and all of the things he has done, or not done, over the years. He distracts himself by thinking about other things that show that he has some humanity, so the reader learns no more about Daphne.

Dorothy Montgomery/Ma Jarrett/Dolly Montgomery

Montgomery's mother Dorothy is of Dutch heritage and is strong and independent. She has an acid sense of humor and argues with him passionately. She shows him around Coolgrange on his return after ten years, saying he will inherit it when she dies. However, she already knows she has changed her will in favor of her stable hand, Joanne. Dorothy had some relationship with Charlie French. There are old letters from her in Charlie's desk. Charlie says that Binkie Behrens also had a crush on her when she was younger.

Joanne, the Stable Hand

Joanne appears to be nothing like Montgomery assumes. He assumes that she is just a stable hand, and yet his mother sits up in her bed chatting and laughing and leaves her estate to Joanne on her death.

Dolly Montgomery says that Joanne is like the son she never had. Joanne is Montgomery's first visitor in jail, bringing him the bag he left at Coolgrange. She also asks Daphne and Van to move in with her and says that Montgomery will be welcome to live there when he is released from jail.

Anna Behrens

Anna Behrens comes from a wealthy family, and her father has an interest in collecting art. Her father invited Montgomery's parents to Whitewater. He apparently had a crush on Dolly and would ply Montgomery's father with alcohol and make moves on Dolly.

Montgomery says that he met up with Anna again in America. At her house, he meets Daphne. He later realizes that Daphne and Anna were lovers. He visits Whitewater to see if they still have paintings that his mother sold to Anna's father.

Anna organizes dinner for Montgomery and her father, but she does not ask him to stay as he had hoped. Anna later sends him a reproduction of the painting that he stole from them to hang in his cell, Montgomery claims. Neither she nor her father mentions him to the police. Montgomery's relationship with the Behrenses may be a figment of his imagination.

Maolseachlainn Mac Giolla Gunna

Maolseachlainn Mac Giolla Gunna is Montgomery's legal counsel. Montgomery describes him as a big man with a big reputation, but Montgomery fancies that the lawyer is like a shy schoolboy who used to try to please Montgomery. Maolseachlainn thinks Dolly Montgomery has hired him, but Charlie French arranged it and is secretly paying his fees.

Maolseachlainn's plan is to have Montgomery plead not guilty to murder and then at a later stage make a plea bargain and plead guilty to manslaughter. The evidence against Montgomery is overwhelming. Montgomery, though, decides to plead guilty to first degree murder, and not the lesser plea. Maolseachlainn is non-judgmental about Montgomery's crime, but in the end Montgomery thinks he either sees disgust, or maybe shock, on Maolseachlainn's face.

Objects/Places

Coolgrange

Coolgrange is the Montgomery family home. On the death of Montgomery's father, it falls into disrepair. Montgomery's mother says he took all of the money, and she had to sell their paintings to invest in a pony school. Coolgrange was to have been Montgomery's inheritance, but his mother leaves it instead to Joanne, who works the pony school with her.

Whitewater

Home of the Behrens family, Whitewater is the location of the robbery where Montgomery steals a painting and kidnaps the maid. Whitewater is a much finer residence than Coolgrange, and its artworks are exquisite. A Dutch painting in a salon catches Montgomery's attention, and he comes back to steal it.

Wally's Pub

Wally's is a pub in Dublin, frequented by homosexuals and actors. Wally is a homosexual with a fondness for young men. Montgomery frequents the pub when he is a student and also when he works in a government job. He thinks Wally only pretends to not remember him when he appears after a ten-year absence. Montgomery claims that he met up with Charlie French here, but Charlie denies this.

Portrait of a Woman With Gloves

Portrait of a Woman with Gloves is the painting that Montgomery steals from Whitewater. He details that it measures eighty-two by sixty-five centimeters. It dates from between 1655 and 1660 and was painted by an anonymous master, sometimes thought to be Rembrandt or Frank Hals. The painting shows a woman of Eastern cast dressed in a black dress with broad white collar and cuffs. She is wearing a brooch. Montgomery feels this woman comes to life and judges him at varying times throughout the robbery.

Charlie French's House

Charlie's house in Dun Laoghaire on the Irish coast is a setting that has come up often in Montgomery's life. His father used to meet with his mistress in this house. Montgomery remembers coming to it when he was a student and when he worked for the government. He returns here with Charlie when he is running away from his crime. The house holds secrets of Charlie's life, Montgomery's father's life, his mother's

involvement with Charlie and Montgomery's own life. The police capture Montgomery here.

Themes

Childhood

Banville's lead character and narrator in *The Book of Evidence* often refers back to his childhood and the childhoods of other characters. He describes his as a fractured sort of existence with two parents who for the most part ignored him. He starts and stops stories about his childhood. Sometimes the stories are leading to fears, and other times they are leading to violence.

Montgomery says that he has a fat, angry character, Billy Bunter, inside him who comes out when Montgomery can't control him. Bunter was the victim of taunts, and he comes out to avenge these scars. Montgomery says that Bunter took over and killed the girl.

The prisoner also talks of a lost innocent child within him. This child is fearful and sensitive, but it is a ghost that no one sees. Readers don't know whether they can believe the narrator, but these child personalities are an indication of possible repressed child abuse and a splintered personality.

Sexuality and Relationships

Many of the characters in *The Book of Evidence* have a secret sex life. Montgomery's father had a long-standing affair with his mistress. Montgomery hadn't realized his wife and Anna Behrens were serious lovers until after he thought about it when he was in jail, but this may have been a figment of his imagination. His mother's relationship with Joanne is ambiguous, as are both Montgomery and his mother's relationships with Charlie French.

Montgomery keeps saying that he is not homosexual, and neither is Charlie. Still, innuendo about their relationship is present throughout the novel. When the police ask if Charlie is homosexual, he says that Charlie has the occasional woman. The only woman linked to Charlie throughout the book is Montgomery's mother, but their relationship is kept secret from the reader because Montgomery forgets parts of what Charlie told him and because he does not reading the old letters from his mother that Charlie keeps in his desk.

Montgomery could be Charlie's son, or Charlie could be a pedophile. Montgomery could be one of his former victims or lovers, or Charlie could be an art thief pimp and Montgomery the thief. Whatever their relationship, Charlie has kept an eye on Montgomery since his youth and ultimately pays for his legal bills.

Psychological Anomalies

Montgomery's narcissism is evident from the first page of *The Book of Evidence*. He can only detail things that put him in the best light. That is not to say that he can't say mean things about himself, because those things may bring him the most attention. He is pompous in thinking that he would be able to narrate to the court in such detail. He is angry when the police pare down his statement to the reality of him cold-bloodedly murdering a young and helpless girl.

Montgomery's considerations are always about himself. He can't bear to bring up details that will upset him. These may be details about the murder, but less so than details about his childhood, his relationship with his parents and his relationship with Charlie French. Whenever a piece of important news comes to him, he blabbers about some other less important details before quickly writing what others would consider most important, such as, by the way, my mother died today. This could be purely narcissism, since these offerings may take the attention away from Montgomery, but they could also be signs of an avoidant personality disorder. Sometimes when unpleasant details do flow through, Montgomery shows signs of physical discomfort, for example, vomiting, sweats and fevers.

At times, Montgomery sounds sociopathic in his coldness towards his victim, and yet, he freely admits his guilt and expects to be punished. His own view of himself is distorted, and readers have no clear picture of him from the book. The descriptions given to police are contradictory. He most recognizes himself in a portrait done by his son Van. In this picture, Montgomery has a clubfoot, meaty fingers and one cyclopean eye. He hints at being teased as a child for being overweight, and he talks of the emergence of Billy Bunter.

Montgomery's recollection of other personalities within him is not strictly in accordance with multiple personality disorder, but this aspect of Montgomery's tale is also not within a normal psychological range. He does not use any of these factors as a defense, which only increases the evidence of a psychological condition.

Style

Point of View

John Banville's *The Book of Evidence* is written in first person narrative from the sole perspective of murderer Frederick Montgomery. This narrative is frustrating since it is tightly restrictive and unlikely to be reliable. Montgomery is a narcissistic, cold-blooded murderer, given to flights of fantasy about his own life and his importance in the lives of others.

Banville hints at information just outside of the reader's grasp and then never fully reveals it. Montgomery contradicts media coverage of him and his case and even lets the reader know when things are not as other characters are trying to convey them.

Montgomery jumps from telling the story of his past to what is happening to him or what he is thinking at the moment he is writing. The past and the present are separated well, and the reader does not lose track of his story. Still, Montgomery's musings are long-winded, and the reader often feels that he or she is being played by the narrator.

Setting

Published in 1989, *The Book of Evidence* is told from an Irish prison cell, presumably in Dublin in present time. There is reference to car bombings in the city of Dublin, and Montgomery thinks to set up his crime as if it were an act of terrorism. Montgomery describes himself as not being a city person, but a country boy. He was raised on a rural property. Whitewater is also a rural property that allows tours to operate in public areas. Montgomery also details the start of his journey on a Mediterranean Island, but his descriptions are like a travel guide, lacking intimacy and conviction. He doesn't even settle on which island he was on, as if it is unimportant. It comes across as a fantasy.

Language and Meaning

Banville writes from the fractured mind of Frederick Montgomery. The language is often erratic in thought, as Montgomery switches from storytelling to his intruding thoughts to an analysis of what he has written. It is a personal journal, but it is intended to be Montgomery's own account to impress members of a court, the jury, the angry crowd and the media. Eventually, he settles for the account going in his official file. The investigating detective questions its accuracy.

Montgomery uses words as a measure of freedom, and he discusses this. He asks for a dictionary so that he can use more exceptional words. A police officer criticizes his use of frills and fancy language. A reader may have the same criticism. His use of childhood references and partial memories may be a tool to evoke a sense of innocence, but they are too constricted and contrived, only adding to the sense of frustration.

Structure

The Book of Evidence is 220 pages, separated into two parts. The first part has seven sections detailing Montgomery's life up to and including the murder of Josie Bell. The second part has six sections detailing his life on the run, his capture and the legal process that follows.

The book does not follow a simple linear structure. Montgomery jumps back and forth from his life in prison to the murder and the case, to what led him to it, to his childhood and to other things he thinks will be relevant in understanding his motivations.

The tension often builds to an anticlimax, where nothing happen. When things do happen, Montgomery appears unable to keep to the facts. He notes the weather, the sky, his feelings, things his feelings remind him of and only very rarely the impact that the action has on anyone other than himself. It is as if he relishes the details and as if somehow they make him more significant.

Quotes

"Stand up please, place your hand here, state your name clearly. Frederick Charles St John Vanderveld Montgomery. Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth? Don't make me laugh." Part 1, Section 1, pg. 7

"In low dives such as this the burden of birth and education falls from me and I feel, I feel - I don't know what I feel." Part 1, Section 2, pg. 32

"I am just amusing myself, musing, losing myself in a welter of words. For words in here are a form of luxury, of sensuousness, they are all we have been allowed to keep of the rich, wasteful world from which we are shut away." Part 1, Section 2, pg. 38

"I am struck for instance, by the frequent appearance which paintings make in this case." Part 1, Section 4, pg. 61

"She. There is no she, of course. There is only an organization of shapes and colors. Yet I try to make up a life for her." Part 1, Section 7, pg. 105

"Somewhere inside me a voice was moaning softly in panic and fright." Part 1, Section 7, pg. 110

"She put her hand up to her head just as I was swinging at her again, and when the blow landed on her temple her fingers were in the way, and I heard one of them crack, and I winced, and almost apologized." Part 1, Section 7, pg. 114

"What did I feel? Remorse, grief, a terrible - no no no, I won't lie. I can't remember feeling anything, except that sense of strangeness, of being in a place I knew but did not recognize." Part 1, Section 7, pg. 119

"It's a very rare condition, somebody's syndrome, I have forgotten the name already, some damn Swiss or Swede - what does it matter. He will never speak properly. He'll never do anything properly, it seems. There is something wrong with his brain, something is missing, some vital bit." Part 2, Section 2, pg. 146

"Nor can I say I did not mean to kill her - only, I am not clear as to when I began to mean it." Part 2, Section 3, pg. 150

"By the way, what an odd formulation that is: to get life. Words so rarely mean what they mean." Part 2, Section 4, pg. 169

"Why, even poor Foxy was hardly more substantial to me in my frantic condition than a prop in a wet dream. No wait, I take that back." Part 2, Section 4, pg. 182

"What a motley little band of manikins I conjured up to join me in these melancholy frottings." Part 2, Section 5, pg. 203

"In these explorations my friend Billy is a valuable guide." Part 2, Section 6, pg. 213

Topics for Discussion

Explain why the narrator Montgomery would allude to so many psychological symptoms and yet not try to use them in his own defense.

Discuss the relationship of Charlie French to the Montgomery family.

What signs of remorse are detailed in the story?

Explain why Montgomery could not make the maid real in his mind.

Discuss the appearance of Billy Bunter and whether it is a coincidence that Montgomery's new friend in jail is called Billy and their trials are set on the same day.

Do you think Van Montgomery's mental problems are hereditary? Explain why Montgomery would forget the name of the rare condition.

Explain why you think the Behrenses do not tell the police about Montgomery.

What is the significance of the painting being Dutch, Montgomery's mother being of Dutch heritage and Max Molyneaux asking Charlie French about the "Dutch job"?

Discuss how and why the woman in the painting seems to come to life for him.

Discuss how much of Montgomery's story you think is true, based on what you've read.