

Freedom (novel) Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Freedom by Jonathan Franzen (1st Picador edition) is a novel about the peculiar lives of the members of an upper-middle class family named the Berglunds. The family includes Walter, an environmental activist, Patty, a stay at home mom, and their two children, Joey and Jessica. The novel uses a 3rd person perspective and the vast majority of the novel is narrated by Patty while narrating her own memoir entitled "Mistakes Were Made."

The novel opens with a prologue-like chapter explaining that no one in the Berglund's old hometown of St. Paul expected Walter to get involved with coal companies and taking advantage of workers. After this, the narrative shifts into a long flashback as part of "Mistakes Were Made." These flashback sections inform the reader that Patty came from a well-connected family and was very popular in high school due to her sport prowess. The reader also learns that during high school, Patty was raped by a boy named Ethan Post, but her parents convinced her to not press charges due to the fact that Patty's parents were political friends with Ethan's parents. This creates a vast expanse of numbness in Patty.

While in college, Patty continued her sport career. She met a girl named Eliza who was clearly incredibly obsessed with Patty. Through Eliza, Patty met Walter and his best friend, Richard Katz. Patty became interested in Richard while leading Walter on. She eventually attempted to seduce him while on a road trip, but it was unsuccessful.

Years later, Walter and Patty married and settle down. When Richard fell on hard times, Walter invited him to stay at his family's lake house and work on a deck for money and boarding. He agreed and wrote an album worth of songs there. When Patty and Walter visited the lake house, Patty and Richard had sex and kept it from Richard. This affair did not continue much longer, but Patty became obsessed with Richard and thought about him very often.

Later, Walter and Patty's son, Joey's college experience was "ruined" by the 9/11 terrorist attacks. He also had some relationship complications with his girlfriend Connie (whose family he moved in with in high school, which angered Patty and Walter). He eventually got embroiled in some shady business dealings, but eventually changed his ways, marries Connie, and becomes a legitimate businessman.

Around this time, Walter worked for a man named Vin Haven who wanted to protect a bird called the Cerulean Warbler. It became clear that Vin Haven cared more about money than the bird, so Walter and his assistant Lalitha eventually took matters into their own hands. They recruited Richard for a music festival/battle of the bands. Before this came to fruition, Walter started a relationship with Lalitha and Richard put the manuscript of "Mistakes Were Made" on his desk. Due to this, Walter kicked Patty out of the house.



Before a major speech, Walter took sleeping pills which caused him to give a ranting speech blasting the coal companies and the workers. Because of this, Walter's project fell apart, but Joey decided to fund it. Lalitha later died in a car accident causing Walter to retreat to the lake house. After reading the final chapter of "Mistakes Were Made," he takes Patty back and the novel ends.



Good Neighbors

Summary

The novel opens with an unnamed 3rd person narrator explaining that no one in St. Paul expected the news about Walter Berglund. According to the press, Berglund was accused of dealing with the coal industry and mistreating workers. The narrator recalls that Walter and his wife Patty moved into the town of St. Paul Minnesota three decades ago (judging by context clues, the present is the early 2000s). The couple were relatively silent about their family, but it was known that Patty's father was a lawyer and her mother was an assemblywoman on the East coast. Eventually, the two had two children, Jessica and her younger brother Joey (whom Patty constantly lovingly complains about).

Eventually, they became acquainted with their neighbors Seth and Merrie, and Carol and her daughter Connie. Patty would often take care of Connie when Carol went on her weekly "mom's night," and the two eventually became baking companions. The narrator then provides the reader with quotes from Merrie proclaiming that Carol is neither a progressive nor a feminist (because she is a stay at home mom), and that Seth talks about her far too much.

Eventually, in their teens, Connie and Joey began to have sex. They also later went into business together, making embroidered watches for the girls in Connie's all-girl's schools which the nuns eventually banned. At this point, Patty failed to see the relationship between the two children. Seemingly years later, Walter's mother died, so they left and allowed Jessica to supervise her brother. Through a course of events, Patty then learned about the sexual relationship.

Soon after, Carol found a new boyfriend, Blake, a backhoe driver. Blake began to cut down trees and renovate the house, promptly annoying the neighbors. After Patty had a confrontation with Blake over this, Blake's truck's tires were mysteriously slashed. During dinner one night, Patty criticized Blake and Joey left. Joey decided that he would now live with Carol, Blake, and Connie. This drove both Walter and Patty into a rage, but after confronting Joey at Carol's home, they eventually left. The narrator then tells the reader of some gossip, such as the reason that Joey moved in was to be the smartest person in the house. The narrator also adds that the bed that Connie and Joey share became a topic of conversation in the neighborhood.

Analysis

This introductory chapter has two purposes: the first is to tell the reader about the various settings within the world of the novel, and the second is to foreshadow things to come while also preparing the reader for flashbacks. The setting of the novel is similar to the cliché all-American town/street. Just like this motif, the town is full of drama and



secrets between inhabitants. It is also established that the majority of the street's citizens share the same ideologies and mindset.

The author is sure to make it very clear that many of the characters are liberals or members of the Democratic party. The author does this by briefly mentioning a character volunteering with the local democratic party and Walter's Gore/Lieberman sticker. Blake is the character that breaks this unity. Blake's sticker that reads "I'm White and I Vote" (18), seems to be the ideological opposite of the rest of the town's ideology. Other settings are established in this chapter, such as Walter's mother's house, wherever Walter and Patty came from, and wherever they leave for during the closing of this chapter.

The other main purpose is foreshadowing and preparing the reader for flashbacks. This chapter highlights a mental descent for Patty. Her mental status seems to slowly degrade until she becomes hysterical when she confronts Joey. However, she does not seem completely stable when the chapter begins either. Her neighbors, such as Seth and Merrie, make comments stating that she has always been off or different. This, and the fact that the next chapter involves Patty narrating her own life, tips off the reader that the reason for her differences may be revealed.

The chapter also foreshadows that this is not the last we will hear from Patty and Walter's son, Joey. The author spends a great amount of time explaining his idiosyncrasies and his separation from his family. The author almost makes him seem like a type of anti-hero protagonist. However, none of this is revealed in this chapter.

Discussion Question 1

What characters could be considered protagonists in the chapter "Good Neighbors"?

Discussion Question 2

Why would Joey like Blake so much?

Discussion Question 3

What is Walter's role in his wife's mental decline?

Vocabulary

haphazard, immoderately, imposition



“Mistakes Were Made”: Chapter 1: Agreeable

Summary

This section of the novel is a memoir narrated by Patty, but written in 3rd person. Patty explains that she was incredibly good at sports, and if she was not an atheist, she would thank God for them (she played basketball and softball). Patty then explains the following: she was the oldest of four siblings living in Westchester County, NY. Her father was a lawyer and her mother was a professional Democrat. One day, Patty went with her father to court; afterwards, he explained that everyone involved with any trial are liars. She hated family events like playing double tennis with her father, his work partner (who looked at her suggestively), and his wife.

Patty had a few relationships, but first had sex with a boy named Ethan Post. However, it was not consensual. Ethan raped her at a party while she was under the influence of alcohol and fighting. Later, after crying in the shower, her coach talked to her about her bruises. Patty explained the situation causing the coach to call Patty's parents.

Patty told the coach that nothing would come of this because the Post family was political friends with her parents. Her father asked her if a formal apology from Ethan would suffice. She said no. Regardless, her father called a family doctor to look at her. The doctor talked to Patty about sex and was pleased that Ethan used a condom. Patty explained to her father that she wanted to go to the police, her father explained that if she did, she would be more violated by the trial and the press than she currently was.

Her father theorized that they could give Ethan a differed conviction, but this did not please Patty. Patty's father called Mr. Post, who claimed that Ethan denied raping Patty. At this point, her father explained that nothing could be done, because Ethan wore a condom and Patty did not scream. He told her that she should be safe and more careful next time. Soon after, the Posts held a fundraiser for Patty's mother. After the incident, Patty became numb to pain.

Analysis

The medium of this chapter is a memoir written by Patty for her own benefit. At this point and in all further chapters of this memoir, the content symbolizes an acknowledgment or confession of her wrongdoing, as we will see as the memoir progresses. It is also notable that the majority of the novel's rising action takes place between the pages of Patty's memoir.

The author uses this chapter to demonstrate contemporary America's attitude towards sexual assault. In the past decade, many stories about women in this situation have become visible in the press and highlighted the issues about how Americans deal with



rape. One of the biggest parts of this problem that the chapter deals with is the lack in belief regarding the woman involved. Patty's father tells her that no one will believe she was raped due to the fact that she did not scream, she could have obtained bruises from her sports, and that Ethan wore a condom.

Obviously, all of these things could be true, and Ethan can still be guilty of raping Patty. Patty, herself, explains that none of the party goers would testify against Ethan because they were his friends and not Patty's. It is also implied that, on top of the previously mentioned reasons, Patty's father does not alert the authorities due to the Post's financial support of his wife.

This chapter also acts as a flashback that explains Patty's future mental state. It is clear at the end of the chapter that Patty's psyche has endured an immense amount of trauma due to the rape. At the end of the chapter, she explains that she became numb to pain and just played on. It is often said that the suppression of emotions eventually leads to the bubbling over of anxiety, anger, or depression. It is possible that this will lead to more trauma for Patty. This disregard for pain may make her more susceptible to just letting more trauma happen to her. Also, her negative experience with her parents regarding the rape accusations could lead her to not acting on negative situations in the future.

Finally, this chapter introduces the recurring theme of politics being the driving force for individuals. Here, we see Joyce put her political priorities in front of her daughter's health, showing how much she seems to care about her career and political standing. This is not the first time we will see this happen, as later characters such as Vin Haven and Walter will do similar things.

Discussion Question 1

In what other ways does this chapter ("Mistakes Were Made": Chapter 1: Agreeable) deal with society's view of rape?

Discussion Question 2

Explain Patty's relationship with her father.

Discussion Question 3

What does the political nature of the dismissing of the rape accusations say city that Patty lives in?

Vocabulary

amenable, differed prosecution, tidings



“Mistakes Were Made”: Chapter 2: Best Friends

Summary

The main focus of this chapter is Patty's college-era personal relationships. Patty considered her best friend to be a girl named Eliza, who sat behind her in a lecture class. Eliza complimented Patty on her athletic skill and eventually began coming to basketball games to root for Patty. During one of these games, Eliza gave Patty a piece of paper with the word “Patty” written all over it. They became friends and had a variety of adventures together including eating hash brownies (when Patty secretly hoped that Eliza would participate in a lesbian experience with her).

Eventually, Patty began a romantic relationship with a man named Carter. After dating Carter for six months, Patty came back early from a game and discovered Carter doing cocaine. She then broke up with Carter and forced Eliza to quit hard drugs. Shortly afterwards, Eliza and Patty met Walter and Richard.

Patty saw Walter as a down-to-Earth nerd, while Eliza hated him. Patty but had an intense attraction towards Richard, who was a punk rock musician. Around this time, Patty began to realize that Eliza was obsessed with her, and this was only cemented by Richard finding a sort of shrine journal to Patty in Eliza's room. After their friendship was established, they went to one of Richard's shows, where Eliza disappeared. Walter told Patty that they were backstage doing coke, which upset Patty. Patty eventually brought this up to Eliza, and Eliza accused, Walter, “the faggot” (83) of turning everyone against her. At this time, Patty also learned that Eliza had not been going to class for six weeks.

During a holiday, after Patty began leading Walter along even though she was not interested in him, Eliza called Patty and told her that she had been diagnosed with leukemia. When they returned to class, Patty began caring for Eliza. Almost right after this, Walter confronted Patty for ignoring him and alluded to the fact that Eliza had been doing heroin and was not actually sick. This realization caused Patty to perform badly in that night's basketball game against UCLA.

After the game, Patty visited Eliza and discovered her intoxicated and hiding heroin paraphernalia. Patty called Eliza's parents, even after Eliza threatened to kill herself if she did, who eventually showed up and sent her away.

Walter then began hanging out with Patty's jock friends, even though he did not have much in common with them (Walter was very political). Walter then asked Patty to move in after she injured her ankle, as Richard was moving out of their shared apartment to live in NY. She stated that she would consider it and made plans to travel with Richard to NY, since she was planning to visit her family for a family function. She did this



because she realized that she did not want to have sex with Walter, but instead wanted Richard.

Richard and Patty first drove to Chicago to stay with one of Richard's friends, while Patty flirted with Richard the whole way. He did not appreciate this and scolded Patty for tearing Walter apart by leading him on, and Patty learned that Walter's father was currently in a comatose state. Because of this, Walter had been going home to keep his family afloat. After Patty failed to seduce Richard at his friend's house, she called her parents and told them that she would arrive soon. Richard dropped Patty off in Walter's hometown, she then kissed Walter, and he drove her to her home in NY.

Analysis

This much longer chapter reveals some things that were foreshadowed in the first chapter of the novel. Most importantly, we learn how Patty and Walter met, and it is not a love at first sight situation. In fact, it is far from it. After the two meet, it is very clear that Patty is actually more interested in Walter's friend Richard than Walter. In short, it is implied that Patty ends up with Walter because she has to settle for him after failing to get together with Richard. This chapter also shows that, early on, Patty is very callous and unfair to Walter. She seems to play a twisted game of "hard to get" while she is pursuing Richard at the same time. This is foreshadowing her later unreasonable behavior. But interestingly enough, we do see Patty demonstrate the inverse of this behavior.

Patty seems to truly care for Eliza. In fact, their relationship is described by the title of the chapter. She goes out of her way to help her when she is "sick" and makes many concessions for Eliza's benefit. However, we learn that Eliza is definitely unstable. She is obsessive, addiction prone, and unreasonable. Also, the piece of paper she gives to Patty acts as a very clear symbol of both Eliza's unstable nature and her obsession. This dynamic shows a type of parallelism between the relationship between Eliza and Patty and the one involving Patty and Walter. Eliza takes advantage of Patty, while Patty takes advantage of Walter. So, Patty is not the only character acting unfairly in this chapter.

We also receive a sizeable amount of character development for both Patty and Walter. This chapter reveals to us that Patty will go to extremes in order to get what she wants. This is apparent as she is willing to betray one of her best friends (Walter, whom she knows is interested in her) in order to sleep with Richard. However, and luckily, (this time) the bond between Walter and Richard is very strong, and Richard dismisses her advances regardless of his free attitude regarding sex. This is foreshadowing the bond that Walter and Patty eventually form.

A final element of foreshadowing is regarding Walter's political interests. We learn that he is interested in political philosophies regarding controlling the volume of humans on the Earth in order to assure the continued existence of man. At this point, we know that Patty's family is deep into the political world, and they tend to be rather left-wing. It is



safe to say that forced population control does align with many of their left-wing values. The foreshadowing lies in the possibility of philosophical conflict between Walter and Patty's family.

Discussion Question 1

Is it possible that Eliza's actions affect Patty's later actions?

Discussion Question 2

What all does Patty's pursuit of Richard tell us about her character?

Discussion Question 3

Why would Walter be so willing to be lead on?

Vocabulary

preemie, pigeon-toed, paramount, excruciatingly, emulate, spritzer



“Mistakes Were Made”: Chapter 3: Free Markets Foster Competition

Summary

The chapter begins with the narrator explaining that Patty's parents always encouraged her to be involved in the arts, but while she did not, her siblings did. The narrator explains that Patty and Walter married in a courthouse about three weeks after they graduated college (this relieved Patty's parents, as it meant she was not a lesbian). Before this happened, Patty and Walter had dinner with Patty's family, however it went quite badly as Abigail, Patty's sister, would not stop talking about herself, and Walter brought up the Club of Rome, an organization whose goal is to control the volume of humans on Earth. Patty's parents gave a mixed response to this subject. Before they were married, Patty also went to Hibbing, Walter's home town. Here, Walter confronted Patty about her trip to Chicago with Richard, but they later had sex. Three days later, Walter's father died. Four hundred people attended the funeral, but Richard failed to arrive, which angered Walter.

Patty learned that Richard probably did not show up because his father was an alcoholic like Walter's father. The narrator informs the reader that Richard's mother dumped Richard on his father and left to find Jesus. Richard did visit, but Richard did not share in her religious fervor. The narrator then explained that over time, even back in college, Richard and Walter were competitive towards each other. For example, Richard did steal one of Walter's love interests to prove that she was bad for him (Walter forgave him due to advice from his mother). According to the narrator, this competitiveness persisted. The narrator then explains that Richard eventually fell in love with the singer of his band, The Traumaties, Molly. She goes on to explain that during this time Patty and Walter's relationship was great and only a bad sequence of events, such as Patty falling in love with Walter's best friend, could have ruined it. Unfortunately, that happened.

Around the time when Patty began drinking heavily, Richard became homeless after forming a band named Walnut Surprise, and a girlfriend named Ellie got him kicked out of his apartment. Patty and Walter had been working on the lake house (mentioned in the first chapter of the novel). Walter offered Richard money and boarding if he came to the lake house and built the deck. He accepted and eventually the trio reunited. Patty then quit drinking after a remark from Richard and continued to attempt to seduce him. They eventually slept together when Patty, faking sleepwalking, got into Richard's bed.

They had sex two more times after this. Patty wanted to continue sleeping with Richard and not telling Walter, but Richard decided to ignore that it happened. Richard decided to leave, but not before singing to Patty, causing her to cry. After Richard left, Patty read War and Peace.



Patty eventually felt guilty for her transgressions and was rather happy with Walter afterwards. She attempted to meet up with Richard twice, once at the lake house (Patty had second thoughts and told him not to come), and again in Philadelphia (Richard had spoken to Walter and realized that Walter was happy). Patty then became overwhelmed with self-pity. Eventually, she visited her daughter's college on Parent's Day to try to reconnect (she seemed to have focused only on Joey during their childhoods). This did not go well, as Jessica's boyfriend would not leave and Jessica refused alone time with her mother.

Jessica explained the reasoning for this as, she was enraged with Patty since Jessica made her life so easy compared to Joey, yet she did not receive the same amount of attention. Patty left. Around this time, Walnut Surprise began to become successful, but Patty could not listen to their songs, as they were written to either be about Patty or Molly (who recently killed herself). In interviews, Richard only referred to Walter as a good college friend, which enraged Walter and sparked his competitiveness. Then, Walter and Patty moved to DC so Walter could form a conservation group.

Analysis

The title of this chapter alludes to the type of relationship between Richard and Walter. As they were both free to pursue their own ventures, competition between them raged on. The two fought over girls and career success. It can be argued that Patty is also a part of this competition. At the point where Walter invites Richard down to the lake house, Walter currently has the upper hand in the competition. He has economic, familial, and social superiority over him. Richard has lost everything: his lovers, his money, and his home. In an attempt to make his victory clear, Walter proposes that Richard come work for him. However, it does not exactly go Walter's way. Richard goes on to remove Walter's familial superiority by having sex with Patty, therefore poisoning their relationship for years to come.

This also introduces the theme of fidelity and infidelity. In this chapter, it is treated quite like a taboo. But in later chapters, such as those involving Joey and Connie, the moral status of infidelity is dealt with quite differently.

It is also not a coincidence that the book Patty chooses to read is *War and Peace* by Leo Tolstoy. The narrative of this novel is not quite unlike the situation involving the situation regarding Patty, Walter, and Richard. The female protagonist of *War and Peace* falls in love with one male character, whom she cannot truly be with, and settles for another man. Patty is essentially parallel to this character. Patty falls in love with Richard (even back when they drove to Chicago), but cannot truly be with him due to Walter (the woman's true love dies in *War and Peace*). The period where Patty is sleeping with Richard parallels the period where the woman's true love dies in the Tolstoy novel. Richard does not die, but he goes off to pursue other things, keeping him out of Patty's reach.



This section of the novel also cements Patty as a sort of anti-protagonist. She is not quite an antihero, due to her wrongdoings, but she is the protagonist of this novel (at least this part of it). In short, she is a type of protagonist that the reader is not exactly supposed to root for. We sympathize with her, since we know that she eventually ends up in quite a bad place (foreshadowed in the first chapter), but she is not exactly likable. She is unreasonable and uses her husband in cruel ways. Regardless, it seems like the reader is supposed to like Walter more than Patty, which is unusual since Patty is the focus and the narrator of these chapters.

Finally, this chapter fills in some blanks about Walter that were not foreshadowed in the beginning chapters. His competitiveness with Richard seems to be what leads him to Washington DC. If this is true, this competitiveness is also the reason that Walter ends up in trouble (again, foreshadowed at the beginning of the book). In the first chapter, we learn that none of the townsfolk expected Walter to do what he did. This makes sense, as none of them were privy to the relationship between Walter and Richard.

The chapter also introduces the lake as a catalyzing force in many of the characters lives. In this chapter, it works as a catalyst for both Richard's music and Richard and Patty's relationship.

Discussion Question 1

What connections are there between this novel and War and Peace, the novel Patty chooses to read after Richard leaves?

Discussion Question 2

Explain Patty's motivations in "Mistakes Were Made": Chapter 3: Free Markets Foster Competition.

Discussion Question 3

Who is at fault in the situation between Patty, Richard, and Walter?

Vocabulary

avowal, derelict, fancy (verb), elucidate, dishevelment



2001: Mountaintop Removal

Summary

This chapter takes place in 2004 and is narrated by an unnamed third person narrator. The narrator explains that Richard, fresh off the success of his last Walnut Surprise album, is now broke after spending too much on tours, drugs, and a DWI. Regardless, the last album “Nameless Lake” was nominated for a Grammy and boosted The Traumatic’s album sales. Due to his financial issues, Richard began building decks. One client was a fan of his music and had a wife who was rather voyeuristic towards Richard.

The client’s son asked him for an interview to impress a girl, and Richard accepted, hoping to sleep with the girl (regardless of being rather adverse towards sex recently). During the interview, Richard ranted and raved about capitalism, how musicians are the same as gum manufacturers, and how he was now a realistic Republican. Richard went home and received a voicemail from Walter, who asked him to meet him, as he had a proposal for him and it was regarding saving the planet.

The two met, and Walter, his assistant, Lalitha (who Richard wanted to sleep with) told Richard about their project saving the Cerulean Warbler. However, the two went on to say how their superior was friends with the Bush family and Cheney family, and sold some of their conservation land for mineral rights after Dick Cheney gave him a warning about changing regulations. Due to this, Walter and Lalitha wanted to raise awareness about fragmentation of land (which makes it difficult to conserve large habitats). To do this, Walter wanted Richard to work with him to create a music festival to get kids involved with conservation.

Richard told Walter that he would have to think about it. Walter and Richard left and discussed Patty. According to Richard, Patty became depressed and wasted her money on something bad. Walter could not figure out what made her unhappy, but Richard knew. Richard internally acknowledged that he and Patty were in the same situation.

Analysis

This chapter continues to portray the competitive nature regarding Walter and Richard’s relationship. Richard realizes that Lalitha seems to really want to have sex with Walter, whether Walter acknowledges it or not. Due to this, Richard wants to sleep with her in order to beat Walter in this competition. The capitalism metaphor (used during the last chapter) also persists in this chapter. Richard explains that he has become a Republican, but not an evangelical one. In short, he believes in the free-market associated with capitalism, but does not appreciate the qualities that the modern Republican Party has attached to it. This is rather timely, as this chapter takes place during the George W. Bush presidency, who was an evangelical Republican. The



presidency itself is used to symbolize Walter's internal ideological clash and the ideological clash between characters such as Walter and Joey.

This chapter also informs the reader about the thing that drives the people of St. Paul to be disappointed in Walter. Walter has gone rogue regarding his employment and seems to be attempting to undermine the desires of his superiors. If we look back at the prologue, it is stated that Walter was accused of working with the coal industries and taking advantage of people. This could either be referring to the actions of his boss (and therefore the Conservancy) or his later actions. Also, in a way, the act of mountain top removal acts as a symbol. It demonstrates the sacrifices that must be made in order to accomplish certain goals (like preservation) Finally, Richard is right in comparing his life to Patty. They both went through a big change, Patty moving to Washington and Richard becoming a successful and later unsuccessful musician, and they both ended up unhappy.

Lastly, the album title is no coincidence. The album "Nameless Lake" symbolizes the feelings that Richard expressed and felt while being with Patty at the lake house. Regardless of the fact that it was written in such a way as to leave the subject of the songs ambiguous, it is clear to the reader what the songs symbolize. Another symbol in this chapter is the Cerulean Warbler, the bird that Walter wants to protect. This symbol is used to symbolize the titular freedom and the Walter's views on the dangers of overpopulation.

Discussion Question 1

Has Walter violated his previous ideals?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Richard want to sleep with his boss' son's love interest?

Discussion Question 3

What other ways do Richard and Patty's life relate?

Vocabulary

plenitude, futile, equilibrating, verbatim, sectioning



2001: Womanland

Summary

This chapter opens during September 11, 2001, on Joey's campus. The narrator explains that after the attacks, Joey felt a sort of resentment towards the terrorists for ruining some of his college experience, and that he thought that the way people mourned was stupid. Later, Joey had been thinking about breaking up with Connie. Meanwhile, she rode on a Greyhound bus to spend a few days with Joey. The weekend of her visit was full of sex and drugs. Joey recommended that Connie take the SAT so she could go to school, while also taking a break from speaking to him. She left and soon after, Joey received a call from Carol. Carol explained to Joey that he had made Connie depressed and that he should spend Thanksgiving with them and act like a good boyfriend. She then remarked that she is starting to feel like Joey's mother felt. After this Joey recalled his time living with Connie's family.

According to Joey, Blake explained that many things were stupid, and Connie told him that Blake thought he was smart, but only Joey was truly smart. He also recalled the time when his grandmother died, and he invited Connie over for a weekend of sex in his parent's absence (his mother seemed fine with this at first and explained that she saw Eliza in public and avoided her). He explained that his grandmother was the only person he was ever completely good to.

Instead of going to Connie's for Thanksgiving, Joey decided to go to his friend's Jonathan's family's house. Joey learned that Jonathan's family was quite rich and proud of their Jewish heritage. Jonathan's father took Joey under his wing, expressed interest in helping him find out more about his Jewish heritage, and offered him a summer job. Joey then went with Jonathan and his sister Jessica to New York to stay in her boyfriend's apartment (Joey was secretly hoping to sleep with Jessica). Before leaving, Joey called Abigail and set a day and time to meet up with her in the city. During this meeting, Abigail explained that she would be leaving town and needed a house sitter. She offered the job to Joey. He accepted and invited Connie to stay.

When Connie arrived, she revealed that she quit her job to spend the few days with him, that she was thinking of going to school closer to him, and that his mother said hi. All of these things upset Joey. Regardless, he went on to have anal sex with Connie and started to think that he did not want to break up with Connie. At the end of the chapter, Jessica emailed him and explained that her boyfriend offered to teach him things about Wall-Street.

Analysis

We learn much about Joey during this chapter. One of the most notable things is that he strangely believes that he is very different than Blake. He complains about how he



thinks everything is stupid. However, in reality, Joey fails to realize that he does the same thing during September 11, 2001. They just seem to simply believe that different things are stupid while still believing that they are the smartest person in the room. Also, the reader is told that Joey still has a strained relationship with his parents. This cannot be a good thing for Patty's mental state, but Joey seems to not care about this.

Even after Joey is ranted at by his father about upsetting his mother (over not going home for Thanksgiving), he does not seem to care. Joey's behavior seems to parallel some of Patty's earlier behavior. When dealing with people such as Walter, Patty seemed rather cold and uncaring towards other people. Here, Joey is doing the same thing towards his parents, Carol, and Connie.

The development of Joey during this chapter also reveals an internal struggle within Joey. Up until the end of the chapter, it seems like Joey wants to break up with Connie. For example, he explicitly says it, tries to sleep with other women, and does not reveal the truth to her mother. However, towards the end of the chapter his opinion seems to have changed. He states that he loves Connie. It is unclear whether Joey has actually had a real change in opinion or that he wants to have sex with Connie while still doing whatever he wants.

Finally, the title of the chapter shows up within the chapter. Joey states that he would have thought that college would have been a "womanland" for him, but he was sadly mistaken.

Discussion Question 1

What do Joey's actions in this chapter suggest about his character? How does he treat Connie, and why?

Discussion Question 2

What is the importance of September 11, 2001 in "2001: Womanland"?

Discussion Question 3

What are Connie's motivations in "2001: Womanland"?

Vocabulary

spadework, hydroponic, reaming, clinger, insister, premonition



2001: The Nice Man's Anger

Summary

The chapter opens after Walter and Lalitha having just closed a Mountain Top Removal project in West Virginia. Lalitha told Walter that they should celebrate, so they went to a restaurant near their hotel. There, Lalitha proceeded to get very drunk, and Walter had his first beer.

Afterwards, the time frame shifts to right before the start of the chapter, and we learn about the last obstacle to fully completing their plan, a man named Coyle Mathis, who refused to sell his land to the Trust. First Walter attempted to speak to him with no luck. Lalitha tried next and succeeded, as Vin promised them jobs manufacturing military body armor and a nice home. According to the narrator, the man accepted because two of his family members were fighting the Iraq war.

The narrative then shifts back to the restaurant, and the narrator informs us that Walter wanted to kiss Lalitha. Lalitha asked Walter if she should sterilize herself; this question made him panic internally.

The narrative then goes back in time once more. Walter recalls the most recent fights that he and Patty had. Walter eventually discovered that Patty was giving \$500 every month to Joey. Walter resented this as Patty did not work for the money and due to the fact that Joey had become a Wall Street Republican. After this fight, Patty got a job at a gym, but stated that it was for Walter's sake and not hers. After this, she also mentioned about possible getting a breast enhancement.

The morning after Lalitha and Walter's dinner, they finally kissed in the car and admitted their love. They then arrived at the mountain top removal site and noticed that the environmentalist Jocelyn Zorn (whom Walter knew and believed was on her side) was blocking the road with her car. Walter attempted to explain that they were on the same side. Walter began screaming at her and the workmen, explaining that he owed everything in the vicinity. He retreated to the car and received a call from Joey, asking for help.

Analysis

This chapter explains that Walter is going through various crises. The first crisis is the most obvious - his marriage. It is briefly mentioned that Patty explains to Walter that he can have sex with Lalitha, but he denies wanting to. We learn that this is not true when he thinks about kissing Lalitha and later actually kisses her in the car. It is implied that Walter actually loves Lalitha, but he does not fully admit it. It is possible that if Walter knew of his wife's transgressions, he may be more likely to act on his sexual impulses regarding Lalitha. Regardless of this, he does admit that he still loves Patty despite her behaviors or mental state and shows satisfaction when Patty seems happier after



getting a job. In a way, Walter is betraying his wife in the same way that she betrayed him, just much later in his life.

Walter also goes through a crises of ideology. At this point, we are fully aware that Walter is a Democrat and an environmentalist. However, he does make decisions that seem to be contrary to this ideology. Primarily, he decides to support mountain top removal. He does believe that in many cases, this is needed so the land can later be reclaimed, but other Liberals, like Zorn, vehemently disagree with him. Also, he claims that he and Zorn are on the same side, which may be true due to their long-term goals, but certainly not their short term ones. The anger Walter shows to Zorn is the origin of this chapter's title. Finally, Walter also gets quite angry that his son has become a Republican, the inverse of his supposed liberal views.

The body armor factory also acts as a point of contention and a symbol for Walter. It represents the unfortunate relationship that Walter has to be make between preservation and the military industrial complex. It shows that almost everything is involved in this complex, whether people realize it or not.

Discussion Question 1

What crises is Walter going through in "2001: The Nice Man's Anger"?

Discussion Question 2

How can Patty and Walter's relationship be described at this point? How has it changed?

Discussion Question 3

"2001: The Nice Man's Anger" ends with Joey calling his father for help. What kind of trouble might Joey be in?

Vocabulary

dismal, yakker, sanctimonious, affront, gigantism, affluence, contractor



2001: Enough Already

Summary

The narrator explains that after Zachary interviewed Richard, he received many more requests due to his controversial opinions. Richard also did end up meeting Caitlyn, but chose not to sleep with her while flirting with her heavier friend to spite her. On the way to a meeting with Walter, Richard got into a small confrontation with a couple on a train, after the wife accidentally threw an ice-cream cup on his feet. When Richard arrived at Walter's house, he spoke to Jessica, who exclaimed complaints about Lalitha and her obliviousness regarding the nature of young people. She also mentioned that Lalitha was ripping the family apart. She was also mad at Patty for driving her boyfriend away by asking awkward questions.

In the morning, Walter, Lalitha, Richard, and Jessica had a brainstorming session. They came up with various names for the campaign, including "Enough Already." When Patty appeared, Lalitha began checking her phone. Jessica and Richard came up with the idea to make the festival more centered around many battle of the bands.

After the meeting, Richard and Walter went to a restaurant, where Richard asked about Lalitha. This angered Walter which then angered Richard. Prior to the meal, Richard had called a venue of a local sold-out concert to secure VIP tickets in an attempt for Richard to recruit the musician to the campaign. At the concert, Richard decided against this because of his anger with Walter. The next morning, Richard confronted Patty. Patty explained that she realized that he only wanted her because Walter had her, and that Richard picked Walter over her. Richard recommended running away together but Patty declined.

Later, Richard found the manuscript for "Mistakes Were Made" (which the readers read earlier in the novel). Richard read it and enjoyed the parts about himself. When Richard decided to leave, he set the manuscript on Walter's desk. He then returned to Jersey City to make more music. One night, upon returning home, Richard found Patty at his door, explaining that she had been evicted.

Analysis

By seeing Patty and Richard's confrontation while the narrator explores Richard's thoughts (and given our prior insight to Richard's thoughts) gives a great deal of validation to Patty's ideas regarding Richard and Walter's relationship. Essentially, we learn that Patty is not wrong. Richard did, in fact, choose Walter over Patty.

However, it is interesting to note that Richard seems to acknowledge this, and attempts to fix it by running away with Patty. Richard further shows his bias towards Walter when he sets the manuscript of "Mistakes Were Made" on Walter's desk. At this point, Richard



knows that some consequence will come from this action, but it is unclear whether he foresaw Patty's appearance at the end of the chapter.

On the other hand, in this chapter, we do see Richard drift away from Walter. Walter's lack of action regarding Lalitha seems to set both Richard and Walter off. Presumably, this is because if Walter left Patty for Lalitha, then Richard could enter the situation and finally obtain Patty. This gives credence to the idea that Richard does truly love Patty, as he is willing to destroy his decades long friendship in order to achieve their happiness together.

Regardless of this, Richard does act rather petty when he plants the manuscript on Walter's desk. Richard most likely realizes that Patty is in a delicate psychological state and can assume that the fallout from this could hurt her even further. But he does this anyway, possibly acting for love in a selfish way.

Lastly, the title of the chapter originates to one of the brainstormed project titles, "Enough Already."

Discussion Question 1

Is it possible for Richard to avoid the end of he and Patty's confrontation?

Discussion Question 2

Describe Patty's psychological state during "2001: Enough Already".

Discussion Question 3

What other things could have angered Jessica?

Vocabulary

blogospheric, corduroy, brocade, paragon, aesthetic



2001: Bad News

Summary

This chapter takes place sometime after the “Womanland.” Joey had been planning a trip to see Jenna in Argentina and explained to Connie that he was just stopping in the country before doing business in Paraguay (which is partially true). The reader is also told that Joey and Connie were secretly married shortly before this, and that Connie had been hiding her ring from Carol. Connie was quite distraught about this due to the fact that they were married, yet she could not live with her husband. While Joey discussed this with her, he accidentally swallowed his wedding ring after putting it in his mouth. He then went to the hospital, and the doctor told him that he would have to wait until it passed through his bowels to recover it.

The narrative then shifts into a flashback when Joey was speaking to his mother. Patty claimed the Connie was not being an individual and compared her to Eliza. We also learn that Connie was being prescribed Celexa for depression and that she had dropped out of school. The flashback then shifts to slightly afterwards. Joey argued with Jonathan whether there were any WMDs in Iraq (Joey stated that there were). The reader is also told that Joey had been working with a company called RISEN which attempted to change the bread market in Iraq. Joey’s father did not appreciate this, as he saw it as making profit through war.

A flashback then shifts forward again and we learn that Connie and Joey had both been cheating on each other, and that Walter had found out that Patty had been sending Joey money and put a stop to it.

Again, the narrative shifts forward to a time when Connie visited Joey. After Joey discovered cutting marks on Connie’s arms and having sex, Joey and Connie secretly were married.

The narrative then shifts right before the initial time period. Joey’s boss called him and asked him to invest in a venture involving selling old trucks to the U.S. military. If he accepted, Joey would go around to different countries buying specific truck parts and sending them to Iraq, making a large amount of money in the process. Joey needed to invest \$50,000, but he did not have the money, so Connie gave him her savings.

Then, in the initial time period, Joey arrived in Argentina with the ring still inside of him. He met with Jenna who kissed him and later gave him unsuccessful oral sex. The next morning, Joey successfully passed the ring through his bowels and recovered his wedding ring. After Jenna became irritating to Joey he told Jenna that he was married, left the country, and went to Paraguay. In the meantime, Joey discovered a voicemail from Carol telling him that she knew about the marriage and that she may tell his mother.



He eventually arrived and went to a junkyard, where an ex-military man with a gun met him. The parts in the yard were very rusted, and Joey began to have second thoughts about sending faulty parts to the military. Eventually, they settled on a good price, and he called his boss and expressed his concern; he told Joey to send the parts anyway. This coupled with the thought of losing Connie's money led him to send the parts. After this, Joey asked Jonathan if he could be a whistleblower to clear his conscious, but he explained that they would make Joey the scape-goat.

While waiting for his profits to arrive, Joey viewed the news and saw that a battle had occurred in Iraq caused by trucks breaking down. Joey did not see the model truck he sent, but he was afraid nonetheless.

Analysis

One of the themes that this chapter highlights is mental illness and how common it is. Up to this point, the author has drawn parallels between characters with mental illness, while not explicitly stating the connections. However, this chapter changes this behavior. When Joey speaks with his mother, Patty states that Connie is just like Eliza. Joey seems to not agree with this claim, but Joey does not have the knowledge about Eliza that Patty or the reader has. The biggest commonality between the two is that they are both extremely obsessive. When Patty was friends with Eliza, Eliza was protective and clearly obsessed with Patty. Connie is similar but is obsessed with Joey in a romantic way.

In a way, Connie seems possibly more obsessive than Eliza due to the fact that, according to Connie, everything she does is for Joey's benefit. Eliza was not quite this way, as Eliza was rather selfish and attempted to take advantage of her situation towards the end of the relationship. However, it could be stated that Connie behaves similarly when she cheats on Joey.

We also witness a large amount of character development in regards to Joey. For the majority of the novel, Joey has been incredibly selfish. His main motivation is to simply acquire large amounts of wealth and do whatever he wants. But, when he marries Connie, he seems to be doing something for the mutual benefit of both he and Connie. He also cares deeply about the possibly losing the money that Connie gave him. He is concerned about this because he really wants Connie to go back to school, and the original purpose of the money was to make that happen. Joey is also starting to care about people he does not even know. When he looks at the truck parts in Paraguay, he begins to think that he should not send them overseas. If the trucks were built with faulty parts, it could cause the loss of American lives in an already bloody war. He is also very concerned when he sees the news broadcast about the battle resulting from the broken down trucks. Essentially, he is beginning to feel responsible for his actions.

Joey is also losing some of his childish ways, particularly the aforementioned trait of doing whatever he wants. Up to this chapter, Joey has been pining over Jenna for months, if not a year. However, he is unable to successfully have sex with her and



eventually leaves her mid-vacation. It seems that he feels guilty that he was interested in such a bad person like Jenna, and that Connie is a much better option. This, along with the changes in the previous chapter, shows a great amount of transformation for Joey, as he is beginning to behave like as good a person as he can seemingly be.

This chapter deals with fidelity in quite a different way than previous chapters. In regards to Richard and Patty, Patty's infidelity is treated like a taboo. However, in Connie and Joey's situation, they both accept the fact that it happened and do not think much of it. The author may be using this to question the absolute nature of fidelity and infidelity or comment on the changes of morals between generations.

Discussion Question 1

How has Joey's character seemed to change in "2001: Bad News"? What prompted Joey's transformation?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Walter stop Patty from giving money to Joey? What does this situation suggest about the relationship between the three of them?"

Discussion Question 3

What does "2001: Bad News" seem to say about the Iraq War?

Vocabulary

impending, reproach, grievous, microgram, privatize, extrapolated



2001: The Fiend of Washington

Summary

This chapter is narrated by an unknown third person narrator. The narrator begins to tell the reader about Walter's childhood. His grandfather was an immigrant from Sweden who treated his son, Gene, badly. He and his wife eventually died in a fiery car crash. Gene, Walter's father was quite the drunk and favored his other sons over Walter. Gene eventually decided to sell his father's lake house (the same one Walter eventually owns). Walter suggested that Gene could make Mitch, the oldest son, pay rent so they did not have to sell the property. Gene confronted Mitch about it and Mitch refused. Later, Walter suggested that he go to the lake house and work on fixing it up. His parents agreed. While on the property, Walter began to observe animals and truly appreciate nature.

The chapter then moves forward in time to right before Patty was evicted by Walter. Walter had read "Mistakes Were Made." After kicking Patty out, Walter finally has sex with Lalitha. The next day, Walter suggested to Lalitha that they fire Richard from the project, but Lalitha refused.

Not long after, Joey and Connie came to visit the trust. Joey also informed him that Patty had already told him about the separation, but he seemed quite indifferent about it. After the visit, Walter and Lalitha got in an argument, and Lalitha claimed that Walter still thought about Patty (which was true). Lalitha also refused to fire Richard once more because Richard had gotten the White Stripes on board.

After the fight and the night before he had to give a speech at the body armor factory, Walter took some trazodone in order to sleep. He woke up incredibly intoxicated. The speech was a disaster, as he railed against the coal companies, shouted about overpopulation, insulted Coyle Mathis, and stated that humans were "a cancer on the planet" (515). Walter was then brutally beaten by the workers, fired, and bought out of the home his boss provided for him. After this speech, Lalitha began to receive thousands of e-mails from young people who wanted to volunteer for their program. This was due to the fact that Walter's whole speech was televised. The speech also caused Richard to pull out of the program.

With their funding cut, Walter thought that the future of the program was destroyed. Luckily, Joey gave the Trust \$100,000 of the truck profits (he was going to donate this immoral money anyway). This money let Lalitha and Walter drive around the country and organize their battle of the bands event. One night, Walter thought about impregnating Lalitha. Right before the main event, Walter decided to return to his family's hometown to visit his brother, which elicited anger from Lalitha. The two temporarily parted ways. Lalitha arrived at the event and found supporters of their program vandalizing the town. Not long after this, Lalitha somehow ended up driving



into a ditch and died. The word of her death finally reached Walter just as he was conversing with his brother.

Analysis

The title of the movie that Walter and Patty saw when they were dating, “The Fiend of Athens.” They had argued about the meaning.

This chapter leads us to believe that Walter was not just speaking nonsense during his speech. It has been stated that he actually did not support mountain top removal, or coal mining and just let it happen in order to secure and reclaim land. In his intoxicated speech, he is showing his true self and his true beliefs. This cements a theme that could be applied to several characters within this novel. This is the theme of a character pretending to be something that they are not. Walter is clearly pretending to be an ally of the coal companies and drilling organizations. Patty is pretending to be a completely sane and reasonable mother and wife. By agreeing to work for Walter’s program, Richard is pretending to be someone with heartfelt beliefs. Joey is pretending to be a cutthroat business man with loose morals. As mentioned in the previous chapter, it is clear that this is not who Joey truly is. The speech truly demonstrates the climax and the beginning of the novel’s falling action.

Walter has changed between his childhood and the early twentieth century. The author uses this to force the reader to compare the younger Walter to the older one. In the flashback, we learn how Walter truly learned to love nature and became a true environmentalist. If young Walter could see into the future and find that his older self is promoting mountain top removal and coal mining, he would definitely be shocked. The idea of The Fiend of Washington symbolizes what Walter has become.

Regardless of this comparison, there is a much more recent change in belief in this chapter. One of Walter’s most important issues is that of overpopulation. He believes that the overpopulation of humans will destroy the Earth due to finite resources. However, in this chapter, he mentions that he really wants to impregnate Lalitha. This goes against Walter’s beliefs that humans (especially low income ones) are having too many children, and that the limit of children should probably be two. Walter already has two children and impregnating Lalitha would put him over this number. Unfortunately, (or fortunately) Lalitha states that she does not want children, crushing Walter’s dreams of having a child with her.

The author also attempts to use a red herring in this chapter. Ever since Lalitha appeared in the novel, Walter has been trying new things. He start drinking beer, and now he is taking unprescribed medication. Much earlier in the novel, we learn that Gene, Walter’s father, definitely had an addictive personality, and the reason that Walter does not drink is because he does not want to turn into his father. By his partaking in addicting substances, it seems like Walter could fall down the rabbit hole of alcohol or drug addiction like Gene (and Eliza).



Discussion Question 1

Why would Walter want to have a child with Lalitha?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Richard pull out of the Trust's program?

Discussion Question 3

Describe how Walter and Lalitha's relationship is different than Walter and Patty's prior relationship.

Vocabulary

compulsory, injunction, malarial. solicitude, furred



“Mistakes Were Made:” Chapter 4: Six Years

Summary

This chapter acts as a physical continuation (six years later) of the previous chapters of Patty's memoir, “Mistakes Were Made.” Patty, in third person, explains to the reader that her relationship with Richard did not last long, as every time she had sex with Richard, she thought about the last time she had sex with Walter. It is also mentioned that Patty and Richard were never meant to last, as they would always just end up disappointing each other. During this time, Patty began to feel bad that she wished Lalitha dead, because if she was alive, Walter could tire of her and eventually go back to Patty. After Lalitha's death, Patty attempted to write a condolences note to Walter, but could never find the words.

The narrator then goes on to explain what occurred during the six years after Lalitha's death. Patty moved to Brooklyn and became a teacher's aide, as she was always good with small children. Patty's father eventually died of cancer; his funeral was heavily attended both by family and pro-bono clients wanting to show their gratitude. After his death, Joyce became the owner of his family's estate but not the lake house. This created turmoil between Patty's father's siblings and Patty's sisters. They wanted Joyce to sell the property and distribute it among them, while some wanted her to distribute it to some family members but not others.

During this period, Patty asked Joyce why she never attended her basketball games, but went to her sibling's events (who were much less adept at their respective activities). Eventually, the house was sold and all of the family members received money. Not long after, Patty ran into Richard; they asked each other whether either of them had communicated with Walter. Neither of them had, but Richard says that he had a present for him and that it would arrive soon.

Analysis

In this chapter, the novel returns to Patty's third person perspective and we become privy to her reaction to Lalitha's death. It seems that Patty is sad that Lalitha has died, but not fully because of the hurt it caused Walter or even the fact that the accident was rather tragic. Patty is upset that Lalitha died because it reduces the chances that Walter will come back to her. This is a rather twisted way of viewing the event, and it is very possible that this is a further sign of her mental illness. We have not been told whether Patty has ever found help or has decided to be medicated, but her lack of empathy and her extreme selfishness is very similar to her behaviors during her possible psychotic breaks. This brings up a very interesting aspect in the novel's theme of mental illness. It



is pretty clear that Patty has some sort of mental illness, but she does not acknowledge it.

Later in the chapter, Patty makes a comment that none of her siblings have become as successful as their parents. This is clearly true, as Abigail is living an unstable life in New York, Veronica simply does not want to work for anything, and Edgar (along with his wife Galina) seem rather entitled. Patty even acknowledges that she has not even come close to being as successful as her parents. An interesting comparison can be made between this phenomena regarding Patty side of the family and her children. Arguably (so far at least), both of Patty and Walter's children have both become successful and more mentally stable than their parents (at least in their current state). This is clearly not a genetic-based pattern, but there are many arguments that can be made regarding why this is.

Discussion Question 1

How have Joey and Jessica turned compared to their parents? What might be the reasons for the differences?

Discussion Question 2

How can Patty's mental state be described in "'Mistakes Were Made:' Chapter 4: Six Years"? How has it changed, and why?

Discussion Question 3

How can the past six years be described regarding Patty's life?

Vocabulary

somberness, recrimination, stalwart, extricate, forestall



Canterbridge Estates Lake

Summary

This chapter takes place around the same time as the previous chapter and is narrated by the third person narrator (not Patty). Over six years, development companies have built houses across the lake from Walter's lake house. One of the residents of these houses, Lisa, believed that Walter had killed her cat. She believed this because Walter had confronted her about her cat killing the resident birds on his property. He asked her to keep her cat inside, but she refused. Later, after Joey and Connie visited Walter, Walter distributed leaflets about the numbers of birds that cats kill all over the neighborhood. Due to this, Lisa had her husband plow the snow on the road in such a way as to require Walter to shovel every morning. In response, Walter trapped Lisa's cat and gave it to an animal shelter.

Shortly after this, Jessica spoke to Walter asking him why he had not spoken to Patty, as they were not technically divorced. Walter became angry at the thought of seeing Patty again. One day, as Walter returned home, he saw Patty sitting at his doorstep in the snow. He ignored her and walked into the house. After listening to a CD that Richard had sent him in the mail entitled "Songs for Walter," and partially reading a second manuscript that Patty had mailed him, he let her in, warmed her up, and kissed her. Patty moved in and introduced herself to the neighbors. They later moved away and converted the lake house to a bird conservancy named after Lalitha.

Analysis

This chapter acts as the conclusion of the novel. In this chapter, we learn that Patty is not the only one having a hard time with their separation. After losing Lalitha, Walter has clearly been devastated and retreated back to the lake house. After having losing the person he loves, his wife, his job, and much of his property, he only has one thing to focus on: the birds near the lake. Walter becomes rather militant about this, much like he was regarding overpopulation. It is very clear that he cares more about the birds of the lake than the new residents.

The listening of Richard's CD is an important part of this chapter. Through the CD, Walter is able to hear the songs that were inspired by his environmental project. The songs reference the movement and the concepts regarding overpopulation. In a way, he partially made an impact with this group (as the CD was released commercially). This, and the manuscript (which is presumably the text of the last chapter) make Walter change his mind about Patty. For some reason, we are not told the exact specifics of this reasoning, but these two things make him forgive Patty. The author does this intentionally, as it makes the reader speculate what exactly about the two items makes Walter change his mind.



Discussion Question 1

What are some things about the manuscript and CD that could have made Richard change his mind?

Discussion Question 2

Is Richard the one that convinced Patty to return to Walter?

Discussion Question 3

What are some uses of symbolism in "Canterbridge Estates Lake"?

Vocabulary

xeroxed, unthriving, intractable, evangelical, constitutionals



Characters

Walter Berglund

Walter can be argued as the protagonist of the novel. Growing up in a rather rural area of Minnesota, Walter deals with his drunk father and uncaring brothers. After a conflict with one of his brothers, Walter chooses to go stay at his family's lake house and make some repairs. While living near the lake, Walter learns to love nature and animals (specifically birds).

Years later, he attends college and makes friends with Richard Katz, a musician. Richard and Walter develop a long-lasting friendship primarily motivated by competition. In college, Walter further develops his liberal ideology. Towards the end of his college career, he meets Patty. He attempts to establish a romantic relationship with her, but initially, Patty is only interested in Richard. Regardless, Walter and Patty eventually marry and have two children. Over the years, the marriage slowly degrades and Walter develops a rather contentious relationship with his children.

Walter then becomes involved with a conservancy project involved with mountain top removal. This goes against many of his environmentalist ideals, but he feels that it is the quickest and most effective way to eventually reclaim land. This creates an internal and ideological struggle for Walter. He soon develops feelings for his assistant Lalitha, and after learning that Patty had cheated on him with Richard, Walter begins a sexual relationship with Lalitha. Lalitha dies in a car crash, sending Walter into isolation. Six years later, Walter and Patty reunite.

Walter is smart but idealistic to a fault. This creates tension during internal struggles.

Patty Berglund

Patty can be argued as the second protagonist in the novel. Patty grows up living with politically minded Democratic parents and quirky siblings. After being raped in high-school, Patty becomes numb to many emotions including emotional pain. Patty becomes a successful high-school athlete (basketball and softball) and later a successful college basketball athlete.

In college, Patty meets a woman named Eliza, who develops an unhealthy obsession for her. Eventually, Patty breaks off this friendship after Eliza becomes addicted to heroin. While being friends with Eliza, she meets Walter and Richard. Patty initially pursues Richard, but after realizing that she cannot secure a relationship with him, she settles with Walter. During the vast majority of their marriage, Patty still thinks about Richard, and it could be argued that Patty becomes obsessed. It is around this time when Patty becomes rather unhinged. She treats her son better than her daughter, picks fights with her neighbors, and slashes Blake's tires.



Eventually, Patty has sex with Richard which only worsens the obsession. She then writes "Mistakes Were Made," confessing many of her actions. When Walter reads this memoir, he kicks Patty out. She then briefly lives with Richard, but the relationship does not last. Next, she moves to Brooklyn and eventually rekindles her relationship with Walter.

Patty is the source of much of the novel's conflict, and she admits this. It can also be argued that she suffers from some sort of mental illness. She also tends to be rather snide in her comments to many of the other characters, except for Joey.

Richard Katz

Richard Katz is Walter's best friend and the man whom Patty cheats on Walter with. He becomes a successful musician after writing songs at the lake house. Throughout the majority of the novel, he conceals the fact that he had sex with Patty and continues to be Walter's friend. The friendship is destroyed when Walter discovers this. Richard eventually continues his relationship with Patty but it does not last.

Richard is certainly not the hero of the novel. He is rather disrespectful to most women, but seems to actually love Patty. He makes reckless decisions that hurt others and only really cares for himself and Patty.

Joey Berglund

Joey is the son of Walter and Patty and could be considered a third protagonist (even though much fewer chapters focus on him). Joey Berglund seems to be an allegory for the excess involved in contemporary American culture. He cares mainly for himself and seems to want everything. He wants the ideal college experience full of sex, drugs, and freedom. As he gets older, he begins to want money. This selfishness hurts his relationship with both Connie (his later wife) and his parents. Right as his parent's marriage falls apart (and after some shady business dealings), he seems to shed much of this selfishness. This type of character growth is typically used to identify a novel's protagonist.

Jessica Berglund

Jessica is Walter and Patty's daughter. The novel does not focus as much on Jessica as it does Joey. Jessica is very independent and believes that her mother takes this for granted. She is intelligent and has some disdain for the better treatment that Joey receives.



Lalitha

Lalitha is Walter's assistant and love interest. She is very passionate about the same environmental subjects as Walter. Walter begins to fall in love with her before his marriage falls apart. After Lalitha and Walter finally acknowledge their love for each other, Lalitha is killed in a car crash while completing tasks for the conservation project, which devastates Walter.

Eliza

Eliza is Patty's college friend. It becomes very clear that Eliza has some sort of mental disorder (OCD or some psychosis) and is incredibly obsessive. She obsesses over Richard and later heroin. She leaves Patty's life after Patty discovers her heroin. Later, Patty sees her briefly at the DMV, but does not approach her.

Jonathan

Jonathan is Joey's best friend. He is much more liberal than Joey (due to the fact that Joey becomes a Republican). Their relationship gets rather tense when Joey pursues Jonathan's sister. Jonathan becomes jealous of Joey when Jonathan's father becomes interested in Joey after Joey states that he wants to learn about his Jewish heritage and work on Wall Street.

Connie Monaghan

Connie is Joey's love interest and later wife. Like many characters in the novel, she is obsessive. She obsesses over Joey and thinks only about their future. Both Joey and Connie are both unfaithful while Joey is at school, but this does not badly hurt their relationship. Connie eventually is prescribed medicine for depression but stops taking it for sexual reasons. Eventually, Joey decides to marry her.

Joyce

Joyce, a Democratic politician, is Patty's mother. She cares very much for her career and sometimes puts it ahead of her daughter's well being. She does not seem to approve of Walter.



Symbols and Symbolism

"Mistakes Were Made" (Patty's Memoir)

The author (and Patty) uses the memoir to symbolize a type of confession and, eventually, to plead for forgiveness. The first sections of the memoir act as a confession, as she is explicitly confessing her wrongdoing. However, the second part of the memoir (the one she sends to Walter) acts as a plea for forgiveness, as Patty has seen the consequences of her actions and wants to seemingly start over. Thanks to the second part of the memoir, she gets her wish.

Eliza's "Patty" Piece of Paper

The author uses the piece of paper that Eliza gives to Patty at a basketball game to symbolize Eliza's burgeoning obsession over Patty. The paper is filled with Patty's name, written over and over again. This is only the tip of the iceberg regarding Eliza's obsessive tendencies, but Patty does not realize this until much later.

"The Fiend of Athens" (movie)

The author uses "The Fiend of Athens" as both a symbol for what Walter is later viewed as and a use of foreshadowing. Patty and Walter view this movie during their first date and come up with their own interpretations about its true message; Walter's view is that the movie's message is an anti-government one. It foreshadows the fact that, in a way, Walter becomes the Fiend of Athens. After his televised outburst, Walter is forever associated with exploiting the environment and people during his stay in Washington. He is viewed negatively, and could be viewed as a type of fiend.

Nameless Lake

The author uses Nameless Lake and its surrounding areas to symbolize and work as the catalyst for many of the happenings of the novel. For example, Patty first has sex with Richard at the lake house near Nameless Lake, initiating the long marital issues between Patty and Walter. Richard also writes his most successful album at the lake, jump starting his career as a celebrity musician. Finally, while Walter was staying at the lake during his childhood, he learned to respect and love nature. This catalyzed his career in conservation and his love for the Warbler. This also makes sense, as Walter later makes the lake house a bird refuge.



"Nameless Lake" (the album)

The author (and Richard) uses Walnut Surprises' hit album, "Nameless Lake" to symbolize Richard's feelings for Patty (or what Richard thinks his feelings are). Richard writes the album in such a way that a well informed listener can make a valid argument regarding whether the songs are about Molly or Patty. However, Patty (and the reader) knows that it is about Patty. The album symbolizes his feelings for Patty in a hidden way, mirroring their actual relationship.

The Cerulean Warbler

The author uses this bird to symbolize a variety of things, from the titular freedom and the dangers of human overpopulation. Towards the end of his chapter and after he begins working at the Conservancy, Walter begins to want to free himself from his current situation, but until he sleeps with Lalitha, he cannot. However, the Warbler is not free either, it is being killed by human expansion and overpopulation. Walter is attempting to create refuges in order to assure the bird's future freedom and to (at least in small areas) curb the effects of overpopulation.

Mountain Top Removal

For Walter, the process of mountain top removal symbolizes the sacrifices that must be made in order to curb overpopulation and protect the environment. Walter sees it as the easiest way to quickly and effectively reclaim a piece of land. He first must let the coal industry take what it can from it, so the environmentalists can later reclaim it without issue.

The Body Armor Factory

The author uses the body armor factory that Walter's superior sets up as a symbol for the unfortunate relationship between saving the environment and the military industrial complex. Like in the description of mountain top removal, Walter and the Conservancy must deal with those that they clash with ideologically in order to get closer to their goals. This symbol demonstrates this as in order to move the residents of West Virginia (in the area where the mountain top removal is to take place) they must give them jobs at the factory. The body armor will go to helping war efforts that are further hurting the planet.

September 11th, 2001

The author uses the time period of the 9/11 terrorist attacks to symbolize a transition in Joey's world. Before the attacks, Joey felt like he was having a cliché great college experience. But after the attacks, he becomes angry at the terrorists because it has

altered his college experience. His whole life then shifts to a more goal oriented one and is a catalyst for the changing relationship between Connie and Joey.

The Presidency of George W. Bush

The author uses the presidency of George W. Bush to symbolize a clash of ideologies and characters. It is safe to say that characters like Walter, Joyce, and Lalitha are quite Liberal. But, it must be noted that they are Liberals in a time of a very conservative governmental regime. This leads to Walter having to make sacrifices to the conservative economic and governmental system in order to assure that the areas in West Virginia will become refuges. Joey also later becomes a Republican, creating a great amount of tension between him and his parents.



Settings

Nameless Lake

Nameless Lake (later renamed Canterbridge Estates Lake) is the location of Walter and Patty's (formally Walter's parents') lake house. The lake house is where Patty first sexually betrays Walter by having sex with Richard. It also happens to be the namesake of Walter's band, 'Walnut Surprise', hit album "Nameless Lake" (as he writes many of the album's songs at the lake).

The lake house is also where Walter learns to love and respect nature.

St. Paul, MN

St. Paul is the town where the Berglund's live during the the time referred to in "Good Neighbors." The town is where both Jessica and Joey grow up and the location of the conflict between Patty and Connie's family. The townsfolk comment that no one in the town expected Walter to do what he reveals during his televised speech.

Hibbing, MN

Hibbing is Walter's hometown. Here, Walter's personality is molded thanks to his drunken and belligerent father, his hostile brother, and its proximity to the lake house near Nameless Lake.

Chicago

Chicago is the location where Patty first attempts to have sex with Richard. She attempts to seduce him while they slept in Richard's friend's home. Patty often looks back to her time in Chicago.

Jersey City, NJ

Jersey City is where Richard retreats after having sex with Patty. It is also the location where he begins to make it big as a celebrity musician.



Themes and Motifs

Politics

Politics play a central role in the novel, and the author uses it to demonstrate that politics is a prime motivator in American culture. Judging by the way the author portrays this, it does seem that he finds this to be a negative thing.

The first instance where we see this is after Patty is raped by Ethan Post. Together, Patty's parents decide that they should not contact the police. This is due to the fact that the Posts are political friends of Joyce. Essentially, Joyce decides not to go to the police because it may hurt her political career. This is quite different than the normal family dynamic; in most other situations, a mother would usually believe that her daughter's well being is much more important than her political career.

Another instance where a character's clear motivations are political is the actions of Walter's boss, Vin Haven. This character considers himself quite the environmentalist but is friends with people like Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld. When Dick Cheney tells Vin Haven that mineral regulations were about to change, Vin Haven becomes much more friendly with the coal companies. With this in mind, it is very clear that the profit motive and his political situation guides his actions.

Fidelity and Infidelity

The author attempts to show the reader that fidelity and infidelity are not absolutes and do not apply in the same way in all situations.

The most obvious usage of this theme is in the relationship between Patty and Richard. While they are having an affair, Patty very well knows that what she is doing is considered wrong. Richard acknowledges this as well, as he mentions that sleeping with Patty is a betrayal to Walter. When Walter learns of this relationship he reacts incredibly negatively. In this situation, the conflict is one of infidelity. In short, all of the characters acknowledge the immorality of the situation.

However, it is dealt with differently in Joey and Connie's relationship. While Joey is at school, he sleeps with several women and does not truly feel sorry about it. It seems that he does not see his infidelity as an issue. He eventually learns that Connie was unfaithful as well. Interestingly, neither of them see this as a major issue.

In short, the author uses the different character's experiences with fidelity and infidelity to show that they are not seen in the same way by everyone. It is also possible that the author is using the difference between these two situations in order to show the difference in the generation's views on these concepts.



Love

In the novel, the author uses love to make the statement that contemporary love is quite muddled and not at all straightforward.

Often times, love is shown as very unrequited. Patty pursues Richard for a long time and constantly thinks about him while they are apart. Even Patty herself acknowledges that she loves Richard. But, in a way, she also argues that she loves Walter.

Unfortunately for Patty, Richard does not seem to love her in the way that she loves him, eventually dooming their relationship after ruining Patty's marriage. This deviates from the normal love story formula, as even after Patty gets together with Richard, they eventually separate and Patty returns to Walter.

This can be seen on Walter's side as well. It is very clear that Walter loves Patty, but as stated before, that love is not returned equally. He falls in love with Lalitha, but she dies and he eventually returns to being with Patty.

Connie and Joey's relationship is a similar situation. In 2001, it is not very clear if Joey truly loves Connie. It is possible, but Joey does not explicitly say it. Regardless, it is very clear that Connie loves Joey. Eventually, after being unfaithful, Joey truly loves her and they get married.

None of these love-infused situations are clear and straightforward, and the author is presenting this intentionally to reflect his view on what love is often like in the real world.

Mental Illness

The author presents mental illness in such a way as to highlight its possible consequences.

For example, it becomes very clear that Eliza suffers from some sort of mental illness. Unfortunately, her condition seems to go unchecked for an indeterminate amount of time (even though her parents are psychologists). Due to this, her condition gets worse and worse, and she becomes more self-destructive and obsessive. This eventually leads to her cocaine and heroin abuse, as well as threats to kill herself. Many of her most destructive demonstrations of her illness are primarily due to obsessing over something, and this obsession almost ruins her life.

The consequences of mental illness are also very clear in regards to Patty. It is implied that Patty's mental illness is catalyzed by her rape as a teenager. Her illness becomes the most apparent after she meets Richard and begins to obsess over him; prior to this, she only obsessed over winning basketball games. Eventually, this obsession spins out of control and, for a time, ruins her marriage, and puts her into a depression.

Finally, the destructive nature of mental illness is also explicit with Connie. Like the aforementioned characters, Connie is obsessive, and her object of obsession is Joey.



Due to her illness and Joey's neglect, her illness gets to the point where she self-harms. Luckily, she eventually beats her illness after marrying and living with Joey.

All in all, the author uses unchecked mental illness to inform the reader about the dangers of untreated mental illness.

Rape Culture

One of the first issues that the novel tackles is that of contemporary American rape culture. Franzen uses Patty's rape in order to comment on the unfair and sexist nature of the culture.

After Patty is raped, her parents tell her that due to the fact that she did not scream and there were no witnesses, no one would believe her claims of rape if she went to the police. Their reasoning for this is that if she accused him without the aforementioned details, it would be her word against Ethan's. Because Ethan is popular and comes from a connected and rich family, it is not likely that many people would side with Patty.

Regardless of the fact that Patty's rape took place in the 1970s, Franzen is using it to comment on contemporary rape culture as well. Even today, the sexist view of not believing the woman involved persists. There are countless cases of this happening, and the author would not be blind to this.

Styles

Point of View

The author uses two different points-of-view in this chapter. The first view is Patty, but as a third person narrator. The author presents this through a document that Patty writes entitled "Mistakes Were Made." Through this peculiar point-of-view, the reader is privy to Patty's recollections of past events. However, due to this, we only really see Patty's side of things for the vast majority of the past-based narrative.

The other point-of-view is an unnamed third person narrator. The author uses this narrator to give the reader insight to happenings and thoughts that Patty is not aware of. The vast majority of this third person narration is used in chapters centered around Walter and Joey. Regardless of the different narrators, both use the past tense in explaining the book's events.

Language and Meaning

While the language within the novel is relatively consistent in terms of mature language and white middle-upper class language, the differences in the character's language can be seen in the metaphors and references that they use. For example, characters like Joyce and Walter are very politically minded, so when thinking about things, they tend to use political references and metaphors, like when Walter constantly mentions George W. Bush.

However, we do not see these types of references when dealing with characters such as Richard and Patty. Neither of these characters have any real interest in the true mechanics of politics, so they tend to reference other mediums like music and literature. The author does this to make it clear that these two sets of characters have drastically different motivations and, therefore, focus on different things.

Structure

The novel is written in a non-chronological way and consists of three distinct sections. The first is the chapter "Good Neighbors." This chapter takes place after Walter and Patty move to Washington and Walter experiences his botched televised speech. After this, the narrative switches to a flashback telling the events that happened prior to "Good Neighbors," through "Mistakes Were Made." After multiple chapters of this section, the novel jumps forward in time in the section "2001." This section tells the happenings that directly led up to Walter's speech. Next, the narrative goes back to "Mistakes Were Made," which goes forward in time by six years. The final section, made up of one chapter, "Canterbridge Estates Lake" picks up directly where the final "Mistakes Were Made" section left off and concludes the novel.



Quotes

I wonder if she's actually in love with Walter, or not," Seth mused optimistically, uncorking a final bottle. 'Physically, I mean.

-- Seth ("Good Neighbors" paragraph 17)

Importance: Seth's words make it very clear that the state of Patty and Walter's marriage is no secret.

Oh Walter: did he know that the most intriguing thing about him, in the months when Patty was getting to know him, was that he was Richard Katz's friend? Did he notice how, every time Patty saw him, she contrived to find nonchalant ways to lead the conversation around the Richard? Did he have any suspicion, that first night, when she agreed to let him call her, that she was thinking of Richard?

-- Narrator (Patty) (Chapter 2: Best Friends paragraph 320)

Importance: This quote highlights Patty's sexual motivations even after getting to know Walter. Richard seems to have always been Patty's priority.

Time passed in a peculiar manner which the autobiographer, with her now rather abundant experience of murdered afternoons, is able to identify as depressive (at once interminable and sickeningly swift; chock-full second-to-second, devoid of content hour-by-hour), until finally, as the workday ended, groups of young laborers came in and began to pay too much attention to her muletas, and she had to leave.

-- Narrator (Patty) (Chapter 2: Best Friends paragraph 832)

Importance: This is one of the first times that the reader becomes privy to Patty's depressive personality. The depression that is explained here is just the tip of the iceberg for Patty.

One hesitates to ascribe too much explanatory significance to sex, and yet the autobiographer would be derelict in her duties if she didn't devote an uncomfortable paragraph to it. The regrettable truth is that Patty had soon come to find sex sort of boring and pointless – the same old sameness – and to do it mostly for Walter's sake. And, yes, undoubtedly, to not do it very well. There just usually seemed to be something else she'd rather have been doing.

-- Narrator (Patty) (Chapter 3: Free Markets Foster Competition paragraph 155)

Importance: This quote explains that Patty and Walter's sex life is rather dead. However, she later explains sex with Richard in a much different way.

For the defense: She loved her kids! For the prosecution: She loved Jessica an appropriate amount, but Joey she loved way too much. She knew what she was doing and she didn't stop, because she was mad at Walter for not being what she really wanted, and because she had bad character and felt she deserved compensation for being a star and a competitor who was trapped in a housewife's life. For the defense:



But love just happens. It wasn't her fault that every last thing about Joey gave her so much pleasure. For the prosecution: It was her fault. You can't love cookies and ice cream inordinately and then say it's not your fault you end up weighing three hundred pounds.

-- Narrator (Patty) (Chapter 3: Free Markets Foster Competition paragraph 184-187)

Importance: This quote explains Patty's logic regarding the treatment of her kids. Specifically, she primarily blames Walter and their failing marriage for the uneven amount of love that she gave her children.

Nice people don't necessarily fall in love with nice people."

-- Narrator (Patty) (Chapter 3: Free Markets Foster Competition paragraph 221)

Importance: This quote explains Patty's situation perfectly. It cannot really be argued that Patty is a good person, but Walter falls in love with her anyway.

When Patty considered this question, all she could see was the great emptiness of her life, the emptiness of her nest, the pointlessness of her existence now that the kids had flown.

-- Narrator (Patty) (Chapter 3: Free Markets Foster Competition paragraph 330)

Importance: This quote is Patty's reaction to a question from Richard. Richard's questioning elicits a very depressive response in Patty.

That she could say all this, and not only say it but remember it very clearly afterward, does admittedly cast doubt on the authenticity of her sleep state. But the autobiographer is adamant in her insistence that she was not awake at the moment of betraying Walter and feeling his friend split her open. Maybe it was the way she was emulating the fabled ostrich and keeping her eyes firmly shut.

-- Narrator (Patty) (Chapter 3: Free Markets Foster Competition paragraph 393)

Importance: This quote explains that Patty was fully aware that she was having sex with Richard (she was not actually sleep-walking). This quote also uses a metaphor regarding the myth that ostrich's keep their heads in the sand.

And that's what I find so refreshing about the Republican Party. They leave it up to the individual to decide what a better world might be. It's the party of liberty, right? That's why I can't understand why those intolerant Christian moralists have so much influence on the party. Those people are very antichoice. Some of them are even opposed to the worship of money and material goods

-- Richard (2004: Mountaintop Removal paragraph 84)

Importance: This quote demonstrates some of Richard's ideological growth. He originally seemed quite liberal, but here, he is sympathizing with the conservative Republican party. However, he could just be faking this in order to "squash" (Richard's word) Zachary.



In America alone,' he said, 'the population's going to rise by fifty percent in the next four decades. Think about how crowded the exurbs are already, think about the traffic and the sprawl and the environmental degradation and the dependence on foreign oil. And then add fifty percent.

-- Walter (2004: Mountaintop Removal paragraph 117)

Importance: These words from Walter encompass his view regarding overpopulation and what will happen if breeding goes unchecked.

I think for a young person today it ought to have a particular appeal, because it's all about personal choice. Nobody tells a Jew what he has to believe. You get to decide all of that for yourself. You can choose your view own apps and features, so to speak.

-- Jonathan's Father (2004: Womanland paragraph 401)

Importance: Here, Jonathan's father explains the benefits of being a contemporary Jew. This is important to Joey as he is considering learning more about his Jewish faith.

And now that you've got these jobs at this body-armor plant,' he continued, 'You're going to be able to participate in those economies. You, too, can help denude every last scrap of native habitat in Asia, Africa, and South America! You, too, can buy six-foot-wide plasma TV screens that consume unbelievable amounts of energy, even when they're not turned on! But that's OK, because that's why we threw you out of your homes in the first places, so we could strip-mine your ancestral hills and feed the coal-fired generators that are the number-one cause of global warming and other excellent things like acid rain. It's a perfect world, isn't it? It's a perfect system, because as long as you've got your six-foot-wide plasma TV, and the electricity to run it, you don't have to think about any of the ugly consequences. You can watch Survivor: Indonesia till there's no more Indonesia!

-- Walter (2004: The Fiend of Washington paragraph 272)

Importance: Here, we see Walter's true, unadulterated view about overpopulation. Walter is under the influence of drugs, but regardless, this encompasses his personal views which are not influenced by his benefactor's business practices.