

Grief Is the Thing With Feathers Study Guide

Grief Is the Thing With Feathers by Max Porter

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Plot Summary

This study guide was created using the following version of this book: Porter, Max. *Grief is the Thing with Feathers: A Novel*. Graywolf Press. 2015.

Grief is the Thing with Feathers is a novella in which a man with two young sons loses his wife unexpectedly. A crow simply referred to as "Crow" arrives to help the family grieve. The unnamed characters convey the story with the use of alternating narratives. Dad is concerned with the immediate aftermath of losing his wife and how he will help his sons cope. Crow offers insight in how to grieve, to heal, and to live. The boys give their perspective of watching their father grieve over the years and how they grow up without their mother.

Family and friends check in on the family after the death, but soon, the family is all alone to cope with their loss. Dad is working on a book about Ted Hughes and his seminal work called "Crow." He tries to focus on his book, but he is distracted by his loss. He is unable to concentrate and everything around him reminds him of his wife and how much he loves her.

Crow arrives one night after the wife dies. He works to keep Dad from dwelling too much in his grief. He fights off demons to protect the family. He also mocks Dad as a way to keep him from being too serious. He assists with the boys, helping them draw pictures and protecting them from the demons as well. In one of his fairy tales, he even taunts the boys with the possibility of bringing their mother back to them.

Crow knows that he must stay with the family until they no longer need him. As time passes, Crow encourages Dad to try and move on with his life. He suggests that Dad find a lover. When Dad does so, making love to a woman reminds him of making love to his wife, and he does not want it to be the same. The boys think it best that their father never remarries, but they are okay with the girlfriends he has over the years.

The loss of their mother causes the boys to lash out. They fight with each other and shoot crows with air rifles. Sometimes the boys view themselves as one unit, but they also realize that they do not tell the same stories about their father the same way.

Finally, Dad decides that it is time to spread his wife's ashes. He takes the boys out of school and to the beach. While Dad realizes that the grief will stay with him, he knows it is time to say goodbye. At the beach, the boys play in the sand and they all fall asleep. Once Dad wakes, he leaves the boys and goes to the shoreline to say goodbye to his wife. He tells her how much he loves her, recites one of his favorite poems, and begins to let her go. The boys wake up and run on the beach declaring their love for their mother as well.



Section 1, pages 1-26

Summary

The first section of the novella is titled "Part One: A Lick of Night." The narrative is told through alternating perspectives titled "The Boys," "Dad," and "Crow." The narrative begins with the boys detailing feathers in their bed. The narrative shifts to the Dad's perspective. He reveals that his wife has died days earlier and he is not sure of what to do. He drinks, smokes, and stays up late. People visit offering their condolences. At night he hears a noise outside and wonders if it is someone trying to break in. At the door he finds a crow, which lifts him into the air and the says that he will leave him only when he is no longer needed. Crow insists that Dad greet him. When Dad does, the bird departs The Dad is able to sleep for the first time in days.

The narrative shifts to Crow, describing his first meeting with the Dad as "very romantic" (9). He notes the boys and the sense of mourning in the house. Crow kisses Dad. When Dad awakes, he is unable to see that Crow is in the shadows. Dad returns to work and draws a picture of mourners with crow faces. Crow declares that he believes in "the therapeutic method" (12) instead of telling Dad about the way his wife died as other birds may have done.

The boys recall asking Dad about what happened to their mother and how they knew something was wrong because of the way in which Dad avoided their question. In learning about their mother's death, they understand themselves as different, perhaps even brave. They wonder why firemen and emergency crews did not arrive at the apartment. Instead of going to school, they stay home in their pajamas.

Crow reveals that in other myths he is represented as a doctor or ghost. He only finds humans interesting when they are grieving. He recalls that he has written memoirs and recounts the story of a crow that was angry with his mother for remarrying. He frames the story like a fairy tale. Dad feels like everything is missing.

In the next "Boys" section, the two children remember finding a guppy in a rock pool; they tried to kill it by throwing rocks. They continued to miss the fish until finding the right sized rock and killed it. One boy felt sick and they went to their father who told them he could tell they had done something wrong.

Dad thinks of all the things he and his wife will never do again, including arguing. He lists things she will not use or finish, such as a novel. He realizes he will never hear her breathe again. The boys remember drawing pictures of the fish and the pool. One of the boys intentionally draws poorly. Crow comments that he has arrived so that he can teach.

Dad thinks about the dichotomy between the civilized aspect of Crow and his wild side. He admits that Crow has much to teach him. The boys realize that their father is gone



and Crow is in the bathroom because he likes the acoustics. They listen outside the bathroom door and hear words like “trauma” (23). Their dad returns and Crow begins a different tune. Crow considers it a performance.

Analysis

The themes of masculinity and grief are introduced at the outset of the novel, functioning to help develop narrative arcs of Dad and his sons. Three distinct voices are introduced, and all are male. The shifting narratives give a sense of discombobulation. There is something unsettling about how the voices are presented. It begins with the boys and shifts immediately to Dad. It is clear the family is grieving, and that the father is struggling. The introduction of Crow then complicates this narrative of masculine grief by introducing a mode of magical realism. Crow is introduced in the Dad’s narrative by lifting him up. The act of Crow being able to lift a grown man introduces the reader to the theme of magical realism. It establishes a world in which a family has suffered a loss and is turning to the fantastical in an effort to heal.

Crow represents play and absurdity in the midst of mourning and becomes a means through which Dad can channel his grief. He likens his meeting with Dad as romantic and that they share a kiss. It is absurd, but it could also be viewed like a first date. Here Crow and Dad meet and begin their relationship. Dad keeps Crow in mind, as though it can replace the thoughts he would likely be struggling with of his wife. When he draws pictures of the mourners, he gives them Crow’s face because that is how he can compartmentalize his grief. Were he to draw pictures of the actual mourners’ faces, he would be reminded of the reality of what he is going through. This gives him a playful escape. Crow is amenable to the way Dad treats his arrival because he understands that Dad’s behavior, including his drawing, is therapeutic. It is also clear from Crow’s dialogue that he is keeping the details of Dad’s wife’s death to himself because the reality is too much for Dad to bear.

The theme of memory is explored in this section through Dad’s uneasy relationship with the facts of his wife’s death. At present the boys are left with their memories of their mother, but their father’s reluctance to answer the question of how she died addresses how he is suppressing his memory. Because the boys are left to their imaginations, they begin to think in terms of rescue. They wonder about police and firemen being called to the scene as a way for them to express how they might have handled it. This helps to illustrate the ways in which the boys seek to take control of a situation they have no control over.

Further developing the theme of frustrated masculinity is the episode involving the boys and a guppy they find in a pond. Out of frustration for their circumstances, they strike the fish with a rock. In doing so, they are able to express the anger and frustration of their grief, but it also allows them to show dominance over something. Their recollection also indicates that they are remembering how the act of killing the guppy made them feel. The boys differ in the way they process what they have done. They are tasked with finding control in the wake of a situation they have no control over. They cannot change



their mother's fate, but they can control the guppy's. Further, one of the boys takes control in the way he chooses to deliberately draw poorly.

Much as the boys demonstrate their duality, Dad sees a duality in Crow as well. It is possible that he recognizes this in the boys and through transference assigns the attributes to Crow. He sees that Crow is both civilized and wild. This very much mirrors the way the boys are behaving. One is able to regret killing the guppy, while the other does not.

Discussion Question 1

Why would Crow consider his first meeting with Dad "very romantic" (9)?

Discussion Question 2

Why would the boys consider themselves brave following their mother's death?

Discussion Question 3

What does the incident with the guppy reveal about the boys mental state?

Vocabulary

clichés, abstract, epicenter, anthropological, lackadaisical, cynical, post mortem, hypocrites, clarity, duvet, epidermis, mausoleum, remnant, tarmac, macadam, therapeutic, deus ex machina, spectre, atrocity, imperative, detritus, indignant, acoustics, enunciate, shamanic



Section 2, pages 27-53

Summary

The second section is entitled “Part Two: Defence of the Nest.” Dad recounts the time he had to write his book on Ted Hughes and his poetry collection *Crow: from the Life and Songs of the Crow*. His publisher encourages him and is sympathetic to the death of Dad’s wife. When Dad tries to focus on his work, Crow interrupts him and pecks at his notes.

Crow tells another story in the style of a fairy tale. It is about a bird who instructs two boys to build a model of the mother. Crow tells the boys that he will bring to life whichever model is the best likeness to their mother. One boy draws and the other builds a model of things about the house, like toys and books and ribbons. Crow likes both and the boys are anxious for him to choose. Crow reveals the story to have been false.

One of the boys remembers their mother always letting them skip their baths to get in bed for stories. The other boy remembers they could not have stories until they took baths. The section concludes “You decide” (31).

Dad does not want to deal with household chores, so his family helps him. His brother brings food, listens, and helps with the boys. The boys remember when their Gran was dying and how they went to visit her. Gran explained to them about how “men were rarely truly kind, but they were often funny, which is better” (33). They remember their Gran being fond of them and taking an interest in them. She asks them if it bothers them to hear her wheeze, and she tells them to take her cigarettes because they may need them one day.

Dad remembers telling his wife about finishing his book proposal and how they celebrated and made love. He misses her and wants to go back. The boys recall playing a game called Sonic Boom, in which they ran through the forest until they flew. One of the brothers pierced his neck on a tree branch. They admit that their story is “partially true” (37).

Dad thinks about people telling him that he needs time to grieve. He ponders the difference between real and imaginary worlds. Instead of time, he believes that he needs Shakespeare. When he threatens to throw the boys’ toys out, they laugh at him. Dad remembers going on his first date when he was fifteen with Hilary Gidding. He thinks about their hands touching as they both reached into the cushion of a movie theater seat.

The boys hear Dad and Crow fighting. After the fight, Crow joins the boys at the kitchen table to draw with them.



Dad remembers his wife in labor and how she screamed obscenities about the pain. The boys admit that they occasionally tell their dad the truth as a way of being nice. Dad attempts to title the chapters of his book, but he crosses out the titles and replaces them with "I miss my wife" (42).

Crow again tells a fairy tale. This one is about two grown brothers. One has one pair of old boots and the other brags about his spare boots being better. They make their way down the hill and one of them makes a gun with his hand to shoot a pheasant. Crow ends his story with a list of comprehension questions.

In the next "Boys" section, it appears the boys have conversations with their dead mother. One of the boys tells Mom that he lied to others, saying that Mom had been beaten to death. She whispers that she would have told the same lie. Dad remembers his wife watching awards ceremonies. They would watch only a little before going to bed because they did not know any of the people. Dad mocked the winners before going to bed. He realizes that he is forgetting things, and the boys invite him to sit with them on the sofa. They accuse him of being sentimental.

Crow thinks about the family as a triptych: the boys on one side, Dad on the other, with Crow in the middle, smelling of death. The boys remember their mother being angry with them for getting toothpaste on the bathroom mirror. They start leaving drawers open and splattering urine on the seat in an effort to miss their mother. Dad and the boys continue to miss her in their ways. Crow mocks Dad for being sentimental. When Dad talks to his friends about his wife, they suggest that he is becoming obsessed with her memory. They suggest that he see a therapist. He imagines Crow creating a bill for therapy and tells his friends not to worry.

The boys remember a hurricane that occurred at about the same time that their mother died. They play on a fallen tree, and when one falls, the other yells "DEAD MEAT" (53). The boys do not know if they invented the game or if Crow did. Dad finds the boys and one is bleeding; he tells the other boy to think about what he had done.

Analysis

Section two is entitled "Defence of the Nest." This indicates to the reader that Crow will dominate this section of the novella. While Dad and the boys adapt to their new lives, they are protected by Crow.

In the novella, recurring references to the poet Ted Hughes help to add complexity to ideas of grief, as Ted Hughes used poetry to grieve for the death of his wife, poet Sylvia Plath. It is revealed that Dad is working on a book about Ted Hughes. This makes a literary allusion to Ted Hughes' work entitled "Crow," which was written after Sylvia Plath's death. Parallels can be drawn between Dad and Ted Hughes and the reader can infer that Dad is likely looking for strength to cope with the loss of his wife through work and poetry. It is also natural to assume that Crow is an extension of Hughes' work and



symbolic of the intimate relationship Dad has with the Hughes' work, especially the collection entitled "Crow."

The theme of memory is further developed by the boys' story about their mother and bath time. Each tells the differently and allows for the reader to determine which scenario is more likely. Both situations could be argued, but ultimately, allowing the reader to determine indicates that memory is unreliable. This is significant in that it adds another dimension to the nature of loss. Dad and the boys attempt to hold on to Mom by retaining memories of hers, but it appears that memory is amorphous and hard to hold on to. Thus, the boys seem to associate loss of memory with life after death. They reveal that they spent time with their Gran before she died. Part of their memory is the way in which they felt she cared for them and took an interest in them. It is as if Gran represents an ambassador of the afterlife, conveying the secrets of memory to the boys.

Dad experiences memories of other women in this section, signifying a process of grief in which he attempts to consider other romantic options and move on with the romantic part of his life. He recalls going on his first date. He identifies the girl as Hilary Gidding. Note that this is the only character in the novella referred to by an actual name, giving her a sense of clarity and her own distinct identity. What makes the memory of Hilary Gidding notable is the way in which Dad thinks about the strong connection he felt with her. Their hands touching is innocent enough, but he is able to connect to the girl and to her name. It shows how his memories are intact, but he is working through understanding the memories he has suppressed. Moreover, he is coming to terms with the fact that he may eventually be able to move on with his life.

On the other hand, Dad still must deal with a great amount of pain related to the death of his wife, and this pain is explored by the narrative in both literal and symbolic modes. For example, he recalls Mom giving birth, and his memory finds her in tremendous pain during childbirth. By remembering her in childbirth, he is able to have her pain match his own pain from losing her. He is able to admit how much he misses her as well.

The mode of magical realism continues to develop as a means of escape by way of the fairy tales that the boys begin to tell. Like Crow, the boys get in the habit of opening their stories with "Once upon a time..." as a way to distance themselves from the harshness of the narrative and offer insight into the imaginary worlds in which they escape. When they run through the forest, one of the boys pierces his neck. When the boys play, they are rough games in which death looms. Certainly piercing one's neck could result in a fatal injury, but the boys deflect by stating that their story is only "partially true" (37). Again, their memories prove to be unreliable and leave room for the reader to interpret. This is seen again when the boys are unable to remember if they came up with the game of "DEAD MEAT" (53) or if Crow did. Thus, the malleability of memory and the escape of imagination become coping mechanisms in the mode of magical realism.

By telling them that he will bring the best likeness to life, Crow tests the boys' own level of acceptance. They are willing to believe that Crow would be able to do such a thing because under Crow's care, they understand the possibility of some kind of magic or alternate reality. Because Crow must prepare them to accept that their mother is gone,



he cruelly challenges them to do something to bring her back and then deny them his promise. The boys do not react well. They channel their aggression toward Crow and ultimately cook Crow as revenge. Crow declares that this scenario was a bad dream, but it also demonstrates the challenges he faces in dealing with the boys.

Masculinity is further explored in the ways that the boys, Dad, and Crow all interact. When the boys detail their memories and so demonstrate the differences, the narrative shows how they are in competition with each other and one attempts to dominate the other. Similarly, the boys begin to exhibit a level of dominance over their father. When the boys misbehave, Dad threatens to take their toys away. The boys view this as a false threat and laugh at him. In this moment, they exhibit power. Later, Dad and Crow have a fight. The boys are able to hear them and when the fight is over, it is Crow that joins the boys. Crow knows he must care for the boys, and in this way could be seen in a somewhat maternal role, but his exit out of the room also demonstrates his dominance over Dad as well. This leaves the three of them to unite separate from Dad.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Crow tell the boys he will bring to life the model that best represents their mother?

Discussion Question 2

What are the implications of the boys claiming their story is only partially true?

Discussion Question 3

What does the story about the boys' game of "DEAD MEAT" (53) reveal about their relationship with their father?

Vocabulary

accredited, fresco, scaffold, assemblage, mosaic, ricochet, ochre, pollard, vacuous, regenerating, triptych, decipher



Section 2, pages 54-65

Summary

Crow begins another fairy tale and states that it is true. He explains about a demon who feeds on grief. The demon can smell grief coming from a widower's house, so he knocks on the door, identifying himself as a neighbor needing to borrow milk. The father in the tale recognizes that the house number the demon gave is not real, so the father does not open the door. The next night, the demon makes another attempt. He identifies himself as a man from Parenthesis Press who heard about the man's wife and brought a pizza. The father does not open the door because he does not recognize the name of the man. The demon returns the next night pretending to be police. Finally, the demon returns the next night pretending to be the father's wife asking for the boys to let her in. The boys try to let her in, but the crow stops them and explains she is not real. Then the crow goes out to confront and defeat the demon. He warns all others to stay away.

The boys remember Crow taking them in to see their father passed out on his bed. One of the boys tries to wake him, asking if he is dead. Dad farts, and the other boy mocks his brother for thinking their father was dead.

Dad writes a letter to Crow. He explains a picture he drew of Crow and Ted, with Crow mocking the way Ted smells. The boys remember Dad telling them stories that changed based on his mood, such as a Japanese writer falling on a sword and an Irish warrior who accidentally kills his son but who doesn't mind in the end.

Dad watches the boys while they eat breakfast. Dad contemplates how much of the evil in the world he should tell them about. Crow provides notes on his "literary memoir" (64). He details hearing the boys and making messes in parts of the apartment where he knows Dad does not clean. He considers himself optimistic and thinks about Dad giving the boys sugary treats.

Analysis

Instead of stating that the fairy tale is a bad dream, Crow explains that the story of the demon is true, thus reinforcing the immediacy of magical realism as a grieving mechanism. Crow, a supernatural character, states through the use of this narrative that he is able to protect the family from the unproductive forms of grief, embodied by the demon. Crow's protective role harkens back to the section title about defending the nest. From Crow's perspective, Dad is able to fend for himself against the demon. The demon tries to outsmart Dad, but Dad is able to see through the demon's guise. Crow must intervene when the demon tries to get into the house by going after the children.

By using their mother to lure the boys into opening the door, Crow jumps to action in a way that Dad may not be able to. Crow is not going to chance it. Yes, Dad was able to recognize the inconsistencies in the demon's attempt, but Crow is not completely sure



that Dad will be able to resist hearing his wife's voice again. If Dad continues to struggle with accepting his wife's death, the demon opens the possibility of Dad regressing further into denial about his loss.

Crow presents himself as a hero. Not only is he able to defeat the demon, but announces to the neighborhood that all demons should stay away. In this manner, Crow is seen in a hyper-masculine light.

Dad makes progress in his grieving process through the alternating use of humor and a grim outlook. He draws a picture of Ted with Crow playfully mocking him for his overly dour outlook. In this context, Dad continues to see himself through the lens of Ted, in part because he likely views Ted as still working through the worst of his grief. But darkness still plagues Dad. He tells them stories about a dark yet comical story about a warrior who accidentally kills his son. This is potentially a way for him to sort out how to make sense of the world for his sons. If the their mother died in a freak accident, perhaps one of his sons could too. It is not to suggest that he is okay with one of his sons dying, but rather he is coming to terms with being okay that sometimes accidents happen.

Dad ultimately decides to prepare his sons for the worst in life, believing they have a right to know about how much darkness there is in the world. He remains undecided about how much he should tell them, but the boys indicate that the way in which their father communicates with them varies based on his mood. If Dad is having mood swings, it is likely that he is trying to fight through his grief, but is not always successful. It may seem oversimplified to suggest that his ability to adjust to his grief depends on his moods, but there appears to be some lightness trying to break through his character.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Crow insist his fairy tale about the demon is true?

Discussion Question 2

Why is the demon able to outsmart the boys, but not Dad?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Crow consider himself worth of a literary memoir?

Vocabulary

ligaments, livid, descants, interlude, plundered, deranges



Section 2, pages 66-86

Summary

The boys detail the ways they pass the time, such as making a ball with the rubber bands around the post and jumping off the back of the sofa. They laugh about possible new mothers from television shows, shocking their babysitter. Dad warns them not to jump off the sofa, but they continue to do so.

Dad has a conversation with Crow. Crow explains about how his wife would appear if she were a ghost. Crow explains that she would return as a child because ghosts “regress” (68). Crow performs words that seem like nonsense until Dad grins because he recognizes some of it from Ted Hughes' poetry. He thanks Crow and Crow reminds him that he is his “Ted's song-legend, Crow of the death-chill” (70).

The boys tell a fairy tale about two boys with faulty memories. They think about the things they lost, such as a note from their mother that said “Good luck” (72). Dad admits that the boys fight.

The boys wake up one morning and believe that their father is gone. They wonder if he will come back. One of the boys insists that he will not. They sing and clean up and walk for three days, losing “their childish bodies” (74) and grow beards. When they reach a cottage, they cannot bring themselves to knock on the door. They run home and find their father making breakfast.

Dad takes the boys to a “Birds of Prey Flying Display” (75). They see a bald eagle and the boys are excited to see it fly. They notice Crow flying just above the eagle and they cheer him on. Dad thinks this is the best day he has had since the death of his wife.

The boys tell another fairy tale. It is about a queen who falls and cracks her skull while the king is distracted. The queen dies. The princes fight with each other, and they miss their mother. They bite each other and alternate giving each other poison to make them sick. They take turns crucifying each other and put nails into their skulls. The king catches them and asks why they are playing in such a fashion. The princes explain that they miss their mother and the king laughs. He tells them the queen was not their mother and that he does not know which of the “corridor wenches” (79) gave birth to them. The princes are relieved to hear this.

Crow explains that he lost a wife. He looks at his oily reflection in a puddle. He reveals that it is another of his bad dreams. The boys reveal that their father went to see Ted Hughes speak at Oxford when he (Dad) was eighteen. Dad arrived three hours early and was nervous, wondering if he would run into Hughes before the reading. He thought about how he would debate with Plath scholars. At the reading, he noted that Hughes looked sick. Afterwards, he asked a long, complicated question that did not quite make sense. Hughes then apologized that he was out of time. The boys were told that their



mother once cried when she was told the story, but before he left the reading, he ran into Ted, who answered his question. The boy telling the story admits that his brother tells the same story about their father differently.

Analysis

The boys use dark humor as a coping mechanism in their fairy tale about the princes. This further develops the theme of humor as a coping mechanism. This humor helps them process their grief and gives them some sense of control over their lives. They also exercise this humor by attempting to shock their babysitter, feeling that if they can shock the babysitter, then they are able to exert control. Similarly, they do this when Dad asks them to stop jumping on the sofa. They enjoy the freedom, and they play in a way that seems common to happy children. Dad may tell them to stop because it is something that their Mum would have done and doing so reminds him of her. Or he may be thinking of how she died and projecting that on the boys.

The reader does not gain insight into Dad's motivation at this moment because the memory is retold by the boys. This develops the theme of memory is the way in which the boys acknowledge that their memories are unreliable. They may think about things they have lost, but part of that is the loss not only of their mother, but the loss of the memory of her. They may create memories or fill in gaps, but they understand that all is not what it seems.

Just as Dad fears that the boys will hurt themselves, the boys worry about their father. It is interesting to note that the boys perceived their father as being protective of them, and they fear losing their father. It is not just loss that they are coping with, but also the possibility of loss. They dream about living life without their father.

Another of the boys' fairy tales portrays them as princes who have lost their queen to a head injury. This is the first true indication of what actually happened to their mother and foreshadows a later reveal. Their memory is shaped by the narrative of the fairy tale and it results in them learning that the queen was not their mother. In doing so, the princes are relieved from having to mourn their mother. In this episode, it is preferable to learn that the queen was not their mother and not know who their mother is at all.

The tale about the princes also addresses the theme of masculinity. The king is a powerful and virile man. He does not suggest that there is one other woman who could be the princes' mother, but rather it could be one of any number of "corridor wenches" (79). The possibility of a different mother is presented in the context of being less than a queen. The princes remain royal because their father is the king, but the woman who might be suggested as their mother is defers power and respect to their actual mother.

The boys also tell the story about their father encountering Ted Hughes. The reliability of their memory is called into question by their own admission. The boys tell the story differently. While the reader is not privy to the second story, there is something idealized, yet vulnerable, about the way in which the story is told. Dad is nervous to



meet his literary idol, but the boys may be able to see that his idol is somehow a symbol of what will happen to their father, given that both men lose their wives. When Dad is given the opportunity to ask a question, he bungles it up and it remains left unanswered. In all likelihood, this is where the accuracy of the story stops. The coda that Dad encounters Ted Hughes and Hughes gives him the answer of yes, suggests that one of the boys may be giving their father closure to his meeting with Hughes.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Crow tell Dad that ghosts regress in age?

Discussion Question 2

How do the boys' fairy tales differ from Crow's?

Discussion Question 3

How reliable is the boys' story about their father seeing Ted Hughes?

Vocabulary

blasé, advent, delusions, bemoaning, regress, iconography, patent, synesthetic, paradiddle, parasaurolophus, parquet, plimsolls, abacus, desecrating, equations, transfixed, artifice, carrion, ovation, futile, flayed, genuflection, disillusioned, modernity, naïveté, partisan, vigorous, gaggle, bickering, authentic, shifty, cowslip, reverential, relevant, coda



Section 3, pages 87-114

Summary

This section covers “Part three: Permission to Leave.” It begins with an exchange between the Dad and Crow as narrators in which Crow wants to tell Dad how his wife died, but Dad does not want to know. Dad then writes another letter to Crow reminding him that Crow once told him never to remarry, but then later told him to take a lover. The boys remember drawing pictures with their father watching. They also remember going with their Gran somewhere secret without their father.

Dad remembers when his wife had the flu and he and the boys were unable to help. He wishes he had known it was a preview of what their lives would be like so that he would have been more motivated to help. Dad goes on to list things Crow is and is not afraid of. Two years after his wife’s death, Dad brings a woman home who is a Plath scholar. He thinks about the ways he pleased his wife sexually and how he does not want to do the same things to a different woman. They have awkward sex and the woman leaves. Crow mocks him by imitating the way Dad had sex.

The boys reflect on their thoughts after their mother’s death. They wondered if they would die at the same age she did. They wonder if she had not actually died and had instead run off to be a spy. As the boys age, their mother ages in their imaginations. They hear “Granny” (96) when they have children of their own.

Dad writes a letter that is addressed to a single boy, but it references the hypothetical boy’s brother as well. He tells of a Christmas memory when he put the boys to bed and his wife found him on the sofa. She walked in naked, wearing only socks. She banged her knee and they argued at the medicine cabinet. Then they filled the boys’ stockings and went to bed.

One of the boys explains that he does not like poetry and is unsentimental. He tells about going with an air rifle to shoot crows in a field. They reveal that their father had girlfriends, but never remarried.

Dad thinks about how it would be ridiculous to stop grieving for his wife, because he believes that grief lasts for one’s entire life. He remembers going into the boys’ room and listening to them sleep the way their mother did. He asks them while they sleep if they want to move on from their grief, but he gets no reply. He concludes that they are all doing fine, and Crow finds Dad as Dad leaves the boys’ room.

One of them states that he eventually becomes married and has a child. He imitates the sound his son makes when he sees a crow. His wife thinks it is strange that he recalls family holidays with Crow. He does not think it is strange.

Dad tells Crow to go away, and “MAN” (103) and “BIRD” (103) have a debate about whether or not the man is ready to move on. The bird explains to the man that he is not



helpless and that he should be done grieving. The man explains that grief changes. Dad wonders if his wife would tell him to “ask Crow to leave” (104).

The boys reveal what they know of their father: how he was as a boy and how he behaved on family walks. They know their parents were in love and that their father behaved strangely for years following their mother’s death.

Dad publishes his book on Ted Hughes and considers it successful. He tells his publisher that he has another idea for a book about Hughes in which Crow annotates it. His publisher proffers that he should take on a different subject. He decides that he needs to tell Crow to leave, but cannot find him when he returns home.

Crow explains that once permission is given, he must leave. He dreams of the wife’s accident, revealing that she tripped and fell and hit her head. The boys and Dad go to spread her ashes. Dad called the school to tell them they were sick. They go to a place she loved and he tries to explain his behavior since her death. The boys tell him not to worry. At the beach, the boys play in the sand and they all fall asleep. Dad wakes up and goes to the shoreline without waking the boys. He recites the poem “Lovesong” (114) and tells her that he loves her and lets the ashes go. The boys wake and run around the beach shouting that they love her.

Analysis

The final section of the book resolves Dad and Crow’s relationship as one of great benefit for Dad. The final section of the book opens with Crow attempting to tell Dad about how his wife died. Because Crow earlier established his outlook on helping Dad as being focused on being therapeutic and not just blurting out what happened, it demonstrates how Crow has come to view Dad. He knows that Dad is ready, even if Dad does not want to admit it. Dad is comfortable in his state of mourning; it is his new normal.

The themes of memory and humor are further explored in this section as well. Dad reacts to Crow’s actions by challenging what Crow has previously said to him. He is able to confront Crow through a letter, when he is unable to challenge Crow face-to-face. In the letter, Dad is able to make peace with his decision to not remarry, but he knows that he needs some kind of companionship. He waits two years before engaging in a sexual relationship with another woman. In doing so, the memory of his wife is present. He admits his lack of sexual experience and understands that the aspects of his sexual prowess were reserved for what his wife liked. He does not want to do the same things to a new woman. This results in an awkward experience, but it also marks a milestone in his healing. When Crow mocks Dad, it helps to alleviate the awkwardness and encourage Dad to keep moving forward.

Dad’s first sexual encounter after his wife’s death is awkward slightly comical yet ultimately hopeful. When Dad does finally take a lover, he brings home a Sylvia Plath scholar. Perhaps this contributed to how his memories of his wife influenced their sexual



encounter. If Dad is an extension of Ted Hughes, then he may view his wife as an extension of Sylvia Plath in this context. In doing so, too much of his wife's memory shadowed the experience and contributed to the awkwardness.

The boys reveal that Dad never remarries, and this appears to reflect an unexpected lack of resolution in Dad's grieving process. However, it may also be interpreted as a strength in Dad and a commitment to honoring his wife's memory. The fact that Dad remains unmarried is revealed in the context of one of the boys declaring that he does not like poetry and sentimentality. It is possible that he views these elements as weaknesses in his father. It may also be a way for him to emotionally protect himself from the possibility of being hurt in the same way.

However, despite the fact that Dad remains unmarried, the narrative portrays hope in the fact that one of the boys does marry and even has a child. The boys also begin to create memories. They make a point to age their mother and refer to her as Granny as a way to keep their mother's memory alive. It also helps to keep her connected to their father. They are forever connected and this helps with the boys and Dad.

When Dad and Crow finally have their discussion about the next step in Dad's mourning, Dad detaches from the experience. For one conversation, the author frames the conversation as dialogue in a play. The characters are called "Man" and "Bird" (103), which barely disguise the characters at hand. In this brief exchange, Bird tells Man about what happened to his wife. Dad is able to accept knowing, but only if it is happening at a distance.

Crow insists that Dad no longer needs him, although the truth of this is left ambiguous in the narrative. While Dad may be reluctant to accept this, his memory allows him to project the situation on his wife. He has come far enough in his grief to acknowledge that even his wife would encourage him to move on. He is not betraying her by letting her go. Instead he is betraying himself for refusing to let her go, effectively sacrificing his life because he lost her. The boys' memories of their father include an understanding of how much their father was in love with their mother. They accept the oddness of his behavior in the same way that they accept that their mother died. It is simply a part of who they are.

Dad does not give Crow direct permission to leave, and this further signifies a potential lack of resolution in the grieving process. With Crow gone, Dad knows that he must contend with spreading his wife's ashes, symbolizing Dad's attempt to conclude his grieving process on his own. Having the ritual take place along the shore gives the reader a sense of transition. Yes, they are letting go, but they are spreading the ashes out into water that moves back toward them. They will forever mourn her loss, but the intensity and frequency may diminish. Dad also spreads the ashes with the boys asleep on the beach behind him. This gives him an opportunity to say goodbye to her by mimicking the time they spent together. Those moments before the boys wake and join him are indicative of the time they spent together before their children were born.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Dad not want Crow to tell him how his wife died?

Discussion Question 2

What do Dad's views on grief reveal about his character?

Discussion Question 3

Why would Crow have dream about the wife's accident?

Vocabulary

monogamous, repressed, whinged, rampaging, acutely, taxidermy, symposium, dissimilar, impersonating, melancholy, pretentiousness, denial, indulgence, mooted, fragility, hectic, rejuvenating, instinctual, vices, pragmatic, primal, vulgarity, nuances, chaotic, durable, spontaneity, perpetual, demeanor, violate, vengeance, collage, post modern, matte, podginess, foliate, ecstatic, coppiced



Characters

Dad

Dad is the father of two sons. He is a recent widower and is trying to figure out how to grieve for his wife. He is a writer who is working on a book about Ted Hughes. He looks to Crow to give him guidance on how to properly grieve his wife and figure out how to move forward. He knows that his behavior is jarring to his sons and that it is peculiar to have a crow helping him with grief and the responsibilities of fatherhood. He relies on humor to help him cope. He remembers his wife fondly, but he does not want to accept that she is gone. When Crow suggests he move on, he is reluctant. He eventually has girlfriends, but he never remarries. He apologizes to his sons for the way he acted following their mother's death.

Crow

Crow is the crow who comes to stay with Dad and the Boys. He interacts with all of them, but his conversations are with Dad. He sees himself as a positive influence on their lives and wants to protect them. He colors and plays games with the boys. He teases Dad and encourages him to move on. He has an optimistic view, but he sometimes has bad dreams. He uses fairy tales to try and explain situations, and he sometimes speaks directly to the reader. He wants the family to heal. He accepts that once they no longer need him, he will have to go.

Boys

The Boys are the twin sons of Dad and Mum. They are young when their mother dies, but their exact age is not given. Throughout the course of the novella, they age and reflect back on their life with their dad and how he responded to losing their mother. The Boys narrate as one unit, but do I've perspective from one or the other. However, they are never individually identified. Originally they want their mother back, but as they age, they understand and grapple with their grief and how to cope with their father's grief as well.

Mum

Mum is Dad's wife who fell and hit her head in an accident at home and unexpectedly died.

Unnamed Woman Who is a Sylvia Plath Scholar

Unnamed Woman who is a Sylvia Plath Scholar is the woman that Dad has sex with for the first time following his wife's death. Dad's date and sexual encounter with the woman are quite awkward, but they represent his first steps towards moving on from his wife.

Gran

Gran is the Boys' grandmother who dies of cancer. She emphasizes the importance of humor and tries to prepare the boys for the unkindness of the world.

Ted Hughes

Ted Hughes is the poet that Dad goes to see at Oxford. Hughes was married to Sylvia Plath and wrote a collection of poetry called Crow.



Symbols and Symbolism

Feathers

Feathers symbolize the transience of grief. The black feathers appear on the Boys' bed. It is as if they have come in with the wind and signal the arrival of something ominous, in this case grief. It demonstrates that Crow will also be there for the boys to help them through their grief, just as he helps Dad. When Crow leaves, their worst part of their mourning will be over.

Crow

Crow is a symbol of flight, or escape from reality. Dad and the boys are traumatized by their loss. Crow's arrival makes a time for them to try and manage their grief through escape. While the boys may have stories and play to escape to, Dad uses his interaction with Crow to escape into an imaginary world where he can process his wife's death.

Birth

Birth is symbolic of starting over. Dad remembers his wife giving birth to their twins and the pain that it caused her. In doing so, he can relate to having to start over with his sons after her death through the pain of losing her.

Dreams

Dreams are symbolic of an imaginary world. Dad, Crow, and the boys all experience dreams throughout the novella. The boys find themselves older and wake up to get their dad, Crow has bad dreams about the loss of his wife, and Dad thinks of losing his wife as a bad dream. The dreams help the characters to find their place and process emotions. Dad insists it must be a bad dream while the boys are able to wake up from a bad dream to seek comfort in their father. Crow exists in between in that he is able to understand a bad dream as a way to remain empathetic.

Ted Hughes

Ted Hughes is symbolic of Dad and his grief. Both Dad and Ted Hughes lost their wives: Dad to an accident in the home and Ted Hughes to suicide. Dad is able to take comfort in Crow, which reflects Ted Hughes' poetry collection entitled Crow. Both men use Crow as a method to cope with their grief.



Air Rifle

The air rifle is symbolic of anger. When the boys remember going out into the field and one of them likes to shoot crows with the air rifle, it is an extension of his grief. It is as if the twins represent both anger and acceptance. One is angry with the birds because they remind him of his grief, while the other accepts that Crow was part of how grief was managed.

Emily Dickinson Poem

The edited Emily Dickinson poem used as a prologue to the novella represents the presence of grief overpowering love. The poem is “That Love is all there is,” and the words “love”, “freight”, and “groove” are all crossed out and replaced with “crow.” It symbolizes how the weight of grief replaces love at the outset of the novella.

The Shoreline

The shoreline is symbolic of transition. When Dad takes the boys to the sea to spread their mother’s ashes, it demonstrates how they are making the next step in accepting their grief. Because the ashes are spread along the shoreline, it demonstrates how their grief may move away from them, but that it is possible that waves of grief will return in memory.

The Demon

The demon symbolizes death and darkness. The demon misrepresents itself each time it tries to get into the house. Dad is able to send it away because he is older and stronger, but when the demon pretends to be Mum, the boys become susceptible to the demon and his darkness. Crow fights him off to protect the boys because they are not able to protect themselves yet.

The Princes

The princes in one of the boy’s fairy tales symbolize the creation of the boys’ alternate identities as they cope with their grief. They need to learn how to live without their mother, so the natural thing for them to do is to attempt to be someone new.



Settings

The Flat

The Flat is where the majority of the novella takes place. It is where the Dad lives with his two sons. It is where his wife died after a fall in the home. Crow comes to stay and fights off a demon that keeps coming to the door. It is also where Dad brings home a woman to have sex for the first time after his wife died.

Oxford

Oxford is where Dad goes when he is eighteen to see Ted Hughes give a poetry reading. He asks Hughes a question during the question-and-answer session, but Hughes does not answer the question.

The Beach

The beach is where Dad takes the boys to scatter their mother's ashes at the close of the novel.

The Publisher's Office

The publisher's office is where Dad meets with his publisher about writing his book about Ted Hughes.

The Birds of Prey Flying Display

The "Birds of Prey Flying" display is where Dad takes the boys too see a bald eagle flying. Crow flies above the eagle, and the boys cheer.



Themes and Motifs

Grief

The author uses grief as the dominant theme in the novella as a way to inform how grief impacts the mental state of those in mourning.

The boys and Dad are all in a state of shock at the beginning of the novella. It is clear that they are coping with the sudden death in different ways but are connected through their interactions with Crow. Because the arrival of Crow is not likely a comforting image, it matches the unsettledness they all feel following the accident.

The way in which they cope with grief evolves throughout the story. It is clear that they are moving through the five stages of grief. Dad does not want to know how his wife died and avoids answering his sons when they ask, indicating denial. He yells obscenities as a way to express anger and is represented as a king lying to his sons about their mother to represent bargaining. He feels depression as he works on his book, and finally reaches acceptance when he and the boys spread her ashes.

As a symbol of grief, Crow symbolizes the slow and uncomfortable nature of the grieving process. While Dad seems to trust in Crow, he also seems aware that this is not normal behavior. Ultimately he does not want Crow to leave because Crow has been a comfort to him in some capacity. The boys understand that while Crow may have helped with their grief, it was not normal. The boys appear to have different opinions of Crow, with one shooting crows with an air rifle, to the other reassuring his wife that it was not weird for them to grow up with Crow. Because of the transient nature of birds, Crow becomes a symbol of how mourning will not last forever. While they all continue to grieve for the loss of Mum, they are able to move on with their lives and keep her memory as well.

Humor

Throughout the narrative, the family uses humor as a mechanism for coping and healing. For example Crow's introduction finds him viewing the meeting with Dad as romantic. Crow then proceeds to pick Dad up and pick things out of his teeth with his beak. The image of their interaction is both absurd and comical and allows the reader to understand that while there is tragedy, there is the opportunity to laugh. This continues with the way in which Dad swears and stumbles around. He thinks about wishing family was there to help. He does so not because he wants people around, but because he knows they will do the chores he does not want to do.

The fairy tales that Crow and boys tell are often dark, but there are elements of comedy, indicating the ever-available nature of humor as a grieving mechanism. This is present in other behaviors as well. For example, the boys watch themselves grow and are startled by their appearance and run away. They climb and fall from trees and sofas.



They beat each other up in acts of what can be considered slapstick comedy. When Crow defeats the demon, it is comical to think of bird attacking such a creature and yelling into the street for others to stay away.

Humor is also used to mark advances in Dad's grieving process. Crow is able to speak nonsense and make Dad grin. Both the boys and Crow mock Dad as a way to keep him from being too serious. And finally, humor is used as a way to mark Dad's return to the dating world with an awkward sexual encounter.

Magical Realism

While magical realism is not a narrative theme, it is an important literary mode utilized throughout the novella. Magical realism is a literary mode that employs a highly realistic narrative style while including at least one magical or fantastical element in the story. The novella thusly uses a very realistic narrative style and presents a fantastical element in the form of the character called Crow.

The use of magical realism represents both powerful hold of grief in everyday lives, as well as the ways in which people cope with grief through the use of imagination. With regards to the powerful hold of grief, Crow may be there to help Dad and the boys get through their grief, Crow must represent an alternate reality for them, as well as the reader. Crow's presence, though fantastical, is constant and unwavering until Dad and the boys finally come to terms with the death of the mother.

On the other hand, the use of impossible feats and events helps the narrative and the characters rise above the weight of their grief. Crow lifting a grown man and helping children color are outside of what is considered possible. Crow interacts with the boys, but there is no dialogue. How they relate to one another is through the creation of the narratives of both the boys and Crow. The stories are frames as fairy tales, reminding the reader that while the story may hold elements of truth, it is fiction.

Magical realism also represents the power of imagination as a grieving mechanism. When Crow defeats the demon, he explains that the fairy tale is true. While the demon is not a literal demon, the battle between the force of wanting to fight off grief and grief persisting is real. The demon approaches Dad multiple times. He asks for milk, he brings pizza, he creates an emergency. In looking for milk, demon is looking for something to sustain him. By offering the pizza, the demon presents Dad with something to sustain him. The emergency leads to the demon's attempt to lure the boys by impersonating their mother. Crow steps in so that the memory and the grief do not persist.

The boys' stories also reveal that they do not remember their experiences similarly. They may be able to fly while playing Sonic Boom or survive getting gouged in the neck by a branch, but they know that their stories are fantastical. Like their father, they use their imagination as a way to cope with their grief because their reality presents too much of a hardship for them.



Masculinity

The theme of masculinity is used in conjunction with grief as a way to demonstrate how men cope with their feelings and long for a sense of control.

The three narrators in the novella are male, and each represents a distinctly masculine viewpoint. It is the death of a woman that overshadows and shapes their experiences. They struggle to find their place in a world turned upside down. The boys are lost without their mother, as is their father. Even Crow appears to offer a male presence, contributing to the desire to struggle with grief and ultimately overcome it.

Masculine tendencies are further demonstrated and developed in the characters of the boys. The boys battle each other for dominance. They roughhouse and use violence in their narratives. As the boys' stories indicate that the other does not have the same experience, it shows one of the twins looking for autonomy, and perhaps dominance. One boy remains sentimental, while the other ends up rejecting it. It demonstrates both the masculine and feminine influence on the boys.

Crow exhibits his own masculine tendencies as well while interacting with Dad and the boys. Crow mocks Dad throughout the novella. This may be behavior that the boys have picked up from Crow or vice versa. Instead of an expression of sentiment, they mock and tease as a way to demonstrate their affection. Crow exhibits a hyper-masculine dominance when he defeats the demon. As the novella progresses, it appears that Dad is beginning to heal. If Crow is an extension of Dad, then Dad is able to conquer the grief that he has been struggling with.

Memory

The author uses the theme of memory to demonstrate its unreliability, particularly in context with a traumatic event.

For Dad and the boys, Mum's death is not only an inciting incident, but a hallmark of a distinct before and after that shapes their lives. All of them offer glimpses of life before Mum's death. The boys recall bath and story time. Dad remembers arguing with her and seeing her on Christmas nude and wearing only socks. He recalls them arguing that night before going and putting the boys' Christmas stockings in their rooms. However, throughout the memory, he never mentions that she got dressed.

The unreliability of memory is also a recurring subject of the narrative. Dad, for example, often conflates memories and forgets things altogether. For example, he remembers his wife when he spends the night with another woman for the first time. He remembers what she liked, so he chose not to do that with the new woman. This pattern helps to establish that the loss of memories is closely related with grief, as people fear that to forget things about a person is to suffer losing them a second time.



Crow often functions as an illustration of how memory functions. Crow's memories are images, like having a dead wife, remembering how Mum died, or seeing his reflection in an oily puddle. He tells his fairy tales or fables as a way to reflect the memories of those around him. Crow is an extension of Dad and the boys' memories. When Dad takes the boys to the bird show and they see the eagle, they see Crow above the eagle as a way to signal that they are sharing this experience. Crow then becomes the memory that connects it and Dad is able to feel happiness for the first time in a long while.



Styles

Point of View

There are three distinct points of view in the novella: Dad, Crow, and the boys.

Dad's point of view is shaped by his grief and how he recognizes his loss affecting his everyday life. As an author writing about Ted Hughes, his focus appears intermittently academic when focusing on things that are not as personal and private. Some of his passages are letters, and at one point, a table of contents. His tone can also be confessional, as when he brings a lover home for the first time after his wife's death.

Crow's point of view is the most irregular of the three. He alternates from fairy tale style to verse to more traditional narration. He understands his role in the family. He may mock Dad or play a trick on the boys, but he has their best interests in mind. When he battles the demon, he shows his protective nature.

The point of view of the boys witnesses them at varying ages throughout their lives. Their narrative takes them from boyhood to manhood. They are trying to understand what happened to their mother, grapple with the permanence of her departure, and the oddity of their father's behavior.

Language and Meaning

The language in the novel is conversational and confessional. The vocabulary is accessible, but sometimes abstract. Crow's use of verse or nonsensical phrasing is meant to evoke passages that are familiar to Dad from his study of Ted Hughes.

British spelling is used throughout the novella, such as "authorised" (28), "behaviour" (53), "defence" (58) and "demeanour" (105). British slang is used as well, such as "welly" (9), "telly" (28), and "bugger" (78). Slang and curse words are used throughout.

The use of cursing indicates Dad's frustrations and anger. Some of the passages reflect his academic background as well. Meanwhile, the boys' narrative voice is similar to their father's, with one of the boys admitting later in the novella that he even sounds like his father.

Structure

Grief is the Thing with Feathers is a novella. It opens with a poem by Emily Dickenson in which Dad has altered the key words in the poem, replacing them with the word crow.

The book is then divided into three sections. The first section is titled “Part One: A Lick of Night.” The second section is titled “Part two: Defence of the Nest” and is the longest section. The third and final section is titled “Part Three: Permission to Leave.”

The novel is told through alternating narratives. Each narrative is titled by the character speaking. The three narrators are Dad, Crow, and the boys. The story is nonlinear, with each of the narrators offering a different timeline.

Dad’s timeline is the immediate aftermath of his wife’s death through to the day he spreads his wife’s ashes. Crow’s timeline is from the night he arrives to when he is given permission to leave. The Boys’ timeline reveals details about the past, the time of their childhood with Crow, and well into the future as they become men.

There are no distinct chapters. A few sections are structured like letters. One is a letter to the boys and two are written to Crow.

Crow’s sections often employ verse. Crow’s voice also uses a fairy tale style that begins with “once upon a time,” a style the boys occasionally replicate.



Quotes

She would approve, because we were always over-analytical, cynical, probably disloyal, puzzled.”

-- Dad (chapter 1 paragraph 4)

Importance: The quote gives insight into the relationship between Dad and his wife and the traits they shared.

We guessed and understood that this was a new life and Dad was a different type of Dad now and we were different boys, we were brave new boys without a Mum.”

-- Boys (chapter 1 paragraph 42)

Importance: The quote illustrates how the boys view themselves, not only as having lost their mother, but trying to reconcile the radical change in their father's behavior and having to accept it.

I am a template. I know that, he knows that. A myth to be slipped in.”

-- Crow (chapter 1 paragraph 48)

Importance: The quote indicates Crow awareness of his role in Dad's mourning and how he should be viewed.

She told us that men were rarely truly kind, but they were often funny, which is better.”

-- Boys (chapter 2 paragraph 23)

Importance: The quote gives insight into the relationship the boys had with their grandmother. It also addresses the importance of the use of humor as a coping mechanism.

We did these things to miss her, to keep wanting her.”

-- Boys (chapter 2 paragraph 86)

Importance: The quote shows the boys' and Dad's desire to keep the memory of Mum present in their everyday lives. In making the mess, they are reminded of how she would get frustrated with them and that makes their memory come alive.

There's grief and there's impractical obsession.”

-- Dad (chapter 2 paragraph 93)

Importance: The quotes addresses Dad's relationship with Mum. His attraction to her while living was like an obsession, grieving her loss is exacerbated by that obsession.

I can't remember if this game was my brother's idea, or Crow's.”

-- Boys (chapter 2 paragraph 100)



Importance: The quote speaks to the theme of memory and the unreliability of the boys' narration.

My dear, sorry loves. It isn't her. Go back to bed and let me deal with this. It isn't her."
-- Crow (chapter 2 paragraph 120)

Importance: The quote illustrates Crow's desire to care for and protect the family. He is not present just to help Dad, but is there for the children as well.

Dad told us stories and the stories changed when Dad changed."
-- Boys (chapter 2 paragraph 134)

Importance: The quote demonstrates how profoundly Dad's grief affected how he interacted with his sons.

I've changed my mind I don't want to hear it."
-- Dad (chapter 3 paragraph 2)

Importance: The quote addresses Dad's refusal to accept what happened to his wife. Even though he has long mourned her, he still has trouble facing the details of his wife's death.

We abused him and mocked him because it seemed to remind him of our Mum."
-- Boys (chapter 3 paragraph 12)

Importance: The quote demonstrates the personality traits the boys adopted from their mother. They interact with their father similarly to the way she did as a way to likely give comfort to all of them.

You were done being hopeless. Grieving is something you're still going, and something you don't need a crow for."
-- Bird (chapter 3 paragraph 68)

Importance: The quote illustrates that Crow (here labeled as Bird) recognizes that his function is complete. Dad is not fully capable of accepting it, so Crow must figure out a way to insist and explain.