

Etta and Otto and Russell and James Study Guide

**Etta and Otto and Russell and James by Emma
Hooper**

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Etta and Otto and Russell and James Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4.....	4
Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8.....	7
Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12.....	11
Chapters 13, 14, 15 and 16.....	14
Chapters 17, 18, 19 and 20.....	17
Characters.....	20
Symbols and Symbolism.....	23
Settings.....	25
Themes and Motifs.....	26
Styles.....	28
Quotes.....	30

Plot Summary

NOTE: This study guide refers to *Etta and Otto and Russell and James*, by Emma Hooper, the Kindle Edition, Copyright 2015.

In *Etta and Otto and Russell and James*, a novel by Emma Hooper, an 83-year-old woman named Etta leaves her farm home in Saskatchewan early one morning on a trek to see the ocean she has never viewed. Etta leaves a note for her husband, Otto, takes his gun, a few personal items, and some food. Along the way, Etta is joined by a talking coyote named James as well as other people who gain notice of her journey. Etta struggles with early stages of dementia. The lines between her identity and Otto's blend as the story extends. Otto enrages their close friend, Russell, when he declares that Etta should be allowed her independence. Russell chooses to go after Etta, whom he has loved since he met her sixty years ago. When he does catch up with Etta, she advises him to follow his own path and create his own journey which he does. Otto, on the other hand, stays at home, baking and making paper-mache animal figures while he waits for Etta's return. Flashbacks and letters of Otto's time in World War I play out on the current landscape of the aging trio's lives.



Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 4

Summary

In Chapter 1, an 83-year-old woman named Etta Kinnick Vogel leaves a note for her husband, Otto Vogel, telling him that she has gone off to see the ocean. She has taken his rifle, but she has left him the truck. She also leaves her recipes so he will not starve while she's gone. Otto discards the idea of trying to find her. Instead, he checks his big globe and determines that she has probably headed east, even though it would be quicker to get to the water if she were to go west from their Saskatchewan farm. Etta never liked short cuts.

Otto grew up in a large farming family of fifteen children. People thought his mother was supernatural because all her babies lived during a time when most were dying. In contrast, Etta grew up with only one sibling, a sister named Alma. They lived in town and thought a lot about the nuns that they saw everywhere.

In Chapter 2, in present day, Etta leaves home early because she doesn't want Otto to see her. She walks through their fields and then on to their neighbor, Russell's, fields. She sees Russell out looking for deer and tells him that she is going on a walk and he kisses her hand and tells her that he'll be there if she needs him. He doesn't ask Etta where she is going or why. Some of the items that Etta has packed in her pockets include chocolate, underwear, socks, paper, pencil, pen, Otto's rifle and a small fish skull.

Because there were so many children in Otto's family, each child also had a number. Because Otto was the seventh child, he was called Otto-7. One night a strange boy was seated in Otto's chair and his mother invited him to have meals with them. The boy's name was Russell and he was the nephew of the Palmers next door. Until recently, Russell had lived in Saskatoon with his parents but his father's store was forced out of business when the banks failed and Russell was sent to live with his aunt and uncle.

Etta was six-years-old that same year. It didn't rain for months, and Alma took Etta to look at dried out fish skulls and skeletons on the riverbed. Alma told her the skulls could come back to life if you touched them and to leave them alone but Etta took some anyway.

In Chapter 3, in present day, Etta sings as she walks through the fields and stops at a cafe where she and Alma had eaten many years ago. Etta continues her walk until she reaches a lake. She knows that Ontario has lots of lakes but doesn't expect to see one so soon. She sits on the sand to rest and is awakened awhile later by a couple of kids who think she is dead. Etta assures them that she isn't dead and produces a paper with her name age and address on it. The kids had been on their way back to a party and they invite Etta to go with them. Later, Etta writes a letter to Otto telling him that the kids loaned her a boat to get across the river. Otto receives the letter a week later



Russel became just like another member of the Vogel family, spending time with his aunt and uncle only for suppers and sleep. One day Otto tried to teach Russell how to drive a tractor but Russell lost control, injuring his leg in an accident and he walked with a limp from then on.

A few years after Russell's accident, Alma took Etta to a cafe and told her that she was pregnant and was going away to a convent on Prince Edward Island to have the baby which would be given up for adoption. Alma's parents thought she was going to the convent to become a nun. Etta never said anything different.

In Chapter 4, in present day, Otto writes a letter to Etta telling her that he is sending letters to his nephew in Manitoba in the event that she stops in there for a visit. He also says that it's right that Etta sees the ocean if she wants, but if there are any other reasons for her journey, he is willing to hear what she has to say.

Etta reaches Manitoba, having walked 14 days. Along the way she has washed her clothes and her body by wading into rivers and streams. A few months before her journey, Etta started to be pulled into Otto's dreams where she stood on a beach with blood lapping to her knees while men all around her cried out.

When Russell and Otto were boys, they alternated days of going to school so that the farm chores would be completed. Otto shared his desk with a boy named Owen who was advanced and helped Otto with his writing and spelling. Otto felt bad because he was good at working on the farm but lagged behind in school work.

When Alma was at the convent, she wrote letters to her parents telling them about her religious duties; but, her letters to Etta told of her advancing pregnancy. The letters continued for a few months until one day when Alma's parents received a letter from the convent telling them that Alma had died of toxemia. Etta signed up at the teacher's college a month later.

Analysis

Supernatural events that are accepted in a rational world define the genre of magic realism. These occurrences come into play early in the story. For example, many believe that Otto's mother possesses supernatural powers because she is the mother of several healthy babies during a time when few babies survive. Otto grows up in a remote farming area where folklore and unexplained events are assigned supernatural or otherworldly definitions. For example, Etta's sister, Alma, cautions little Etta to not touch the dried out fish skulls on the riverbed because they will come back to life if she does.

These instances of magical realism ebb and flow in the story and blend in with Etta's memories and, more importantly, her loss of memory. Etta is experiencing the early stages of dementia and what is real and what is not become ever more difficult for her to discern. Etta is very brave in wanting to set out on such a journey at her age, knowing that her mind and memory are compromised. She tells Otto in her note to him that she



will try to remember to come back from her trip. This is amusing at first when viewed as the matter-of-fact statement from a woman who has always known her own mind. Another look at the statement, however, is very sad in that Etta knows she is losing her mind slowly and remembering to come back may not be an option.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Otto's and Etta's lives as children.

Discussion Question 2

How does the author introduce the supernatural into the story?

Discussion Question 3

From the items that Etta takes on her journey, what can you tell about her?

Vocabulary

overlapping, latitude, kilometers, silhouette, siblings, fixedly, overalls, numeration, filthy, transparent, rhubarb, obstacles, shallow, distracted, cascades, dinghy, indents, treacherous, scythe, essence, unconscious, momentum, hulled



Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8

Summary

Etta can no longer wear her boots because her feet are swollen and beginning to bleed. One night she dreams about water and boats. In one dream, there are boys who tell her she is in no place for a woman. When Etta wakes the next morning, a coyote is licking the blood from her feet, and it follows her into town and into a shoe store where she buys some athletic shoes. The coyote follows Etta when she leaves the store, and she names him James. The next morning, Etta asks James if he will be following her for her whole journey, but he is not sure.

Otto is becoming gaunt from not eating properly. He decides to make Etta's cinnamon roll recipe, but it fails miserably. After a couple more days and some more attempts, Otto makes rolls that are still too tough. A woman at the commissary tells Otto that he is kneading the bread too long so his next attempt yields rolls that are almost like Etta's. Otto takes some rolls to Russell and tells him that Etta has gone. Russell already knows this and shows Otto a letter that Etta had written to him asking him to look after Otto.

When Russell was six-years-old, his father took him to his store to choose a birthday gift. Russell chose a book on hunting and tracking animals in Western Canada. Russell is particularly taken with images of deer tracks. His father tells him that it is possible to find deer if a person is quiet and patient.

In present day, Otto returns from Russell's house and goes to bed. At three in the morning, he is awakened by Russell beating on the house and telling Otto that they need to go find Etta. Otto refuses to go because it is not what Etta wants.

When Otto was a teenager, his mother tried to prevent his hearing any talk of war on the radio one night; but, Otto knew he would soon go, feeling both terribly sad and terribly excited. The next day, the Vogel kids arrived at school to learn that their teacher, Mr. Lancaster had gone. Mr. Lancaster had always taught with the doors open which allowed all the dust to come in and now his voice had completely disappeared. Two days later, a new teacher who looked about Otto's age had arrived. Her name was Miss Etta Kinnick. Days before when the instructor at Etta's teacher's college had read the announcement about the opening at the Gopherlands School, Etta had excused herself to go to the restroom. Instead, of going to the restroom, she had proceeded to the Civic Bureau office to apply for the position. She is now Otto's teacher.

In Chapter 6, in present day, James sings cowboy songs and hymns as he and Etta walk together. Before falling asleep one night, James digs into Etta's bag to retrieve the paper with her contact information and family information and tucked it under her arm where she would find it the next morning.



Four months earlier, Otto awakens one night having dreamed of water. Etta is already awake and sitting at the table. She tells him that maybe she should go away to a place for people who forget themselves. Otto tells him that he will remember and balance her out, but she is afraid she might hurt someone.

In the present, Russell drives and drives in his quest to find Etta. Otto cannot get back to sleep so he makes Etta's recipe of Date Squares.

The story once again travels back to when Etta becomes the teacher at Gopherlands School, Russell tells Otto that she is wonderful. All Otto knows is that she has nice calves. Otto is more interested in getting Russell's help in stealing the radio from the house so he can listen to it properly for just a half hour. The boys devise a plan in which they put a scared chicken in a tree, knowing that Mrs. Vogel will come get it, leaving the radio in the house unattended. Their plan works well until Otto realizes that the battery is missing from the radio. The battery is wrapped in his mother's dish towel under her arm the whole time during the chicken incident.

Otto and Russell are able to listen to the radio at Russell's aunt and uncle's house instead and decide that they are going to go to war. Otto would be seventeen in two months and Russell in five months after that. Otto would wait for Russell, and they would enlist together.

In Chapter 7, in present day, Russell is well into Manitoba when he stops for breakfast at a diner. He shows Etta's picture to the two kids working there, and they recognize Etta who had passed through the area yesterday. The boy says she was singing and her white hair was flying, making her look like a witch or maybe a lady Santa Claus. Russell opens his map and decides that Etta will probably walk south a bit to move around all the lakes in Ontario. Russell has spent his life tracking deer, so he decides that he will get out of his truck and follow Etta on foot.

Etta writes another letter to Otto and tells James that they will see the ocean one day. James tells her that they should be in Ontario by tomorrow where there are lots of lakes and rain, but Etta is not deterred.

Otto writes a letter to Etta telling her that he has told Russell about her journey and that Russell has left in search of her because he is worried about her. He puts the letters with the others he has written because he has no address to send it to Etta.

When they were boys, Otto's birthday arrives and he declares that he will wait until Russell is old enough to enlist in the army with him. When the time comes, the boys complete the tests at the recruiting office and a few weeks later, Otto gets his induction papers. However, Russell is rejected because of his maimed leg. Before he leaves, Otto asks Etta if he can write her letters and asks her to do the same in return.

In Chapter 8, a photographer from Kenora takes Etta's photo while she strides with her hair blowing out in the wind and his newspaper prints it. Soon Etta is a local celebrity. One day a man and woman dressed in business attire join Etta on her walk to ask questions about her journey. They want to know why Etta is taking this trip. Etta tells



them that she is not sure, and they vow to stay with her until she knows the reason. That night, Etta dreams of water and boys and tells her company the next morning that she is going to see the water.

Russell recalls following Etta's tracks about 50 years ago and finding Etta weeping near an abandoned thresher on his farm. He gently called to her to let her know that he was nearby. After a long silence, Etta reached out to hold his hand briefly before she told him to go home. Otto had been home from the war for a few years at that point, so he was not watching over Etta as much. Later that night Russell walked over to Otto and Etta's house, climbed into their truck, and watched their awkward reconciliation through their house windows.

In the present day, Otto receives a phone call from his nephew, William, to ask whether Otto knows that Etta's photo has been in The Canadian National newspaper. William reassures Otto that Etta looks healthy but offers to go after her in the car. Otto tells William that Etta has a plan and is on course. When he ends the phone call, Otto drives to the co-op to buy newspapers.

Sixty years ago, Otto left for war and began his correspondence with Etta who made a habit of correcting his grammar and spelling so that she could return them to him and he could learn from his errors. She also told him that he should start calling her Etta instead of Miss Kinnick.

Analysis

Magic realism continues in the character of James, the coyote who speaks to Etta and becomes her faithful partner on her journey. It is up to the reader to decide whether or not Etta thinks James is speaking or if her thoughts insert dialogue for him. Growing up in the vastness of Saskatchewan, Etta and the other children enjoyed the folklore of the area and probably cultivated their own myths and legends, too. Is James' speech supernatural or part of Etta's dementia/alzheimer's disease? The author lets the reader decide based on how he or she wants to perceive Etta and her state of vulnerability or state of awe on her journey. Does Etta really know where she is going, or is she trying to run away from a life that is slipping away from her, taken by old age and dementia?

As Etta travels, she is described by people as a lady Santa Claus or a witch with her long white hair trailing out behind her. The author provides a strong visual image juxtaposed over the background of rural Canada as Etta determinedly heads toward the ocean. The image gives Etta otherworldly powers in her person, as well as her mind. It is not typical for a woman of Etta's advanced age to walk such a distance, so she is showing observers that it is never too late to take a risk or fulfill a dream. This theme will extend as Etta's journey continues, too.

It is interesting to note how Otto and Russell--both men who love Etta--respond to her disappearance. Otto chooses to remain at home, claiming that Etta would not want him to try to find her and interfere with her journey. Otto opts to take care of himself in the



home they share, even trying to make some of Etta's recipes so he will not go hungry. He is relatively passive in his response to her departure. Russell, on the other hand, is angry with Otto's reticence to find Etta. He bangs on Otto's house in the middle of the night to rouse him to go after Etta. When Otto is unmoved, Russell sets out on his own to find her. As the story extends, the reader will come to understand why Russell is not content to just sit and hope that Etta will return.

The author also introduces the specter of war in this section. Otto and Russell plan their enlistment just as soon as they are old enough. They are both excited and scared and rightly so. They have never been anywhere outside of their rural area and the prospect to see another part of the world is thrilling. However, they have heard horrible stories about the war on the radio and they're petrified of these realities. The war is a recurrent theme in the story as exhibited through Otto's and Etta's letters to each other and the dreams of blood, water, and young men dying.

Discussion Question 1

Why has James the coyote decided to join Etta in her journey?

Discussion Question 2

How do Otto and Russell react so differently to Etta's absence from their lives when she leaves for her journey?

Discussion Question 3

What is the symbolism of the dust that has ruined the voice of Mr. Lancaster, forcing him to leave his teaching position?

Vocabulary

distinguishable, conjoining, sachet, rhythmic, amber, outskirts, nestle, legible, depicting, various, creak, torso, dispersed, siblings, hastily, assured, oboes, random, grainy, refinements, nonchalantly, reckon, hodgepodge, habitation, despite, haggard, negotiable, hygienic, inflection, designated, repulsive



Chapters 9, 10, 11 and 12

Summary

In Chapter 9, it is present day when Otto stops at several co-ops on his way home and buys nearly two hundred issues of The Canadian National, a newspaper. When he gets home, he clips Etta's photo from each one and tries to think of some useful ways to get ride of the stacks of newspapers now in his house. Otto adopts a guinea pig that he names Oats and shreds some of the newspapers for her cage.

In the past, Otto had written a letter to Etta and enclosed a photo of himself in his army uniform, and Etta sent him a photo of herself in return. Otto looked at Etta's photo in between bouts of vomiting on the ship sailing overseas. Seven days after leaving for war, Otto's hair had turned completely white. At the same time, Otto's sister, Winnie, decided that she wanted to go to war and serve in some capacity even though Russell thought it was a bad idea.

In Chapter 10, it is present day as Russell continues to track Etta and he eventually finds her, scaring her at first when he whispers her name. Etta points her gun at Russell but then believes that he is a man much older than she and she invites him to rest with her. In the morning, Etta is surprised to find Russell sleeping on the ground near her. Russell wants to take Etta home but she is not going. Etta tells Russell that he is not actually there to bring her home; it is really just his turn to go do whatever it is he wants to do. Russell tells Etta that he is going to trade his truck for a horse and track caribou up north and would meet Etta at home later.

Creating newspaper strips for Oats' cage gives Otto the idea to make her a papier mache guinea pig for a companion. While the project dried, Otto goes to Russell's house but Russell isn't there so Otto sits in his living room and falls asleep. When Otto awakes, he sees two deer in the front yard and decides to create two full-size papier mache deer for Russell.

In the past, Mrs. Vogel came to the school to ask Etta if she knew where Winnie went, knowing she probably went overseas to the war, but Etta didn't know. Otto and Etta maintained their wartime correspondence and Otto's letters were increasingly difficult to understand because someone in the military would cut out any words related to locations, activities and names.

In Chapter 11, it is present day and Etta and James continue across Ontario. Etta is hungry all the time, living mostly on dandelions and berries. One day Etta is able to catch a few tiny fish with bread crumbs from her last piece of bread. After she eats the fish, she saves the skulls and puts them in her pocket.



It takes Otto over a week to make Russell's deer and he places them in Russell's front yard where he had seen the real deer. The next day Otto receives a postcard from Russell telling Otto that he has changed direction on his trip.

In the past, Otto's friend was killed when the enemy attacked while they were sleeping in a little village. Otto continued to write to Etta telling her about the horrors of war but that he planned to dance with her when he returned home. Etta learned from her last remaining student, little Lucy Perkins, that her mother was selling their farm because she couldn't keep it up anymore due to the war and the men being gone. Etta lost her job because the children had to work on the farms but she was allowed to keep the house. Etta got a job in a munitions factory.

Etta visited her parents who told her that the government was trying to get them to take one of the local farms because the owners would not be returning but they feel that they're too old to start farming. Etta told Russell that he should take the farm because it will probably be the only time he'll be offered something like this. Russell agrees to become a farmer and Etta offers her help whenever she's available. Etta began to bake and send treats to Otto overseas.

In Chapter 12, it is present day and Etta and James continue their journey past lakes, rocks and trees. Otto continues to create a menagerie of papier mache animals and birds. Russell is hiking in the north but nobody knows where except him.

Not too long ago, Winnie had called Otto and Etta from her home in Paris to wish Otto a happy birthday. It hardly seems possible that they have been apart for 65 years. She sent Otto a globe for a birthday gift.

During the war, Otto would often find company with a local woman in whatever town he was in. Often the women were named Giselle, regardless of where he was. After Otto had been at war for a year, he was allowed a leave and he wrote to Etta asking if she, and she alone, would meet him at the train station. Etta calculated the days for Otto's crossing and return home and asked to work the night shift during the time he would be back. Etta went to the train station for three days straight until Otto arrived and she took him to her house.

Analysis

Etta is the perfect example of the concept that it is never too late to pursue a dream. Her quest to see the water had probably lived within her for many years, and she sets out to accomplish it at the age of 83. Most people at this age and even younger would never even attempt such a task. Etta has always been a strong woman with an independent mind and she knows what she wants. Etta also knows that her faculties are starting to slip, and she wants to accomplish this dream before she can no longer do it. This determination drives her and she also encourages Russell to do the same. She confronts him by saying that he has not really come to bring her home; basically, he needed an event to propel him out of the inertia of his life. Russell had the power to



pursue his dream of tracking caribou all his life but he never took it. Thanks to Etta, Russell will very likely achieve his dream, too.

The placid mood surrounding Etta's and Russell's treks and Otto's papier-mache crafting is punctuated by memories of the horror of war. The author does not delve into gory details but provides the emotions felt by the characters dealing with the atrocities, deprivation, and loneliness during this time.

The author continues to inject magic realism into the story with Otto's papier-mache creatures. What started out as a way to use up excess newspapers turns into a way for Otto to express himself and create creatures that are almost real for him.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Etta not recognize Russell when he finds her after tracking her but knows who he is the next day?

Discussion Question 2

Why do you think Otto made papier-mache deer for Russell?

Discussion Question 3

Why did Otto say that all the girls he talked to in the little towns during the war were all named Giselle?

Vocabulary

scrupulously, plateau, congealed, configuration, alternatively, commotion, burrowed, seafoam, dialogue, accommodations, warily, mandarin, papier-mache, meticulously, barrier, disarray, chronology, rustle, metallic, alien, frenzied, susceptible, tendrils, distressing, ambush, oui, narwhal, civic, strategically, unsubtle, resilient, facade



Chapters 13, 14, 15 and 16

Summary

In Chapter 13, Otto continues to make paper-mache figures that now extend into his yard where people go by slowly to view them. At last, Etta and James reach a town, and Etta finds a gas station and inquires about any nearby grocery stores. The attendant calls her by name, recognizing her from all the newspaper publicity she has received. Etta is also recognized in the grocery store, and some of the employees pose for a picture with her. One of the employees gives Etta a small paper crane which he wants Etta to carry with her as if some part of them were accompanying her on her journey.

In the past, Etta took Otto to the teacher's cottage when he was home on leave, being careful to avoid his family or anyone who might alert his family that he was home. They made love, and Otto stayed at the house while Etta went to work. He agreed to see his family the next day. Otto's family was overjoyed to see him. He was shocked to see that his father was bedridden, his legs strapped down to prevent terrible shaking. A few months ago he was found shaking uncontrollably, as if his body stopped listening to his commands to do what he wanted it to do.

While he was home on leave, Otto also visited Russell. They talked about the war and Russell's new life as a farmer.

In Chapter 14, it is present day as Etta imagines herself to be Otto during the time he was marching during the war. She even writes a letter to herself as if she were Otto. The next morning, James throws the letter into the lake. Etta is tired and knows she must stop again. She is frustrated by the growing number of people who gather to watch her pass on her journey. Some of the people give her objects such as jewelry, nickels, ribbons, and lockets to take with her on her trip.

Otto writes another letter to Etta telling her that people have offered to buy his papier-mache animal collection, but he wants to keep them until Etta comes home to see them. He just wishes he knew how much longer that would be.

When Otto was home on leave during the war, he helped his mother at the farm during the day and spent the nights with Etta at the teacher's cottage. When it came time for Otto to go back to the war, Etta joined his family at the train station to say goodbye.

In Chapter 15, it is present day and Etta and James keep walking, looking for a bridge because the water is growing wider as they get closer to the ocean. Etta is happy when they come upon an old railroad bridge, but James thinks it is too dark in the center and refuses to go, promising to find her on the other side. As she makes her way stealthily across the bridge, Etta is startled by the presence of a reporter she had seen before named Bryrony who wants to join Etta on her journey. Etta leaves some signs for James. Hours later, he has not emerged, and Etta fears he has drowned in the river.



Russell sends Otto a letter and encloses some small pieces of caribou fur and says that he is thinking about making a coat out of it. Otto finds himself coughing a lot more these days, which interferes with his sleep. Otto decides to make a full size caribou and paste the fur from Russell onto its head.

In the past, Otto left the train station at home and then transferred to the boat that would take him back to the war. When he re-joined his unit in a small village, his friend told him that they would be getting reinforcements soon. Back at home, Etta went to Russell's house to help him pull weeds to stave off her loneliness. Etta learned that the father of Lucy, one of her students, had been killed in the war. Lucy's mother had no more interest in keeping the farm going. Etta and Russell felt hopeless against the depressing state of things and decided to go dancing. Otto wrote a letter to Etta telling her that he missed everything about her.

In Chapter 16, it is present day. Etta dreams of water again as if she had been a soldier in the war, struggling to get to shore. The next morning, Etta and Bryony begin walking again. Etta wonders if James will ever come back. When they take a rest, Etta reviews a piece of paper with her name, age, and home on it. She asks Bryony who Etta was this morning. Neither one of them is completely sure. Later in the day, Etta asks Bryony to tell her some of her stories, but Bryony does not have any of her own, just those belonging to other people. The next morning, Etta announces that she wants to go home because it is not fair to her parents and siblings. She calls Bryony by Gerald's name and says that she probably wants to get home to her wife, too. Bryony convinces Etta to keep marching and they will find a bar tonight and go dancing.

At home, Otto looks through recipes and comes across a recipe for flax paste that Etta used to make to help him sleep. He ventures outside to find what flax flowers he can, crushes them, mixes a paste, and places it on his closed eyelids. Otto nearly sleeps the clock around and wakes refreshed for the first time in a long time. He repeats this the next night. By the third day, he heads to the co-op to find any flax flowers available, even posting a note for those who might be able to part with any.

In the past, Otto and his comrades were encouraged by the arrival of more troops. Otto is shocked and saddened to see Owen because he thought Owen was too young to be at war. At home, Etta and Russell went dancing every night, even though they were exhausted from working all day.

Analysis

Etta's mind begins to slip more regularly now. As she walks, she thinks that she is Otto marching to war and can envision the surroundings that Otto had told her about so many times in the past. Etta's dementia deepens, and she writes a letter to herself as if she were Otto. It is possible, however, that the author wants the reader to think that Etta and Otto are so connected that she can inhabit his thoughts and actions. Memory is a powerful thing. As Etta's mind becomes more vulnerable, she clings to the memories she has of her life with Otto to provide some grounding as her life shifts under her feet.



Water continues to be an important symbol in the story. Not only is Etta driven to see it, but she also dreams of it as if she were Otto experiencing his wartime events. The struggle of Otto and his comrades to get to the safety of the shore mirrors Etta's own journey of struggling to get to the water's edge, too. The author maintains this parallel water allusion as the story extends for Etta in the present and as she recalls Otto's wartime events.

It is questionable whether Bryony is real or a figment of Etta's imagination. It is possible that Bryony is a reporter who wants to accompany Etta on her trip. However, it is also plausible that Etta uses the idea of Bryony to represent other thoughts in her mind. If Etta can imagine that she is Otto during the war and Bryony is Gerald, Otto's comrade, then it is possible that Bryony is entirely fictional. However, Bryony could function in Etta's mind like James does; James is real, but coyotes do not talk like this one does for Etta. Perhaps, Bryony is a culmination of many aspects of Otto's war experiences for Etta.

Discussion Question 1

Why do people give Etta items to take with her as she continues her trek to the water?

Discussion Question 2

Why would Otto want to make a full-size caribou and glue fur remnants on its head for Russell?

Discussion Question 3

Is Bryony a real person or someone in Etta's imagination?

Vocabulary

companionship, liter, squashed, familiarity, mimicking, instinctively, murmuring, hereditary, superimpose, diluted, opalescent, merged, discarded, chronological, hesitating, formation, dispersed, latticework, squinting, saliva, caribou, reverberating, matte, vestry, cascade, pebbled, gorges, flax, pestle, mortar, exhilarated



Chapters 17, 18, 19 and 20

Summary

In Chapter 17, Etta and Bryony cross into New Brunswick. Etta tells Bryony that she has fourteen siblings. A few nights later, Bryony awakens in the middle of the night to see that Etta is in extreme ear pain and says that her head is on fire. Etta talks and talks about the past, thinking that Owen is following her, and finally Bryony walks the both of them to a care facility where she tells the reception nurse that Etta has lost herself. Once Etta is checked in, Bryony leaves. Etta asks about her army buddies, and the nurse helps get her into bed. Etta sleeps all night. When she awakens, she thinks she is Otto. She moves a chair toward the window to look out at the night. A nurse checks on her, and she answers as if she is Otto.

At home, a family brings Otto some flax to make his sleeping paste. He writes Etta a letter telling her that he hopes she is almost at her destination and that he is waiting for her. Up north, Russell stands on a large flat rock while a local woman tells him that the caribou herd will be coming in the next few hours.

In the past, Owen adapted to the relentless waiting of army life with Otto and the others. Sometimes Owen sang at night to soothe the nerves of the soldiers. Otto and the others were ambushed one morning by enemy soldiers. Chaos ensued as they ran to the water. A gunshot went off near Otto's ear during the fighting. Owen was killed and Otto placed his body on the beach before running away to safety. Otto ran for forty minutes until he found a British army truck which he jump started and drove to the next town. Otto found refuge in a dark room where he was visited by Giselle, who made love to him and then bandaged his wounded ear.

Otto spent two weeks in that room and emerged one night to go to a bar where he saw his sister, Winnie. She told him that people thought he was dead and that Giselle could make arrangements to get him back to his unit and shipped home because he was injured. That night, Otto wrote a letter to Etta telling her everything about his recent experiences.

Russell arrived to pick up Etta to go dancing, but Etta did not tell him that she had a sharp pain in her abdomen. After the dance, Etta collapsed on the ground as they walked to get the horses. Etta suffered a miscarriage in the field, as Russell stayed nearby. Etta and Russell did not go to another dance for two weeks. When Russell came back, he told Etta that he wanted more of a relationship with her because he was at home and Otto was far away. The next night when Russell arrived at Etta's, she was sitting with a letter sent by the Army. They left the letter on the table and went dancing. Russell watched from outside her house as she opened the envelope later that night.

In Chapter 18, it is present day and Etta (Otto) sits in a nursing care facility listening to the howl of a coyote. James comes to the window and tells Etta to check the left pocket



of her coat where she finds a paper listing her name and the names of her family members. Etta dresses, climbs out the window, and continues the journey with James.

In the past, Giselle, who worked as a voluntary nurse, prepared Otto to return to his Army unit's infirmary. Giselle left Otto in a bed complete with an envelope with a paper listing his condition listed as ruptured eardrum and psychological trauma. The envelope also contained a ticket home. The next day a doctor confirmed Otto's release and he gave them Etta's address as his own.

In Chapter 19, it is present day. Etta and James continue to walk. Otto continues to prepare more papier-mache materials. Russell drinks coffee in a cafe where a man older than he gives directions to an airport.

In the past, Otto was released from the Army hospital. A nurse took him to the train station for the beginning of his journey home. At the same time, Etta was reading the letter sent to her by the Army telling her that Otto had been injured and was coming home.

In Chapter 20, Etta hears a brass band as she enters Halifax.

In the past, Otto sailed on the HMS Nova Scotia back to Canada and spent most of his time on deck.

In the present, Etta and James reach the tip of the peninsula, and James decides to stay on the rocks. Etta leaves her rifle and bag beside him.

In the past, Otto took two train rides home and kept an open letter in front of him, its words saying only to breathe. Russell loaned Etta his horse to go to the train station but declined to go with her.

In the present, Etta removes all the items from her pockets and places them near the edge of the water which washes them away. She then removes her shoes, stockings, and dress and steps into the water.

Otto spreads the flax paste on his eyelids, lies down on his bed, breathes six times and then stops. Otto can see Etta's feet and legs in the water. Eventually, they meet and sit together. Otto tells her that he has missed her, and Etta tells him that she will miss him but it is all just a big loop. Etta kisses Otto one last time and rises to the surface of the water, facing away from the shore.

In the past, Etta stood on the platform and waited for Otto's train to arrive.

Analysis

Etta continues to think that she is Otto, even telling Bryony that she has fourteen siblings, the truth of Otto's life, not hers. Etta even experiences the physical ear pain



that Otto did after he was injured in the war. She and Otto are almost one character now, so seamless are they in their thoughts and feelings.

It is interesting to note that the relationship between Etta and Otto was in danger of never happening as Etta and Russell became very close when Otto was at war. When Etta received a letter from the war department, she delayed opening it because she assumed it would tell her that Otto was dead and she would have to address the situation between her and Russell. When they learn that Otto is not dead, but seriously wounded and on his way home, there is almost a palpable sense of regret between Etta and Russell that their relationship will never mature because of Etta's commitment to Otto.

The relationship between Otto and Etta obviously grew over the years they were together, even connecting in a spiritual way at the end of the story. Otto dies in his bed, yet he can see Etta who has finally reached the water. They engage in a final kiss and connection before Otto moves on. Etta reassures him that they will see each other again because life is all just one big loop. The mention of Etta's waiting on the platform for Otto's train alludes to her waiting until they will see each other again on their spiritual journeys.

Discussion Question 1

What makes Bryony decide that Etta has lost herself?

Discussion Question 2

Why does James make Etta look at the piece of paper in her pocket when she is in the care facility?

Discussion Question 3

How can you explain the underwater reunion of Otto and Etta at the end of the story?

Vocabulary

increments, constellation, nostalgic, grouse, negotiating, shuddered, lichen, mon petit, bluff, threshers, unceremoniously, backlog, muted, congregate, silhouette, matron, peninsula, flexed



Characters

Etta Kinnick Vogel

Etta Kinnick Vogel is an 83-year-old Canadian woman who sets out alone on a trek to see the ocean. She has never seen it for herself and has only heard stories about it related to the wartime activities of her husband, Otto. Etta was raised in a family of two children, and she became a teacher after the premature death of her sister.

Etta is a strong woman who is able to rise above her circumstances, rallying those around her during wartime. Etta remains loyal to Otto, a former student with whom she falls in love. Etta creates a comfortable home for Otto and herself, gardening and baking to add depth to their home life.

Etta has always been a strong minded woman. When dementia threatens her way of life, she determines to do the one thing she has always wanted to do--see the ocean. Usually quests of this scope are undertaken by younger, more heroic types in literature, but Etta proves that it is never too late to pursue a dream.

Otto Vogel

Otto is an octogenarian who has lived all his life in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan. He grew up there, one of fourteen children, leaving only to serve in World War I. Otto was a student of Etta Kinnick's, and they became close when sending letters when he went away to war.

When Otto's wife, Etta, leaves their home to make a trek to the ocean, he assumes the typically female role of staying home, baking, gardening and even crafting paper-mache figures. Otto loves Etta and knows that she needs her independence. It would never occur to him to try to go after her. He knows that Etta craves experiences, too, and he would never deny her that.

Otto is also loyal to his male friends such as little Owen and Russell. He knows how much Russell would have loved to track deer, so he crafts some made of paper-mache for Russell's yard. Otto seems to intuitively know what will make people happy, and he tries to provide that for them without being forceful. Otto is a gentle, calm, sensitive person who takes life as it comes and does not make too many demands of it.

Russell Palmer

Russell Palmer is a lifelong friend of Otto's, and he is now an octogenarian like Otto and Etta. Russell first came to know Otto when Russell moved in with his aunt and uncle, the Palmers, after his father's business failed. Russell was incorporated into Otto's big family and they were friends from that point on. Russell became close to Etta when Otto



served overseas in the war and he has never stopped loving her even though she married Otto. Russell is obsessed with tracking deer and pursues Etta on her trek to the ocean as if she were one. Russell's foot was maimed in a tractor accident as a boy so he is not eligible to serve in the army. It is perhaps this disability that makes Russell especially sensitive to others' feelings, especially those whom he loves like Etta.

James

James is the coyote that accompanies Etta on her journey to the ocean. James is not a predator where Etta is concerned and looks out for her well being along the way. James not only has the magical power of speech, he can also reason with Etta. He reminds her of who she is when she falters.

Owen

Owen is a boy who attends the Gopherlands school with Otto and Russell. Owen is younger and smaller, but they make friends with him because he is smart. Otto tries to protect Owen when Owen joins the army, but Owen is killed anyway. His death devastates Otto.

Alma Kinnick

Alma Kinnick is Etta's older sister. When Alma got pregnant as a teenager, she went away to a convent to have the baby, not telling her parents the complete truth. Alma died from toxic shock after childbirth.

Winnie Vogel

Winnie Vogel is one of Otto's sisters. She is the most adventurous of the Vogel children and runs away to work as a nurse during the war. Winnie never returned to Canada, preferring to live the rest of her life in Paris.

Giselle

Giselle is the prostitute with whom Otto spends time when he is in the Army during the war. Each town that Otto spends time in has women like these who are anxious to spend time with soldiers. Otto calls all of them Giselle. To him, they are all the same in their purpose in his life at the time.

Bryony

Bryony is a reporter whom Etta meets along the way in her journey to the ocean. Bryony may also be a figment of Etta's imagination because Etta asks her questions about her own state of mind. It is also Bryony who takes Etta to the nursing care facility when she begins to decline mentally. It may be that Etta invented Bryony to get herself to the facility because she would never admit herself on her own.

Gerald

Gerald was Otto's closest friend when he was serving overseas during the war. Gerald was killed when their unit was ambushed by enemy troops.



Symbols and Symbolism

Dust

Dust covered the landscape of rural Saskatchewan to the point that it became an ever present entity. The dust symbolizes the flatness of life in this area where life was an unending cycle of work and death. Dust is lifeless; nothing grows in it, just like the people in the rural area struggled to find full lives. The dust eventually gets the better of everyone who lives there. It ends the teaching career of Mr. Lancaster whose vocal chords were severely impacted by it. It is almost as if living in this barren area had rendered him incapable of knowing anything else to share.

Water

Water is an important symbol in literature, and it often represents baptism, new life, and freedom. The scope of the water can also be important in understanding its symbolism. For example, the ocean that Etta longs to see is huge and mysterious, symbolizing her need to try to understand life, and in particular, her life with Otto. Etta also knows that she is declining mentally and she longs for the freedom from this downward spiral and submerging in the ocean would be symbolic of a huge cleansing of her spirit.

Dried fish skull

Etta's sister told her that dead fish skulls could come back to life if you touched them. This bit of folklore is both repulsive and intriguing to Etta yet she takes some with her when she goes on her trip. The fish skulls symbolize the possibility of new life and second chances which is what Etta is taking when she embarks on her trek to the ocean.

Radio

The radios at Otto's house and Russell's aunt and uncle's house are the only means of communication from the outside world into their rural Saskatchewan life. The radio symbolizes the entry of danger and hate into their protected world because it is here that news of the war filters in to the boys who are both terrified and excited by its presence in their lives.

World War I

World War I symbolizes the end of the friendship between Etta, Otto and Russell. Otto's entry into the army separates him from the other two not only in geography but also in the scope of his experiences. Etta and Russell remain relatively naive about the world



because of their being sheltered from it. After the war, Otto and Etta pair off, leaving Russell as the odd man out for the duration of their lives.

Flax

In folklore and superstitions, flax symbolizes the home so when Otto grinds a flax paste for his eyelids in order to sleep, he is transitioning from traditional male responsibilities to those that are typically categorized as female roles. Otto falls asleep in his masculine world and enters another dimension of what home means. The sleep is punctuated by bouts of staying home and missing Etta, the role usually assigned to the female in a relationship when the man is away for any reason or for any length of time.

Papier-mache

Otto's papier-mache project symbolizes ingenuity and creativity. Otto is stuck with many newspapers after he clips Etta's picture from them so he is inventive and tries his talent for papier-mache. This is not only creative, but it shows Otto's resilience in the face of unpredictability and facing the unknown about Etta.

Recipe cards

Etta's recipe cards are a source of comfort to Otto when Etta is gone. She had baked for him and sent goodies when he was away at war as a form of comfort. She continued to bake throughout their married life. Etta left the most important recipe cards lined up on the kitchen table before she left on her journey so that Otto could make them for himself. Also, by having the recipe cards, Otto has something of Etta while she was gone.

Personal items

People along Etta's journey learn of her trip, and they give her personal items such as a paper crane, a ribbon, a nickel, etc., to take along with her to the ocean. It is as if their items represent their hopes and dreams. Etta carries the items with her on her journey as a means of wish fulfillment for the givers, too.

Globe

Otto received a globe from his sister Winnie in Paris for his last birthday. When Otto learned of Etta's departure on her trek to the water, his first act is to go to that globe to get a better idea of what Etta would be facing. Winnie gave Otto a globe on which he could see physical points, but at the same time, Etta was giving herself the world by taking a trip she had always longed to take.



Settings

Gopherlands, Saskatchewan

Gopherlands, Saskatchewan is the home of Otto, Etta, and Russell. They grew up there, attended school there, and lived their adult lives there.

Prince Edward Island

Etta's sister, Alma, moves to a convent far away from home on Prince Edward Island so she can have her illegitimate baby.

Europe

Otto is sent overseas to Europe when he serves in the military during World War I.

Otto and Etta's house

Otto and Etta live in a farmhouse in rural Saskatchewan. Otto holds vigil here while Etta is on her trek to the ocean.

Russell's farm

Russell obtains a farm during World War I when most of the men were away at war. He continued to live there the rest of his adult life.

Atlantic Ocean

Etta's quest to see the water is finally realized when she reaches New Brunswick and the ocean shore.



Themes and Motifs

Magic Realism

Magic realism is a technique often employed in literature, especially within a culture's folklore and stories. Magic realism inserts unusual, and sometimes startling, concepts into an otherwise ordinary story. James, the coyote, is an example in this story. When Etta encounters him at first, she is not sure whether he will be friendly or will eat her. Not only does James turn out to be friendly, but he also talks and becomes Etta's confidante on the trip. This is very unexpected to come across a talking coyote, however, Etta accepts it without any real question. James keeps Etta from harm and even projects their next moves in order to keep Etta focused.

Etta also accepts other instances of magic realism, too, such as her sister's telling her that if you talk to dead fish skulls, they will come back to life. Etta travels with fish skulls just in case. There are also instances where Etta assumes Otto's persona, thinking like him, answering like he would and even adopting his memories. This could be due, in part, to Etta's dementia, but it could be magical realism as her mind blends with Otto's.

Spirituality

Etta becomes not only an icon for making independent choices, she also imparts an essence of spirituality to the story. Etta motivates the people in her life to live the best lives they can, especially Otto and Russell. When Otto is in extreme distress about being in the war, she advises him to remember to breathe. Etta is a calming force for Russell, too, advising him on taking on the farm and starting a new life.

Etta also understands why so many people are drawn to her on her journey. They want to give her something of theirs to take with them and she gets that it is a spiritual act for them, both urging her on and taking a bit of them with her as she goes.

At the end of the story, when Otto and Etta are forced to part, she reassures Otto that she will be alright. She knows that she has to let Otto go, too, on his own spiritual path. She tells him that it's all just a big loop, probably meaning that they will meet again at some point in another time because they are connected spiritually.

Follow Your Dreams

Etta is quite an inspiration to others around her. She is assertive and eager to get what she wants, even as a girl. She outwits the other girls in the teacher's college to get the job at the Gopherlands School just by showing up earlier than the rest do. Etta also decides that she wants Otto and pursues communications with him while he is away at war. Etta helps Russell grab a new life for himself when all the other men are away at war and he has the opportunity to get a farm.



Of course, Etta's trek to the water is her biggest dream and she ultimately makes it come true. Given Etta's determination, it's not surprising that she accomplished her goal. What is surprising, though, is the fact that she set out on her trip at the age of 83. Most people of that age have difficulty moving around, let alone going on just a trip on foot. But even though Etta is not a typical heroine for a literary quest, she is the perfect example of someone showing how to follow your dreams no matter what.

Along the way, Etta inspires others to discover their own stories and contemplate going after their own dreams too. She even advises Russell to take a trip north to track caribou, something he has always wanted to do. She also tells Russell that he never needed her permission to go, but that he should go while he has the chance to do so.

Memory

Etta is losing her memory. She knows that she is faltering and is not completely herself anymore. This is, in part, the reason she heads out on her journey to the water at this point in time. In the note she leaves for Otto, she even tells him that she hopes to remember to come back. She is both very bold and very vulnerable but her dream pushes her forward.

The author also uses memories to tell the story of Etta, Otto, and Russell. Each of the characters takes turns telling his or her story through memories of the past. The reader learns through memories of how Russell came to become part of Otto's family; how Etta met Otto and Russell by becoming their school teacher; and the time during the war when Otto went away and Etta and Russell became close, possibly falling in love.

Memory is a wonderful tool for an author to use because she is able to add substance to the story without impacting the current story line. It is ironic that the memories the three main characters share are now in jeopardy due to Etta's declining memory. In a way, she must be afraid that she won't continue to exist if she can't remember where and who she used to be.

Horrors of War

Otto and Russell learn early about war when they hear broadcasts on the radios at their homes. They are both excited and terrified about what they hear. Even so, they are anxious to go and be part of what is happening in the bigger world. Little did they know what going to war really meant. Russell was spared the immediate terror of the war experience because of his crippled foot, but Otto learned all too well the anxiety and horror of the experience.

Otto shared his experiences with Etta through letters but she couldn't fully understand them because they were screened by the military administrators who cut out any information that would provide details to the enemy if found. Otto can't help be haunted by what he experiences though and tried to share that with Etta.

Styles

Point of View

Like many novels, *Etta and Otto and Russell and James* is written in the third person omniscient point of view. This means that the author writes the story using third person pronouns such as "she" and "he." The author also has insight into what the characters are thinking, which makes it an omniscient view, as opposed to a limited view where only the activities of the characters are reported. For example, the author writes, "Etta didn't want Otto to see her leaving, which is why she left so early, so quietly. But she didn't mind about Russell. She knew he couldn't keep up with her even if he wanted to." The author could have just said that Etta left early in the morning before Otto got up. But she chose to add some insight into what Etta's thoughts are on the morning of her departure to add some dimension to Etta's character.

However, the author does let each main character take turns at narrating the events of their current lives and their days as students and teacher, as well as the times during the war. This adds an even more intimate view of the characters because their personal thoughts and perspectives are revealed through their own word.

Language and Meaning

The dialogue of the novel is very spare and simple, lending authenticity to the characters' being rural people from Canada. Sometimes the author shares more in what isn't said than what is said. For example, when Otto is away at war and Etta and Russell become very close, Etta receives a letter from the war department. Neither one of them says anything because if they learn that Otto has died, they might not be as traumatized as they might have been because they have fallen in love and their lives would be less complicated if Otto did not return. All of this is unspoken between the two without either of them saying a word.

The author also chooses to not use quotation marks around the dialogue so it can be challenging to follow at times but the meanings come through as the reader adapts to this style.

Structure

The structure of a novel usually takes one of four forms: character, milieu, event or idea. And while a story can contain all four forms, one usually predominates. *Etta and Otto and Russell and James* takes the structure of both an event and a character form. Etta is driven to make her trek to the water so that is the overriding objective of the book. Will Etta reach her goal? Will she accomplish what she sets out to do? The reader needs an end to the question and a realization of the event which the author does provide.



As a character novel, *Etta and Otto* and *Russell and James* shows personal growth of the main characters as the story extends. A character structure shows transformation as being important as opposed to an event story which is more concerned with what a character does. It is easy to identify a character structure novel because there comes a point in the story when the main character reaches a point of frustration with life or a set of circumstances that are no longer acceptable for personal growth. So, it is with Etta. Realizing that she is slowly losing herself to dementia, she decides to go after her lifelong dream of seeing the ocean. Etta's change in attitude and thoughts propel her in a different direction, away from her life with Otto in their farmhouse. Consequently, life for Otto is dramatically changed when Etta sets out on her journey. The conclusion of the story occurs when Etta realizes her dream and she tells a dying Otto that they will be together again on the other side of their earthly lives.



Quotes

I've gone. I've never seen the water, so I've gone there. Don't worry, I've left you the truck. I can walk. I will try to remember to come back.

-- Etta (chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: Etta's brief letter to her husband, Otto, tells of her desire to see the ocean and her consideration for him by not taking the truck. Her comment about trying to remember to come back alludes to possible signs of dementia in this 83-year-old woman.

I'm from next door. I'm starving. I'm Russell.

-- Russell (chapter 2 paragraph 14)

Importance: Russell has come to live with his aunt and uncle, the Palmers, who are neighbors to the Vogel family. His family has fallen on hard times and Russell has ingratiated himself into the Vogel family who take him almost as one of their own from that moment. This displays not only Russell's vulnerability but also the Vogels' generosity to include another child into their very large family. Russell and Otto will be lifelong friends from this moment on.

But I'm happy, I think. Or maybe not happy, I'm just here, and this is where I am. And that's Good. There is nowhere you can go on this island and not hear the rhythm of the water.

-- Alma (chapter 4 paragraph 1)

Importance: Alma is pregnant and has gone away to a convent to have her baby. However, her parents think that she has gone to the convent to become a nun. The convent is located on Prince Edward Island, and Alma cannot escape the sounds and rhythms of the water surrounding it. Much like the act of childbirth, Alma's experiences of the water symbolize what will be coming next for her. Water can mean new life and baptism, also symbols for a new baby. In this case, it also symbolizes the rhythm of the waters involved in the actual act of childbirth.

It's like before," said Russell. It's like before but swapped. You and her, swapped. And me, I'm always just here.

-- Russell (chapter 5 paragraph 5)

Importance: Earlier in their relationship, Otto had been away at war and Etta and Russell waited for his return. Now it is Etta who is gone, and Otto and Russell wait for her to come back. Russell is the constant in this relationship of long term friends with nothing much dramatic happening in his life.

You're here, continued Etta, because it's your turn, finally. It's sad that you thought you needed my permission for that, but, oh well. Go, Russell, go do whatever, wherever. Go do it alone, and now, because you want to and you're allowed to and you can. You



always could have if you wanted to enough.
-- Etta (chapter 10 paragraph 6)

Importance: Russell has always lived vicariously through Otto and Etta and never really ventured away from home. Etta tells him that it is his turn to go somewhere and do what he really wants. Good or bad, it took Etta's leaving home for Russell to decide to leave. Etta encourages him to do what he wants to do, even though he could have done it many years ago had he really wanted to do so.

That's what it's like, said James, to be a coyote. Being hungry all the time? Yes, either hungry or sleeping. But, mostly hungry. That's why we're able to kill so easily, and why humans aren't. Because we're not hungry enough? Exactly.
-- James and Etta (chapter 11 paragraph 7)

Importance: James represents another facet of Etta's personality and mind. She envisions him as a concrete being, but he is really just another part of herself. In the conversation about how coyotes are able to kill easier than humans, Etta is testing herself on what she will be able to do in order to stay alive while on her journey. If she imagines that she is part coyote, it might make it easier to do things that she might not have considered otherwise.

It makes me want to do things and do things and never stop doing. If we're doing we're living and if we're living we're winning, right?
-- Etta (chapter 15 paragraph 8)

Importance: Etta and Russell are depressed after Otto returns to war. They also struggle with the negative impact that the war has had on their lives at home. They feel powerless to control their circumstances. They continue doing the best they can with what they do every day in the hopes of living the best possible life under such bad circumstances.

Bryony, said Etta, who was I this morning? You were you, of course, Etta. But was I? I'm not sure. I'm not sure either.
-- Etta and Bryony (chapter 16 paragraph 25)

Importance: Etta's concept of herself vacillates due to dementia, and there is no one who can help her understand if she is really herself at times. If Bryony is a real person, she would not know enough about Etta to know if she were herself. If Bryony is someone in Etta's imagination, Etta may be trying to understand if her behavior is changing.

Etta's eyes were open, staring open at her, past her. Oh, she was saying. Oh oh oh oh oh. Help me. Help me. Oh, oh. Oh! My ear. My ear! My ear my ear my ear. Oh god oh god. Oh oh oh.
-- Etta (chapter 17 paragraph 2)

Importance: Etta has taken on Otto's characteristics and experiences, this time in pain



as if she had been injured in the war just like Otto was. Otto experienced severe ear trauma and head pain and Etta suffers the same things that he does as she absorbs his experiences.

She's lost herself, said Bryony.
-- Bryony (chapter 17 paragraph 7)

Importance: Bryony has witnessed Etta assuming Otto's personality and experiences. She guides Etta to a nursing care facility in order to get help. In her trek to find herself, Etta ironically has lost herself in memories.

YOU'RE HAPPIER ALONE, LIKE ME, MAYBE she shouted. YES, shouted Russell.
YES, MAYBE.
-- Russell (chapter 17 paragraph 4)

Importance: Russell is on his caribou quest in the north and comes across a woman who guides him. She determines that Russell is unmarried and figures that he likes being alone. Russell's uncertain answer belies the love he has always felt, and still feels for Etta, even though there was never any future in it.

It's a loop, Otto. It's just a long loop.
-- Etta (chapter 20 paragraph 1)

Importance: Etta and Otto must part for this lifetime but before she leaves him, she reassures him that she will be all right, that everything is just a long loop of living, dying, and living again.