

The Goldfinch Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Thirteen-year-old Theodore Decker survives a terrorist bombing in a New York art museum, which kills his mother and acts as the catalyst for Theodore's challenging coming-of-age journey, whereby he grows from a scared, confused, depressed and grief-stricken boy into a mature and responsible adult. In this first-person account, Theo documents his journey, describing his conclusions, or lack of conclusions, regarding the meaning of life.

In the wreckage of the bomb, Theo meets a dying elderly gentleman, who instructs Theo to take The Goldfinch painting, gives Theo a man's ring, and further instructs Theo to go to Hobart and Blackwell to ring the green bell. This elderly man, named Welty, accompanied a young girl Theo's age to the museum. Once Theo saw the young girl with the red hair, named Pippa, he was smitten, as a thirteen-year-old boy may be. Social workers work with Theo to place him in another home, but Theo mentions his elementary school friend, Andy Barbour, who he would like to go and stay with.

At the Barbours, Theo tries to adjust to life on Park Avenue. In some ways, the Barbours' apartment is a comfortable place to grieve, for example, because of the very low lighting. In other ways, Theo feels as if he is on display with the antique furniture, as Samantha Barbour hosts several charity engagements at her home. Theo has to deal with Kitsey and Toddy, Andy's two younger siblings who resent Theo's presence because he takes their parents' attention away from the youngsters. There is an aura of mystery, of which the details are kept hidden from the Barbour children, over the health of Mr. Barbour. Mr. Barbour is an avid sailing participant, who loves the open seas and skies. During Theo's stay, he visits the shop of Hobart and Blackwell to return the ring to Hobie and sees Pippa once again. He continues to visit the shop. At the end of Theo's stay with the Barbours, Larry Decker, Theo's father, moves Theo to Las Vegas.

In Las Vegas, Theo meets his great friend Boris, who follows his heart much of the time and does not make excuses for who he was born. The two bond through excessive use of drugs, alcohol, petty thievery, and work in the criminal art underground. After Theo's father fails to pay a gambling debt, and Bobo Silver pays a couple of visits to the Decker home to collect on the debt, Theo's father asks Theo if he can get any money out of his college fund. Theo's lawyer tells him that he cannot withdraw the money for anything other than his education. Soon after, Larry Decker dies in a drunk-driving car accident. Theo flees Las Vegas and returns to New York.

Once in New York, Theo asks to stay at Hobie's, to which the lawyer agrees. Theo attends college, but finds he enjoys working in Hobie's antique furniture restoration business. Hobie makes Theo a business partner, only to find that Theo has been selling fraudulent pieces of furniture as the expensive authentic versions. The Goldfinch painting has traveled with Theo from New York, to Las Vegas, and back to New York again, or so Theo thinks. Theo is in a high state of anxiety because a man who calls himself Lucius Reeve is threatening to expose Theo and Hobie for the fraudulent furniture sales. Reeve also thinks Theo has The Goldfinch painting, which he offers to



buy from Theo. Theo denies all accusations. When Boris bumps into Theo in New York, Theo is engaged to Kitsey Barbour after the deaths of Mr. Barbour and Andy in a sailing accident. Boris tells Theo that he stole the painting from him. When Theo goes to the storage locker to retrieve the painting, which he thought he had this whole time, he finds Boris's ex-girlfriend's Civics textbook.

Boris wants to make this up to Theo, and he masterminds a scheme for the two of them to go to Amsterdam, where Boris thinks the painting is now located. Theo will act as a rich American buyer of the painting, and reclaim The Goldfinch. Something goes terribly awry, and Theo, in an act of self-defense, shoots a man named Martin, who stepped in at the last minute to steal the painting.

Theo hides in his hotel room in Amsterdam, waiting for Boris to get back to him. Theo says that he feels dead himself; he has committed an ultimate act which cannot be undone. Theo thinks of suicide and of going back to New York, only he cannot because Boris has his passport. One night, Theo's mother comes to him in a dream. Theo is elated, and upon awakening, he decides he will turn himself in. Soon after he makes this decision, Boris arrives at his hotel room, with a satchel full of money. Theo does not want the money, until Boris tells him that the money is legal. Boris masterminded another scheme whereby his organization made a phone call to the art cops. This one phone call regarding the whereabouts of this one painting, The Goldfinch, led to the recovery of many other stolen artworks.

When Theo finally makes it back to New York, he travels the country buying back the fraudulent antique furniture. Theo has grown from a child to a more responsible adult; however, he concludes that some questions may never have answers, no matter how much one searches.



Part I, Chapter 1: The Boy with a Skull

Summary

in section i of chapter 1, the main character – scared, physically ill, and self-imprisoned in his hotel room in Amsterdam at Christmastime – hides from the as-yet-undisclosed details of an unknown murder reported in the Dutch newspapers. His anxiety escalates at the benign noises of church bells tolling (de Westertoren and de Krijtberg); at his inability to understand the Dutch language in the newspapers and on television; and at the nightmares he suffers during sleep. The main character studies two small oil paintings in his hotel room, and he dreams of his dead mother for the first time in years, as he lies feverish in bed.

In section ii, the main character remembers vivid details of his now-dead mother. He writes them down. Because he had gotten suspended from school when he was thirteen years old, he and his mother were en route to the school conference.

In section iii, the main character's mother becomes ill in a bumpy cab ride with a sickening odor. As the cab swung onto Eighty-Sixth Street, the main character tells the cab driver they would like to get out. Mother and son begin walking to the park, in the fresh air, so the mother can sit down and recover. The mother reminisces and enjoys the timeless feeling she experiences when she is in the city, when suddenly, dark clouds move in, pouring down rain. The two run for cover under the portico of the art museum.

In section iv, the main character is not surprised when his mother decides they should go into the museum to poke around. Theo stares up at the cavernous dome near the museum's entrance and imagines he can float like a feather up there. According to his mother, they must see a few important paintings. One is *The Anatomy Lesson*, another *The Boy with a Skull*, and the other is *The Goldfinch*. While in the museum, a young girl with red hair distracts Theo. When Theo's mother goes back, alone, for one more look at Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lesson*, there is an explosion. The last thing Theo sees is an old man's arm with his knotty fingers splayed.

In section v, Theo awakens in shock with a confused state of mind to the wreckage that was once the museum. He sees the elderly man, whom he had seen before with the red-haired girl, and learns that the girl's name is Pippa. Theo gives the elderly man some water and tries to help him. Before the elderly man dies, he pushes Theo to take *The Goldfinch* painting, at which point, Theo thinks he feels his mother's presence; she urges him to meet her at home. The elderly man gives Theo his ring and instructs him to go to Hobart and Blackwell and to ring the green bell.

In section vi, Theo finds his way through the wreckage of the museum, running through the *natures mortes* gallery and others, as the ever-increasing terror of running into the ominous paintings haunt him, as he searches for his mother among dozens of mutilated dead bodies. He finds an exit to the outside world from the museum. It is still raining



torrentially, and the bomb squad disrupts a second bomb. Theo searches for his mother in the crowd outside, as he heads back to the apartment.

Analysis

In section i, there is irony in the main character's reaction to the tolling of the church bells. For believers, religion is typically a place of peaceful refuge; yet, this young man seems to have a very limited knowledge of the meaning of religion. At de Westertoren, the highest church tower in Amsterdam, the famous painter Rembrandt is buried, as well as other painters. When the main character studies two small oil paintings in his hotel room, he searches for answers to questions about the old Flemish masters. Here, other themes are introduced: Art touches the heart and the search for meaning.

The main character's inability to translate the Dutch language is a parallel to his inability to understand the events which have led him to this point in his life. Someone has been murdered, and the main character is somehow involved. The unknowns prompt the reader to continue reading, to search for these answers, along with this young man, in much the same way as a modern-day thriller would. Here, the idea that the main character is possibly writing down his story surfaces, contributing to his coming of age and further indicating his growth from a child to a well-adjusted man.

His description of the hotel room is one of stark contrast: "... the brocades were rich and the carpet was soft, still the winter light carried a chilly tone of 1943, privation and austerities, weak tea without sugar and hungry to bed." (Chapter 1, paragraph 4.) This parallels the main character's coming of age, depicting the dichotomy between child and adult. This, too, parallels the dichotomy of where Theo is in the present and where he would like to be in his future.

In section ii, the main character's mother's death when he was a kid is the catalyst that prompts this young man's challenging coming-of-age journey, with everything divided between before her death and after her death. His vivid memories of his mother show that he has made progress through the stages of grief. He is no longer in denial, but rather, he remembers her for all of the joy and beauty she brought to his life. His very act of writing his story shows that he is more of a grown-up man than when he was thirteen years old. He has maturely accepted the fact of her death. However, it's also apparent that he blames himself for her death, though he understands that everything that happens after her death is his fault.

Section iii is filled with foreshadowing, as a literary device, of the unimaginable, unpredictable tragedy to come. The young man and his mother exit the cab on Eighty-Sixth Street. The number eighty-six means to get rid of or throw out, which is not only meaningful to the fact that the two exit the cab, but rather, a sign of what is to come later in this chapter. Other foreshadowing includes the mother turning ill, and the dark clouds quickly moving in overhead and causing a downpour of rain.



In section iv, the museum hosts an art show entitled “Portraiture and Natures Mortes.” Natures Mortes means death in life, and the main character’s mother describes a painter’s use of wilted flower petals or black spots on a piece of fruit as these details having meaning in life. The wilted petals and the rotted fruit are symbols of death in life. The meaning or secret that a painter tries to impart here is that life is temporary, which is another theme of this novel. What does one do with one’s life with the knowledge that one will indeed die one day?

In further parallels to the outside world, the main character’s mother and he view the following paintings: *The Boy with a Skull* by Frans Hal, *The Anatomy Lesson* by Rembrandt, and *The Goldfinch* by Carel Fabritius. The main character’s name, Theo, is used for the first time when he and his mother view *The Boy with a Skull* painting. The literal meaning is the link Theo’s mother makes between the two boys needing haircuts; the figurative meaning is the premonition or foreshadowing of a death of someone close to Theo, and quite possibly the blame that Theo will feel for the rest of his life for this death. (The long-haired boy in the painting is holding a skull in his hands.) As they find their way through the natures mortes gallery, “ ... large gloomy reproductions of *The Anatomy Lesson* appeared erratically and at unexpected junctures, baleful signposts, the same old corpse with the flayed arm, red arrows beneath: operating theater, this way.” (Chapter 1, section iv, paragraph 26) This foreshadows the death in life that will occur.

Theo’s mother gives an in-depth analysis of Rembrandt’s *The Anatomy Lesson*, pointing out that the thumb is reversed on one of the oversized hands of the corpse on the table, making it look out of place, drawing attention to it, presenting a subliminal message to the viewer that something is not quite right. The corpse glows, she says, and the painter did this on purpose so that the viewer would pay attention. Meanwhile, Theo has his eyes on this red-haired girl he sees, whose face shines like a light. This light indicates that Theo is on a journey to seek enlightenment and meaning in life.

Theo is only thirteen years of age. He feels an instant connection to the girl he sees at the museum. Theo feels embarrassed about being with his mother sometimes and he notices the irritating-to-him manner in which other men look at her. Earlier in this section, Theo stares up at the cavernous dome near the museum’s entrance and imagines he can float like a feather up there, a self-described childlike trick which is getting harder and harder to do as he ages. We understand Theo’s state of mind at this juncture; he is still very much a child.

Theo’s floating like a feather is a reference to birds and floating or flying. Other references to birds are his descriptions of the red-haired girl and the elderly man who accompanies her; he writes that her movements were swift, her face sharp, mischievous, and strange, and his nose was beaky and birdlike. The *Goldfinch* painting is a small, simple painting of a yellow bird chained to a perch; this painting is another real-world connection, painted by Carel Fabritius. The bird references symbolize the fleeting nature of life. A further real-life connection or parallel is the history behind Fabritius’s death. The town of Delft was destroyed in a gunpowder plant explosion, killing Fabritius and destroying most of his paintings. Only five or six paintings survived,



one of these being *The Goldfinch*. In the author's research for this novel, it was a coincidence that she came across the fact that Fabritius died in an explosion; this is an outside parallel to the randomness of fate theme, or more precisely, a possible answer to the question of whether there are predetermined patterns which exist in life.

When the explosion erupts, most of the foreshadowing to this point has come to pass. Here, especially with *The Anatomy Lesson*, life in the novel imitates the artwork of Rembrandt. Just as *The Anatomy Lesson* pictures an oversized hand of the corpse on the table, the last thing Theo sees is the knotted hand of the red-haired girl's elderly companion. The premonitory elements have come to fruition.

In section v, Theo's state of mind is hopeful; he tries to do the right thing by becoming a caretaker to the dying old man. As Theo feels comforted by helping the old man, the memory of his mother temporarily fades to a mothlike flicker. Moths symbolize messengers from the spirit world, indicating that a ghost is close by. In a moment of psychic awareness, Theo feels a message from his mother to go immediately home. The ring symbolizes the circle of life and the green bell is a symbol to go and take action.

In section vi, Theo is subjected to the trauma of witnessing the bomb's human destruction. Theo is in the same room where his mother said she was going – *The Anatomy Lesson* painting gallery – "... in the oddly screaming silence, the only two observers were the same two puzzled Dutchmen who had stared at my mother and me from the wall: what are you doing here?" Here, we see art coming to life. Theo is witness to these naturalistic art elements a second time, and this resembles the modern-day thrillers written today. Theo heads home, in disbelief that his mother could walk away from the scene at the museum without him. He rationalizes that their emergency plan is to always meet back at the apartment.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think Chapter 1 is entitled *Boy with a Skull*?

Discussion Question 2

Name two themes already established, and discuss how each is established.

Discussion Question 3

Describe three of the many ways art imitates and foreshadows life throughout Chapter 1.



Vocabulary

inwrought, whitewash, probity, privation, austerity, tableau, vivant, beatify, claptrap, eighty-six, trompe l'oeils, acrid, slag, inert, cairns, monoliths, lintel, gilt, periwigged, superciliously, pneumatic, capriciously, caterwauling,



Part I, Chapter 2: The Anatomy Lesson

Summary

As Theo walks home in the rain, he remembers when he was four or five years old and felt scared that his mother would not return home from work. He remembers the day he and his mother woke up to find his alcoholic and unhappy father had abandoned the two of them. While he and his mother were not heartbroken, Theo then wonders if his father would care that the museum had been bombed by terrorists. As Theo continues walking home from the museum, he believes his mother is alive, waiting and worried at their apartment, and he tries to psychically send her a message that he is safe. In Theo's thoughts, he thanks the girl Pippa for saving him from the explosion in the postcard shop.

At the apartment, Theo falls asleep. When he awakens, he calls the missing person's phone number and finds out that Audrey Decker is not on their list of those who died. In an act of love, and to take his mind off of the traumatic events of the day, Theo works to get the kitchen drawer that had been stuck for so long free to open. He succeeds, but finds the day's events creeping into his thoughts.

At almost three o'clock in the morning, Marjorie Beth Weinberg, a social worker, calls to speak to Theo's father. Theo lies, saying that his father is sleeping. In despair, Theo presses the social worker for details about his mother, to no avail. In further despair, Theo thinks of calling the police and almost decides to go uptown to look for his mother in the middle of the night, when the doorbell rings. Theo rushes to the door, only to find two unknown people; his life will be forever changed.

Analysis

In a flashback to his early home life, Theo describes his childhood fear of his mother not returning home from work, and the reality of his father coming home drunk and sounding like what Theo imagined was a killer breaking into his home. Theo begins his journey already traumatized by his now-absent father. Theo's thirteen-year-old mind tries to imagine how worried his mother must be for him and he psychically sends her a message that he is fine. Theo believes in magic, i.e., the act of writing the missing person's phone number down would cause his mother to arrive at their home. His great love for his mother drives his actions in this chapter, e.g., he cleans the kitchen dishes and counter, he saves The Goldfinch painting, he saves her Chinese food for her in case she is hungry when she returns, and he fixes the kitchen drawer.

When Theo says, "... I still had a splitting headache and the feeling (new to me then, but now unfortunately all too familiar) of waking up with a nasty hangover, of important things forgotten and left undone," this foreshadows Theo's trouble with substance abuse problems in the future.



The rain that falls is a symbol for tears, sadness and sorrow.

Discussion Question 1

Why do you think this chapter is entitled The Anatomy Lesson?

Discussion Question 2

Point out three descriptions used in this chapter that poignantly and vividly show how Theo feels during his walk home and during his time in the apartment waiting for his mother. Pinpoint what each description tells about which feeling he is experiencing.

Discussion Question 3

What is the prominent theme of this chapter?

Vocabulary

occult, enmity, sisal, harum-scarum



Part I, Chapter 3: Park Avenue

Summary

In sections i through iii, the social workers, Enrique and a Korean lady, take Theo to a diner and break the news to him that his mother is dead. Instead of going to a foster home, Theo gives the social workers an elementary school friend's name – Andy Barbour – who he would like to stay with. At the Barbour's home on Park Avenue, Theo and the Barbours get through an uncomfortable first meeting, and Theo grieves as the Barbours cater to him. Mrs. Barbour, who Theo describes as a masterpiece of composure, protects Theo from his social worker's badgering interrogations over the whereabouts of his father. Theo remembers his mother; he grieves; he continues to wish he had done something differently so she would still be alive.

In sections iv through vii, Mrs. Barbour sends Theo back to school. Some people at school expressed their condolences, some went out of their way to give him gifts or give him therapeutic strategies to cope with his grief, others avoided Theo, and some fell silent as he walked by. Tom Cable, Theo's friend who smoked at school, getting them both suspended, ignored Theo. Theo fights depression in grief. Mrs. Barbour comments on the ring which the elderly man in the museum gave to Theo; it is very old, and a souvenir of the Grand Tour. Theo defies Mrs. Barbour's order to put the ring someplace safe and he continues wearing it. Things at the Barbours' are getting more stressful for Theo.

In section viii, investigators visit Theo's school for a meeting in the conference room with the adults who are responsible for Theo's well-being. Theo does not remember much about the bombing at the museum.

In sections ix through xii, Theo is in English class, while they read a poem by Walt Whitman. He flashes back to the scenes at the museum, remembering Pippa and the old man. He remembers reading Macbeth in English class. In section xi, Theo has a nightmare and awakens to remember Hobart and Blackwell and ringing the green bell. At breakfast, Mr. Barbour talks incessantly of sailing, recounting some of his stories. Theo's memory is returning and he decides to look up Hobart and Blackwell in the phone book and call them. When no one answers the phone call, Theo decides to go for a visit and offer the ring back to Hobie, which he does in section xii. Theo enters the Elephant and Castle restaurant, a place he enjoyed with his mother, and then decides to leave.

Analysis

In section i, the diner's décor, with its glittering beveled mirrors and chandeliers, provides such a stark contrast to the news of Theo's mother's death that he has trouble reconciling the two. Herein lies an irony. This is also another contrast which parallels



Theo's coming of age journey, where he will grow from a child on one end of the spectrum to a man on the other end. Theo is in denial about his mother's death and the need to place a minor child with adults away from his apartment home. He has a childlike feeling that if he cooperates with the social workers, his mother's death will turn out to be a mistake. \

In section ii, Theo describes Mrs. Barbour as a masterpiece of composure, which creates an allusion that real life mimics art. Art has, indeed, touched Theo's heart. When Mrs. Barbour protects Theo from his social worker Enrique's interrogations about the location of his father, Theo advances in his coming of age journey because he recognizes this act of love.

In section iv, when Tom Cable ignores Theo, Theo gets so angry that he attempts to pick a fight with Cable; Cable does not fight back. Theo follows a path of his own rationalization that Tom Cable is to blame for setting off the events in which his mother dies. Herein lies the idea that some relationships are temporary, i.e., there is no love providing a solid base for lasting relations. The fact that Theo now realizes the nature of his friendship with Cable forces him to mature psychologically. Theo's feelings have changed toward Tom Cable, and he sees him for the person he really is. Theo is entering the anger stage of grief. Theo continues to torture himself over his mother's death, and to ask "if only" questions, which is the bargaining stage of grief, where he tries to regain control over the helpless and vulnerable feelings he experiences. Also in section iv, Theo suffers depression, another phase of grief, as he says, "... sometimes, unexpectedly, grief pounded over me in waves that left me gasping" The author uses personification here, as the grief pounds him. Grief is a very personal experience, and through metaphor, the waves that left Theo gasping, the reader imagines the main character's pain so vividly.

In section v, Mrs. Barbour examines the Blackwell ring that the elderly man gave to Theo after the museum's explosion. The ring is a souvenir of the Grand Tour, which was an educational rite of passage of wealthy young men, from about 1660 to 1840, who toured Europe, in search of art and culture. With unlimited funds, these young men commissioned art, i.e., hired painters to create and paint works of art. This historical rite of passage is a metaphor for Theo's rite of passage; herein lies another connection between Theo and the elderly man. This ties in with the theme of randomness of fate versus prearranged destiny.

In section vi, Theo rebels and attempts to control some parts of his life, e.g., when he ignores Mrs. Barbour's order to put the ring in safekeeping. This rebellion can be seen as both childlike and adult behavior. Defying an order which makes sense is childish; defying this order is a vote of confidence in oneself and one's decision making.

In section vii, the contrast between the Barbour's lifestyle and the Decker's becomes stressfully apparent to Theo. The more Theo tries to help and blend in, the more attention he seems to draw to himself. When Theo says he would like to disappear into the chinoiserie, i.e., the Chinese art gallery that is the Barbour's home, like a fish among a coral reef, i.e., through this simile, Theo means he wants to be inconspicuous.



In section viii, Theo has a chance to tell investigators about The Goldfinch painting, but he chooses not to; he is not ready to let go of this symbol of his mother. This marks a turning point in Theo's growth, where he chooses not to do the right thing.

In section ix, Theo suffers post-traumatic stress after the interrogation. These moments come unexpectedly; he can feel, smell and taste the blood of the old man on his hands. In a real-world parallel, Theo compares Shakespeare's Macbeth to his situation, and he now understands how Lady Macbeth could never scrub the blood off her hands; it was always there.

In section xi, Theo's grief and shock seem to be giving way, i.e., his nightmares do not bleed into his reality and confuse him as much. When he looks up the Hobart and Blackwell address, he writes, "Seeing the name in black and white gave me a strange thrill, as of unseen cards falling into place." Theo's memory is returning. The suggestion here is also of another theme: the preordained nature of some experiences.

In section xii, when Theo backs out of the Elephant and Castle restaurant because he remembers his mother and him eating there, the pigeons fly low. The pigeons are symbols for house and home; they also signify determination, and the sighting can be a reminder to be brave and hang in there despite the challenges in life.

Discussion Question 1

Find and discuss examples of the following literary devices used to develop a corresponding character: personification, irony, hyperbole, metaphor, and simile. How does each contribute to the development of the specific character?

Discussion Question 2

What does the Blackwell ring signify to Theo?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the symbolism behind the drooping tulip sympathy card, both as it relates to Theo and as it relates to Dorothy Decker. Weigh Andy Barbour's hypotheses regarding Theo's grandparents.

Vocabulary

reconcile, ermine, sang froid, conviviality, opulent, swanky, ostracized, simulacrum, noxious, chthonic, Lovecraftian, assiduously, carnelian, pompous, chinoiserie, plinth, consanguinity, vitality, pugilist, pallid



Part I, Chapter 4: Morphine Lollipop

Summary

In section i, Theo gives James Hobart, or Hobie, Mr. Blackwell's ring, talks to him about the explosion and war, discusses his father, chats about school and his favorite subjects, and learns that the newspaper has printed a story about him, an orphan and his plight. Theo eats a meal reminiscent of his mother's cooking for the first time since she died. In section ii, Theo visits Pippa and holds her hand while she recovers from her brain and leg surgeries.

In sections iii through v, Andy reminisces about Theo's mother to him. Many people notice that Theo's hunger has returned. When Theo meets with Dave the psychiatrist, he still does not open up to him about his feelings.

In sections vi through viii, Theo plans to sneak out to visit Pippa again and tells Andy to cover for him. At Hobart and Blackwell, Theo meets Pippa's Aunt Margaret, who will be taking Pippa to Texas with her. Theo and Pippa talk about what they have in common. Pippa kisses Theo goodbye.

In section xi, Hobie tells Theo about Welty's father sending him off to America to live with relatives because Welty contracted spinal tuberculosis, and Welty's father had no tolerance for weakness such as illness. Hobie tells Theo he has a good eye for furniture and that he must love living at the Barbours. Theo makes a distinction between Hobie's workshop, where Hobie restores antiques, and Mrs. Barbour's home furnishings. Hobie puts Theo to work in the shop.

In section xii, Theo works with Hobie in his shop-behind-the-shop and has a new hobby now. Theo tells Mrs. Barbour the truth about his whereabouts.

In section xiii, the atmosphere is tense at the Barbours, but Theo decides to stay and help Andy.

In section xiv, Theo considers telling Hobie about the painting. He considers many ways to return the painting to the proper authorities, until he sees a newspaper article reporting that the painting had been destroyed in the bombing, and Mrs. Barbour interrupts his reading, asking if he would like to join the family on their annual Maine summer trip.

In section xv, Theo decides to wait to say anything about the painting, because after all, the official story is that it has been destroyed.

In section xvi, Hobie shares a story about his father, a bully of a man, who made Hobie work at his trucking company for free for years, without giving any of the money to Hobie. Theo is appalled by the unfairness; Hobie laughs. Welty saved Hobie by giving him a job in New York at his shop. Hobie tells Theo that he may find his calling on the



sea in Maine, just as Hobie found his calling through Welty and the old furniture of one of Welty's customers. Theo dreams of the Barbours adopting him.

In section xvii, Theo's father, Larry Decker, and his girlfriend, Xandra, retrieve Theo from the Barbours' home, and go to the Sutton Place apartment of Theo and his late mother. At the apartment, Theo is most concerned about hiding the painting; he packs the painting in a suitcase, along with some clothes and asks the doormen to hold onto it until he, and only he, comes back for it. Goldie, the doorman, gives Theo a wad of cash, which he said was payback to Theo's mother for a computer for Goldie's son. Theo feels the pain of the loss of his mother again at the apartment.

In section xix, Larry Decker takes Xandra and Theo out to dinner and allows Theo to drink champagne. Theo thinks about his mother and how she was so great, yet people treated her so badly, and she did not deserve any of it. Larry and Xandra look at Theo like he is a Gila monster.

In section xx, Theo stumbles into the Barbours' apartment drunk, and tosses and turns on his top bunk in Andy's room.

In section xxii, the Sutton Place apartment is cleared out.

In section xxiii, Theo's last days at the Barbours' fly by and no one there pretends to be happy about Theo's move.

In section xxiv, Theo says goodbye to Hobie.

Analysis

In section i, Theo's conversations with Hobie raise him to a more adult level, as Hobie treats Theo as a person, rather than as a troubled kid. A bond between the two is initiated here. Theo feels comfortable enough to talk with Hobie about his estranged father and about the explosion, which is therapeutic for Theo and Hobie both. For the first time, Theo eats. He eats Hobie's cheese toast, which reminds him of his mother's meals. Theo is beginning to move forward in his coming of age journey and begin the healing process through grief.

Theo is shocked to find out that Hobie already knows of Theo's living arrangements via a newspaper account. Theo disputes the details of the article, showing that he is the type of person who sees the world in terms of right and wrong.

In section ii, Hobie's nickname for Pippa is pigeon, which symbolizes communication between the spirit world and the earthly world; Pippa is a link to Welty for Hobie.

In section v, Theo still does not trust the adults who are assigned to help him. Just as Pippa is not out of the woods yet, neither is Theo; he lets himself cry now over the loss of his mother, whereas before, he was too numb and in shock to let his feelings go.



In section vi, the sneakiness behind Theo's visit to Pippa intensifies the excitement for him.

In section viii, Theo and Pippa talk about things they have in common – the fact that neither wants Pippa to leave, the fact that both of their mothers have died and they are like orphans, the fact that Theo will be leaving too, and horses. Pippa kisses Theo after sucking on what Theo believes is a morphine lollipop, and he has a dizzying taste on his lips as he sails home on the bus. Theo feels a different kind of love for the first time. The morphine lollipop symbolizes not only the physical pain that Pippa feels, but the emotional pain that both feel at their losses. The morphine foreshadows what will happen in Theo's life, and his guess at the lollipop indeed being a pain killer is a metaphor for his feelings for Pippa, in that he thinks she makes him feel better.

Theo gets to see himself through Andy's eyes and this enlightens his path toward self-knowledge. In section xi, Theo discovers that Welty's father left him too, in essence, and Theo feels an even stronger connection to the old man in the museum. In a more adult fashion, Theo makes a distinction between Hobie's workshop, where one can actually touch the furniture and restore it, and Mrs. Barbour's home, where the air has a feeling that one cannot touch or use the antique furnishings.

In section xii, Theo visits Hobie, helping him in his workshop, listening and telling stories with Hobie, whom Theo is able to relax around and be himself. We can see Theo's personal growth here, as he finally discloses the truth of his outings to Mrs. Barbour; Theo no longer feels he has to hide everything and he takes responsibility for this part of his life.

In section xiii, Theo makes another responsible, and compassionate, decision – to stay with Andy during the tension at the Barbour's. Theo puts himself aside, much in the way an adult would, to help someone else and stay in a difficult situation.

In section xiv, Theo remains conflicted over how to return the painting without getting into trouble. As a child easily distracted, Theo immediately forgets about the painting when Mrs. Barbour invites him on their annual summer trip to Maine.

In section xv, Theo knows full well that he should tell someone about the painting, but he makes a conscious decision to say nothing. With childlike naiveté, Theo thinks he can sell the painting; he thinks he can use it as insurance so he will not have to go live with his grandparents. Theo is developing a manner of devious behavior, longing to get what he thinks he wants.

In section xvi, Hobie's story of his father's abuse and Welty's saving grace somewhat parallels Theo's story of the grace of Hobie through the chance meeting of Welty. Theo now has someone with which he can connect. Hobie seems to be a good role model for Theo; Hobie is a man without a father, by his own choice, and he is an upstanding citizen. Theo does not tell Hobie his wishes, rather, he guards the fact that he would like to stay with the Barbours, it seems, due to a childhood fear that if something is spoken aloud, it may not come true.



In section xvii, Theo is in shock when he sees his father and his girlfriend, Xandra, in Mr. Barbour's study, "where the framed nautical charts and the rain streaming down the gray windowpanes were like a theatrical set of a ship's captain on a storm-tossed sea." (paragraph 3) The language here evokes a feeling of unreality, and, in particular, the "storm-tossed sea" is a metaphor for Theo's life, as he is "tossed" from home to home. After Theo's father abandoned him and his mother, cash and other items went missing from the apartment. Audrey Decker did not trust Larry, and she asked the doormen to not let anyone in to the apartment if she was not home. These facts foreshadow the main reason Theo's father reenters Theo's life.

In section xviii, Theo's feelings of unreality continue as he looks around in the apartment. He wonders how it could seem so permanent, when it is really only a stage set, something to be broken down and moved, like Theo and his life. Theo is on a search for something permanent in his life, but since he is still a minor, he must go with adult family members. We see in this section that Theo is still going through the bargaining stage of grief, i.e., he thinks if he picked the movie she wanted to see the Saturday before she died, maybe she would still be alive. He continues to blame himself, torturing himself with the what-ifs, and exacerbating his depression. Theo is skeptical of the cash Goldie gives him, and we see that Theo is advancing in his ability to analyze situations that do not quite add up, much as an adult would. This exchange of money foreshadows future events in Theo's life with his father.

Theo takes his first alcoholic drink at dinner in section xix, which foreshadows the choices he makes in Las Vegas. When Theo says the two looked at him like he was a Gila monster, there is deeper meaning. A Gila monster symbolizes frugality and a warning to be careful with your resources. After his father's phone call with his mother's insurance company, we become suspicious that Larry Decker may be in this for some money.

In section xx, as the room spins when Theo tries to sleep, this is another metaphor for Theo's life spinning out of control.

In section xxii, as Theo watches the apartment being cleared out, he sees a black and white picture of Audrey from her modeling days hanging on the wall; he thinks of her looking out from the photo, a parallel to The Anatomy Lesson painting, at her home being physically dismantled, and he hopes that she never dreamed of this scene ever taking place, because he loves her.

In section xxiii, Theo likens his future with his father and Xandra to a "blot of black ink on the horizon." (paragraph 7) Theo will be going from a life of privilege to one on a different planet, according to Andy Barbour. This transition is one paralleling Theo's coming of age journey, where he will grow from a boy to a man.

In section xxiv, in Theo's adolescence, he tells Hobie he feels relieved that his father came to get him; he cannot yet know the foreshadowing ulterior motives his father and Xandra have in mind. Theo finds Hobie's place is a place of refuge for him, one that he longs to return to, and in his leaving, he makes the connection to when he, his mother



and father left their old apartment on Seventh Avenue. Theo is either making an analogy to the fact that he feels he is leaving a true home, or he could mean that Xandra and his father are his new complete – mother, father, and son – family. The author uses an element of suspense when she has Theo complete chapter 4 by writing, “But though I had no idea I’d ever be seeing him [(Hobie)] again, about this I was wrong.” (paragraph 31)

Discussion Question 1

What does the reference to animals in the following quote mean? “Gettysburg? a soldier so mad with shock that he started burying birds and squirrels on the battlefield. You had a lot of little things killed too, in the crossfire, little animals. Many tiny graves.” (Chapter 4, section i, paragraph 35)

Discussion Question 2

Up to this point in the novel, the reader notices a continued metaphor regarding water, watery images, and rain. What significance do these have?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Theo think of The Goldfinch painting as his own?

Vocabulary

oblique, provenance, apothecary, ochreous, lampblack, genial, falsetto, sacrosanct, surreptitious



Part II, Chapter 5: Badr al-Dine Summary

Summary

In sections i through iv, Theo retrieves his suitcase from Sutton Place, and heads to the airport with his father and Xandra, where he slips through security with the painting.

In section v through viii, the trio land in Las Vegas, where Theo looks at The Goldfinch painting in the glow of the desert light. Theo deduces that his father lied to him and his mother about his business trips, and instead went to Las Vegas, where he met Xandra; that his father did not stop drinking and now takes prescription painkillers; and that it was unclear what his father did for a living. Theo realizes that Xandra and his father gamble in the casinos.

In section ix, Theo tries to get used to his wide open surroundings in his father's home, which is a little unsettling to him at first. In fact, Theo is left much to his own devices here. There is not much to do at his father's home, except for swimming in the pool. Theo floats on his back in the pool gazing up at the stars remembering the star constellations from the ceiling of his room back at Sutton Place.

In section x, Theo at first thinks his new school looks like a prison. In English class, Theo meets the only friend he will make in Las Vegas, Boris. The two boys discover they have a couple of things in common on the bus ride home from school: their mothers both died and their fathers are alcoholics.

In section xi, Theo goes over to Boris's house and drinks beer; when they get hungry, they go to Theo's house to get some food that Xandra may have brought home from the bar that she manages.

In sections xii and xiii, Theo and Boris continue to spend all of their time together, stealing food, preparing meals, smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and connecting with one another. Boris tells Theo he is no longer a Muslim because he decides to drink alcohol, and one cannot drink and practice as a Muslim simultaneously.

In section xiv, Theo writes letters or emails to Andy, Mrs. Barbour, Pippa and Hobie, although he decides not to mail some of the ones to Pippa and Hobie. Theo receives a beautiful letter from Hobie which his dad intercepts.

In section xv, as Theo tries to remember what Pippa looks like, his view of the moon distracts him, and he remembers a story his mother told him about the moon being the same wherever you go. Boris's father comes home with two prostitutes, and Theo wonders how he ended up in this strange new life where no one loves him.

In section xvi, Boris comes to English class with a wine-colored bruise on his face.



In section xvii, Boris picks up on cues that Xandra does cocaine and wonders where the cash may be in the house if she sells the drug.

In section xix, Theo meets Boris's father and is surprised at his physical smallness, and his gracious attitude toward Theo.

In section xx, Theo and Boris get drunk, bicker and pass out at Theo's house on Thanksgiving. Theo vomits on the carpet and while he cleans, he remembers New York. Theo telephones Hobie (no answer) and the Barbours, but Kitsey is in a hurry to go to dinner with the family.

In section xxi, Theo witnesses Mr. Pavlikovsky beating Boris until his nose and forehead bleed.

And in section xxii, Boris tells Theo that his father has killed people before. Back at Theo's house, Theo plays nurse to Boris when he remembers that his mother told him perfume works in a pinch to clean wounds. Boris punches Theo in the face, they fight and go out to the pool.

In section xxv, Theo says he awoke in the middle of the night wailing sometimes, due to the physical manifestations of the bomb blast. Boris is the only person Theo has told about his mother's death. Theo reads and re-reads Hobie's letter and the Wind, Sand and Stars book that Hobie sent him.

In section xxvi, Boris becomes friendly with Theo's father; however Larry Decker still remains an enemy of Theo's.

In section xxvii, Theo and Boris make a Christmas dinner for Larry and Xandra. At the last moment, Larry Decker changes the plans and takes them all out on the Strip for dinner.

Analysis

In section iv, Theo turns as white as a ghost as he slips through airport security with the painting undetected; Theo suffers an anxiety attack. Larry and Xandra try to guess at Theo's fears and talk about Theo as if he is not standing in the same vicinity as them. The pills foreshadow a life of substance abuse and dependence for Theo.

In section vi, Theo's love for The Goldfinch painting comes to life in vivid poetic language as he views the painting for the first time in the light of day, the desert light of day. Theo speaks of the painting through personification, saying that the painting breathed an atmosphere. The painting is a metaphor for his mother.

In section vii, Theo sees a mellow change in his father when he is on Vicodin, but the fact that Theo thinks his father plays a character, like an actor, shows that Theo does not trust his father, because he has seen how his father acted when he was with his mother prior.



In section ix, Theo picks up on more subtle social cues, especially the tone of voice Xandra uses when she says “apparently” when she is annoyed with Theo. He realizes not all women over the age of forty have a mother mentality. When Theo gazes at the stars while lying in the pool on his back, he uses his conscious mind to pick out the constellations he remembers from his childhood bedroom ceiling. The stars are symbols of awareness in the conscious mind. Theo sees a scattering of stars in the sky, of which some are confusing to him, yet we see him advancing in his coming of age journey.

In section x, the reference to the school reminding Theo of a minimum security prison is a parallel to Theo’s coming of age journey, i.e., as a child, he is subject to the rules, guidelines, and curfews of the adult wardens in his life, but here in Las Vegas, Theo has a minimum of rules and makes his own decisions. His coming of age journey is advancing in this respect, but only by chance, and not necessarily because he is ready to advance. Theo is fascinated by Boris’s jet-setting lifestyle and the many languages he can speak. Theo’s world is opening up as he learns more about the seedy world of Las Vegas. Theo is learning to not rely so heavily on the stereotypes of his youth; for instance, when he first saw Boris, he made a stereotypical judgment that the bracelets Boris wore signified that Boris was too cool for anyone to talk to. In reality, Boris has the bracelets as keepsakes from the countries he has lived in. Boris’s character comes to life and is believable because the writing stays true to the way a Russian may pronounce the English language. The reader can actually hear Boris’s voice speaking.

In section xii, Theo realizes that his and Boris’s loneliness and the condition of their family lives, or lack thereof, bring them inseparably together. Boris has been independent for much of his life. When Boris chooses not to practice as a Muslim anymore, because he chooses to drink alcohol, we understand that Boris’s actions are motivated not by a true religious belief or any belief at all, but because the Muslim people were nice to him and took care of him. This is a childish, selfish, uneducated way of making decisions. Boris tells Theo that the Muslims gave him an Arabic name – Badr al-Dine – which is the name of this chapter. The name means full moon of faithfulness, and the moon symbolizes the subconscious growing mind.

In section xiv, Theo’s insecurity prevents him from sending some of his written letters to Pippa and Hobie, but Theo misses New York. Theo’s description of Hobie’s letter to him exudes love through personification and poetry: “The letter itself was beautiful, as a physical artifact: rich paper, careful penmanship, a whisper of quiet rooms and money.” (paragraph 27)

In section xv, through a stream of consciousness device, we see Theo being distracted by the full vivid moon, which brings to light the story his mother told him about the moon being the same everywhere; when you see a full moon, this means that home is wherever you are. Theo is putting the pieces together, on a subconscious level, regarding the symbol of the moon which Boris introduced with his given Arabic name, Badr al-Dine. The moon is a symbol of the awareness of the subconscious mind; we see Theo becoming enlightened. Theo does not feel the kind of love he felt when he was back in New York with his mother, with Pippa, and with Hobie. Also within Theo’s subconscious mind, a resemblance of his mother comes to him in a dream, warning him



to go home and questioning what Theo is doing there. Theo's subconscious mind is assembling all of his experiences to date and trying to make sense out of them; we see Theo as a person converging with his various environments, where he is growing into an adult in order to make his own proper decisions based on who he really is.

In section xvi, Theo questions the bruise on Boris's face, which Boris downplays; Boris has grown up with a much different idea of love than Theo. Boris is happy to have the money and the tears and apology from his father after the beating.

In section xvii, we see that Boris is very streetwise and picks up on the cues of drug use by Xandra; he immediately schemes that cash may be around the house if she sells drugs. Theo remembers his childhood morals and will not succumb to a scheme to cash in the baccarat chips at the casino.

In section xix, Theo learns that his expectations can be upended. Theo imagined Mr. Pavlikovsky a large beast of a man, but found him to be pale, small and thankful to Theo.

In section xxi, Theo becomes traumatized by the beating Mr. Pavlikovsky gives Boris. Back at Theo's home, in section xxii, when he puts perfume on Boris's bleeding cut, Theo is thinking like his mother and being a care giver to his friend, which turns riotously funny, because Boris now smells like Xandra. When Boris holds Theo underneath the water in the pool, Theo suffers a moment of post-traumatic stress; his subconscious mind takes him back to the museum, in the dark, with no way out. Theo, as all human beings, is a sum of his experiences, both subconscious and conscious. Being underneath the water of the pool is a metaphor for the fear that Theo still feels; it is linked to the unconscious mind.

In section xxv, Boris and Theo's common bond of pain in life brings them even closer. Boris protects Theo when he howls in the night; Boris is not troubled by these wails, as if these are a normal occurrence for him. The two teenagers share a different kind of love for one another. Theo still grieves and misses his mother, but takes refuge in thoughts and things of comfort through Hobie's letter and the hardcover edition of *Wind, Sand and Stars* by Saint-Exupery which Hobie sent to him, and which Theo reads and re-reads.

In section xxvi, we see the survivor mentality in Boris, and the living moment by moment, when Boris befriends Larry Decker. Theo cannot understand his father's allure to people, and Theo stands his ground, telling Boris to not believe everything his father tells him. To which Boris says that he does not believe everything that anybody tells him. Boris is more advanced than Theo in his coming of age, in that he can live moment by moment, forgive, move on, live and survive. Theo is not yet able to forgive his father for leaving him and his mother; he may never be able to forgive his father. In looking back and writing his story, Theo realizes that Boris was able to give Theo's dad something that he himself could not give – excitement for gambling winnings and praise for how well Larry had done.



In sections xxvii and xxviii, Theo's father's selfishness and whim to take them out to dinner instead of eating Theo's and Boris's prepared meal ruffles Theo, yet Theo and Boris enjoy the best meal of their lives and receive five hundred dollars apiece from Larry for Christmas. When Theo says, in the last paragraph of this section, that happiness does not seem like such a doomed or fatal idea in the casino atmosphere, it seems he means that there is a fantasy happiness which exists, one which lies on a superficial level. To make this distinction is a sign that Theo is indeed growing in his conscious insight.

Discussion Question 1

What do Theo's references to actors, plays and the stage mean?

Discussion Question 2

Trace how the relationship between Boris and Theo has grown throughout Chapter 5. Compare and contrast their differences and backgrounds and how it all works to foster a loving friendship.

Discussion Question 3

Compare Theo's life in Las Vegas to his life in New York. How does his life in Las Vegas help him to psychologically grow during his coming of age?

Vocabulary

drollery, consternation, hysterically, bodega, incongruous, jauntily, coquettishly, warble, sojourn, florid, melodramatic, intonations, golem, desultory, solicitude, chlorotic, atolls, pofter, aplomb, segued



Part II, Chapter 6: Wind, Sand and Stars

Summary

In sections i through iv of *Wind, Sand and Stars*, Theo tries to forget his life in New York. Boris finds a girlfriend named Kotku Hutchins shortly after Theo's fifteenth birthday, and Boris spends less time with Theo. Theo misses Boris, resents Kotku and contemplates the reasons Boris would like a derelict like Kotku. In section iv, Theo spends more time with his father, as his father is currently home more. Theo witnesses his father's gambling on football games and his father's mood swings, and Larry Decker gives Theo money once in a while to get his son interested in gambling. Theo analyzes The Goldfinch painting.

In section v, Larry Decker is nice and friendly to Theo and takes him out to dinner once a week. Larry Decker also takes responsibility for his alcoholism during the time when he lived with Theo and Audrey, and he laments the fact that he missed some important years in Theo's life.

In sections vi and vii, Boris breaks the news to Theo that his father is on a big losing streak, and Theo is the only one home when Naaman Silver pays the Decker household a visit, looking for Larry. Boris fills Theo in on the reasons Silver looks for Larry Decker.

In section ix, Theo retreats to his bedroom to look at the painting, safeguarding it from his father or Mr. Silver in section x. Theo puts the painting in his school locker.

In section xi, Boris asks Theo if he can get the money for his father; Theo is dumbfounded.

The mood lightens in section xii, when Larry comes home with Chinese food and tells Theo that Mr. Silver told him that Theo was a gentleman.

In sections xiii through xv, Boris introduces Theo to the drug acid, things lighten up at the Decker house, and Theo brings his painting home.

In section xiv, Larry Decker asks Theo to call Mr. Bracegirdle, his mother's lawyer, to ask for \$65,000 so Theo can go to private school.

In section xv, Boris and Theo drop acid at the playground, only to find that in section xvi, Mr. Silver and a Russian man named Yurko, wielding a baseball bat, visit the Decker house again, the next day.

Theo's father, in section xvii, dies in a drunk-driving car accident.

In sections xviii and xix, Boris and Theo get high and drink with Xandra and her friends, and then the teenagers steal money, cocaine and jewelry from Xandra as she is passed out on her bed. Theo finds his mother's emerald and diamond earrings, a family



heirloom which disappeared before his father left Theo and Audrey, cash, cocaine, and other items of his mother's jewelry in Xandra's hidden stash. Theo decides to run away, back to New York, because he does not want to go with Social Services in Nevada.

Theo tries to convince Boris to come with him, but at the end of section xix, Theo leaves on his own, with Popper the dog.

When Theo arrives in New York, feverish and sick, in section xxi, after traveling through his mother's birth place, Kansas, he begins doubting his decision to return. Theo eventually returns to Hobie's place, where he is greeted by Pippa and Hobie; Hobie makes Theo call Xandra to let her know that he is fine.

Analysis

In sections i through iv, Theo's preoccupation with forgetting his old life in New York causes him to ignore the passage of time. The sand in the title of this chapter is a symbol for this passage of time. Theo feels resentful that Kotku has swooped in and assumed ownership of his friend Boris. In a childlike manner, Theo thinks evil thoughts about Kotku, but soon enough, he is able to rationalize that he and Boris are still friends, no matter what. Theo understands that Boris, or people in general, have hearts big enough to include many friends in their lives. A grownup knows it is not an all-or-nothing situation.

In section iii, when Boris says Kotku is like him and Theo, Theo wonders how he had gone from academic success to being associated with a derelict like Kotku. This is ironic because Theo does not see himself and Boris as derelicts. Theo is blind to how far he has fallen. We find out in this chapter that the teenage boys now smoke pot and sniff glue, as well as drink alcohol. These tie in with the theme of addiction.

In section iv, we see the convergence of several connections to the theme of chance happenings or the randomness of life. First, Larry Decker's chosen "profession," gambling, is entirely a game subject to the powers of fortune, or misfortune. Second, the fact that Carel Fabritius, painter of *The Goldfinch*, died in an explosion is an outside parallel to Theo's life with his mother dying in the explosion at the museum. This knowledge intensifies Theo's lure to the painting. When Donna Tartt was writing *The Goldfinch*, her research produced the manner of the painter's death; this too is an outside, real-world parallel which artfully adds to the theme of chance happenings.

In section v, Theo's father opens up about his feelings of alienation when living with Theo and Audrey. Perhaps this is the beginning of the father-son relationship mending.

In sections vi and vii, suspense is growing as Naaman Silver visits the Decker home, looking for Larry Decker, and the money due. When Boris says, in section viii, it will be a revolver, roadside or roof for Larry if he doesn't pay Silver the money he owes him, this foreshadows events in Larry's future and scares Theo.



In section x, Theo's desire is to protect the painting from his father and Mr. Silver, for if they found it, they could make money off of it. The painting is the closest thing Theo has to his mother, so the painting is a metaphor for Theo's mother. Theo takes comfort in the painting and guards it, which is something he was not able to do for his mother. Theo had no control over her death.

In sections xiv and xv, Larry thinks Theo has a fortune left to him by his mother; Boris is the one to disclose this to Theo as they trip on acid. Larry Decker breaks down and cries when Theo is unable to secure \$65,000 from his mother's lawyer so he can pay his gambling debt. It is like father and son are switching places: Larry becomes a child, crying, and Theo becomes more akin to an adult.

In section xv, Theo says that the night he and Boris tripped on acid was one of the great nights of his life. Theo's addictive personality is growing stronger here, a link to his father's genes, and we see that when problems arise, addicts will reach for some sort of substance, whether alcohol or drugs.

After Theo's father's death in section xvii, Theo makes an adult decision in section xix: he will go back to New York. Theo says goodbye to Boris, but does not say the words on the tip of his tongue: he loves Boris. Here, Theo makes the distinction between expressing the obvious out loud, and simply feeling the contentment that comes along with real love. Theo is advancing in his coming of age journey.

In section xxi, as Theo journeys back home to New York, he doubts his decision to return. He says the city seemed foreign, loud and cold, with exhaust fumes, garbage and strangers. Theo continues to run, in search of something that will help him define himself and his new life without his mother, when all along, the journey is life itself, not the running to something definite. When he travels through Kansas, the birth place of his mother, he notices the vastness of the state, "... the unrelieved sky, so huge that you felt crushed and oppressed by the infinite." (paragraph 4.) What does one do with one's life, knowing that one has a whole life ahead? In the same breath, what does one do with life, when one knows that life is finite?

Theo receives a happy and emotional welcome from Pippa and Hobie. Hobie's parental guidance is what Theo needs right now. Hobie requires Theo to call Xandra to let her know that he is fine. When Xandra says that Theo is a lot like his dad, Theo gets angry and rejects it as a lie; although, the statement stays with Theo throughout his dreams that night, in his subconscious mind. Theo does not like his father, for many reasons, and he most definitely does not want to be like him, in his conscious mind. We can, however, see that both Theo and his father suffered depression and addiction problems.

Discussion Question 1

What does Theo mean when he says, in Chapter 6, in part iv, paragraph 37, about the painting, "I never took it out except when Dad and Xandra weren't there and I knew they wouldn't be back for a while—though even when I couldn't see it I liked knowing it was



there for the depth and solidity it gave things, the reinforcement to infrastructure, an invisible, bedrock rightness that reassured me just as it was reassuring to know that far away, whales swam untroubled in Baltic waters and monks in arcane time zones chanted ceaselessly for the salvation of the world.”?

Discussion Question 2

How does the fact that the author Donna Tartt’s research brings to light the death of painter Carel Fabritius in an explosion add to *The Goldfinch* book? Which theme(s) does this tie in with?

Discussion Question 3

What do the wind, sand and stars symbolize? How do these tie in to Theo’s re-reading of the book by St. Exupery?

Vocabulary

vehemence, lackadaisical, supplicant, viscid, ruminatively, archival, achromatism, miasma, daffy, reticent



Part III, Chapter 7: The Shop-Behind-the-Shop

Summary

In section i, Theo awakens at Hobie's and when he looks in the mirror, he sees someone he does not recognize. Hobie agrees to see Theo's lawyer with him.

In section ii, Theo takes in his surroundings, hears from Boris via text messaging, and finds out that Boris is at the MGM Grand, in the pool, doing cocaine with friends from school.

In section iii, a feverish Theo suffers nightmares of running from people on his way to New York from Las Vegas. Pippa enters his room to give him an origami paper frog she made, and she notices how serious Theo is.

In section iv, Theo calls Mr. Bracegirdle and finds out that he could have taken some money out of his 529 college plan with a large tax penalty.

In section v, in a dream-like state, Theo wants to call his father to let him know that he can help him, but Theo awakens to Pippa coming to say goodbye. She is going back to the boarding school for people with head injuries or mental illness and will not see Theo until springtime. Theo lays in Pippa's bed after she is gone, breathing in her aroma.

In section vi, Theo and Hobie meet Mr. Bracegirdle to work out the practical aspects of living arrangements and schooling for fifteen and a half year old Theo.

In section vii, Theo studies for an early-college entrance exam. Theo is depressed and anxious over three things: what to do with the painting, the circumstances surrounding his father's death and how he could have helped, and Pippa leaving to return to boarding school. Theo compares life at the Barbours' with life at Hobie's. A friend of Hobie's, Mrs. DeFrees, says that Welty knew exactly what he was doing when he gave Theo the ring. That action brought Theo right to Hobie.

In section viii, Theo continues to obsess and fear what will happen if the painting is found by Hobie. Theo spends much time with Hobie, attending auctions, having dinner, and entertaining.

In section ix, Theo takes his early-college entrance exams, and on his way home, he sees a newspaper article covering the recovery of certain stolen paintings from the museum. Hobie and his guests, the Amstisses, discuss the art thief, a paramedic who stole the paintings off the walls while people lay bleeding and dying in the museum. Theo's turns to the bag of pills he absconded from Xandra.



Analysis

In section i, when Theo says he does not recognize himself, he does not recognize who he used to be. The mirror reflects who Theo has become after his trip to Vegas.

In section ii, when Boris text messages Theo, Theo finds out that Boris is partying at the MGM Grand hotel. Perhaps Boris wants to entice Theo to come back. Theo's eyes take in the dark brown walls of his room at Hobie's. Brown is a color which symbolizes stability, structure and support, especially within family units. Brown brings with it responsibility and seriousness about a family's obligations, the need for security and a sense of belonging. In essence, these are all of the things which Theo seeks, epitomized at Hobart and Blackwell, and with Pippa. Theo is now worried that his excessive drug use may have harmed his health, which is a more grownup and responsible way of looking at himself and his life.

In section iii, Theo does not know how to act around Pippa; he only knows that he wants to ask her questions about whether she suffers nightmares or fears after the explosion. Theo is not confident enough to be himself around Pippa. He feels a connection to Pippa through their similar experience at the museum. They were both wounded, although Pippa had family members and parental guidance to support her throughout her recovery; Theo did not. Theo is changing and what Pippa tells him is true. He is very serious now. He is so serious that he seems almost afraid to laugh.

In section iv, Theo is crushed to find out that he could have given his dad the money to almost satisfy the gambling debt. Theo envisions a different future with his dad alive. This is a terribly bleak turn of events for Theo, because this happening has the power to exacerbate Theo's feelings of self-blame and depression. Theo cries because he could have saved his father's life.

In section v, Pippa tells Theo she goes to a special school for kids with problems. It is ironic that Pippa says she is not nuts or like a shoplifter, because Theo engaged in shoplifting himself. Theo tucks himself in to Pippa's bed after she and Hobie leave, taking comfort in her left-behind things, as part of the theme of unrequited love. Theo seems to always live on the periphery of what he wants in life; he is paralyzed by a lack of confidence and he does not seem to be able to strategize a way to get what he thinks he wants.

In section vi, although Theo does not want to go to a boarding school, he will not speak up in front of Mr. Bracegirdle and Hobie. Theo thinks he is reading the two men's facial expressions and tone when Theo comes to the conclusion that they want him to go to boarding school; so Theo remains polite and quiet. What Theo does not understand is that he is now old enough to make some of his own decisions, i.e., a judge would consider Theo's wishes above all others.

In section vii, Theo makes a decision for himself: He will stay in New York City. He makes a plan to enter an early-college program, and he studies excessively, so much so that he thinks he is punishing himself by setting his sights so high, to make it up to



his mother. With an addictive personality, Theo throws himself into his studies to the point where he metaphorically calls the work a drug that left him too exhausted to function normally. It is like Welty is still working on earth, even though he has passed away. One of Welty's talents was to bring people together with the most appropriate antique. Welty also brought people who were appropriate for each other together. It is ironic that Welty inadvertently puts Theo in a bit of a bind with what to do with the painting; although, the ties that illegally bind Theo to the painting stem from Theo's young, grief-stricken, and depressed thoughts and actions. Theo is inadvertently his own worst enemy.

In section viii, Theo's relationship with Hobie is tainted because of the painting. As Theo clings to the painting and his mother's past memory, he strays from a present healthy relationship with his new guardian Hobie. A metaphor arises that Theo is becoming like the goldfinch pictured in the painting, i.e., The Goldfinch painting is the chain which holds Theo down, preventing him from flying free, growing and living his life. Theo is lonely and sticks with Hobie like Popchik stuck with Boris and Theo in Vegas. Herein is a metaphor that humans are like animals in their needs.

In section ix, as he is prone to do, Theo agonizes over how he fared on his tests. What overshadows all of that agony is the agony Theo feels after reading the article in the newspaper about the absconded art thieves. In his high anxiety, Theo turns to drugs again in the form of pills to cope with the stress. What is apparent throughout is the fact that Theo is doing this to himself partially, as he is growing into adulthood. This could be happening because of his personality and his feelings of grief and depression, or due to his lack of a responsible parental role model, or both. Theo now sees himself as an art thief.

Discussion Question 1

Now that Theo is clean and sober, how has his conscious mind grown? Trace his coming of age during this chapter, or lack thereof.

Discussion Question 2

Trace the metaphor that Theo's life resembles the goldfinch's life. How has Theo become the goldfinch bird in the painting?

Discussion Question 3

What does the Shop-Behind-the-Shop signify in the title of Chapter 7?

Vocabulary

precarious, bailiwick, agoramaniac, souk, blasé, ineradicable



Part III, Chapter 8: The Shop-Behind-the-Shop, continued

Summary

In section i, Theo receives his acceptance letter into the early college program.

In section ii, Theo is pleased that the early college program is not demanding and he can go through the motions. His teachers and counselors attempt to get him involved, to no avail. Theo still longs for Pippa, and prefers to work with Hobie in the shop rather than go to school. Theo remembers his mother, Boris and his father.

In sections iii to iv, Theo learns the trade of antique furniture restoration.

In sections v and vi, Theo helps Grisha, Hobie's Russian moving and storage man, at the fine arts storage building, where Theo thinks he has found a solution to the problem of The Goldfinch painting.

In section v, Theo has two anxiety-provoking incidents: the fire at Hobie's and Hobie found in Theo's bedroom fixing the window, with The Goldfinch painting still hidden.

In section vi, Grisha puts the idea into Theo's head that Hobie is not a good businessman; rather, he is an artist. On Theo's way home from a different storage building where he locks The Goldfinch painting away, he walks to Sutton Place, his old apartment building, only to find it gutted.

Analysis

In section i, despite his early-college program acceptance, Theo is not happy. His depression, lack of self-confidence and knowledge that he is an art thief overshadow any joy he lets himself feel. There is something deeper; Theo really does not want to attend college. He does so because he thinks that is what the adults in his life and society want for him.

In section ii, Theo continues to live on the outskirts of life, as he muddles through school and enjoys Pippa through the household items she leaves behind. The false sense of adulthood Theo had with Boris as they drank alcohol in Vegas is prohibited in New York, so Theo returns to his minor or childlike status. When Mrs. Lebowitz points out to Theo that his essay is about the question of fate being random, why good people suffer, and about the basic chaos and uncertainty of the world we live in, Theo is unsure whether his essay discussed those things. The randomness of fate is a major theme in this novel, i.e., the unpredictability of events outside the realm of a human's control. Through his essay writing, we see that Theo is a culmination of all of the experiences he has to date; these experiences have formed his thought processes and who he is as a person,



as this novel (Theo's writing) presents as well. We see Theo's conscious and subconscious minds integrating more in this section, as he thinks of his mother, Boris and his father.

In sections iii through vii, Theo works closely with Hobie in the shop, taking in all of the sensations and learning the tricks of the trade. It is important to note that when Hobie discusses patination, in section iii, as being one of the biggest problems in a piece, this ties in with the theme of *natures mortes*, for the patination symbolizes a form of "decay" to the metals bronze and copper. Even the physical and symbolic permanence of antique furniture has a way of "dying." Here, Theo finds hope in life through Hobie, for Hobie can repair these "dying" pieces. In actuality, Hobie restores the furniture, but he carefully leaves signs of age and "decay" to preserve the piece. It is as if the antique furniture has a life all its own, which parallels a human's (Theo's) life, and the aging or dying aspects of both are simply to be accepted and perpetuated. It is the natural order of things.

In section vii, the fact that Sutton Place is being torn down ties in with the theme of *natures mortes*, as even large buildings have ways of dying, whether by a lack of repairs and maintenance or by demolition. This shines a light on the impermanence of all things in the world.

Discussion Question 1

What are the reasons Theo is drawn to antique furniture restoration? Include Hobie's character in your analysis.

Discussion Question 2

What are the themes which predominate this chapter? Give examples of each.

Discussion Question 3

Why is this chapter entitled, yet again, *The Shop-Behind-the-Shop*, continued?

Vocabulary

mutinous, beneficence, patination, capricious, assuage, derisive, columbarium, cicatrice, strafing



Part IV, Chapter 9: Everything of Possibility

Summary

In section i, eight years later, on Madison Avenue in New York, Theo runs into Platt Barbour, who discloses that his father, Mr. Barbour, and his brother, Andy, have died in a sailing accident.

In section ii, Theo and Platt go to a bar, discussing the details behind Mr. Barbour's bipolar disorder, his trouble at Harvard Law School, his arrests, and his death of hypothermia off the coast of Northeast Harbor.

In section iii, Theo visits Mrs. Barbour at the apartment, where he likens Mrs. Barbour's room to the Sargasso Sea.

In section iv, Platt tells Theo about Tom Cable's thievery, smoking pot, and dating Kitsey.

In section v, Theo walks home from the Barbours and ponders during springtime in New York, which is when his mother died. Theo thinks how Hobie has made him a partner in the antique furniture business, and Theo reveals to the reader the scam he established to sell fakes as original pieces. One buyer, Lucius Reeve, calls Theo on the scam, and Theo tries to buy the piece back at a greater purchase price than was paid, to no avail. Theo has become quite the salesman, making a lot of money for the business. Theo remembers where he and Andy scattered his mother's ashes in the park as he continues to walk; he finds her bench, the one which says "EVERYTHING OF POSSIBILITY" on it.

In section vi, Theo is reminded of Pippa and her new boyfriend, by Hobie, when the Vogels and Hobie prepare to go out to dinner. Theo remembers how angry and hurt he was, not understanding what Pippa saw in Everett.

In sections vii through ix, Theo dines at the Barbours', seeing Toddy (now Todd) and Kitsey for the first time in years. Toddy thanks Theo for making an impression on him all those years ago, because now Toddy is studying in college to work for a nonprofit helping disadvantaged children. Kitsey, while she does not come right out and say that she is sorry for how she and Toddy treated Theo when he stayed with them, she implies that because her father and Andy have died, she knows how Theo must have felt back then. Theo learns that Kitsey was supposed to have gone sailing with Mr. Barbour that fateful day.

In sections x and xi, Theo rationalizes his prescription pill drug habit, saying that he was much more high-functioning on the drugs than off of them, due to his post-traumatic stress disorder, his anxiety and his tension. Theo puts his stash of pills in the storage locker with the paining.



In section xi, Theo begins his withdrawal program.

In sections xii through xiv, Theo schemes to put the business with Lucius Reeve to rest by having Platt Barbour verify the antique chest-on-chest's lineage in exchange for Theo's services in helping Platt sell some of the Barbour antiques. When Lucius Reeve meets with Theo downtown, Reeve tells Theo he knows all about the scam that Theo and Hobie are running to make money off of The Goldfinch painting, and offers to buy it for half a million dollars.

In sections xv and xvi, Theo decides to tell Hobie about his changeling scam, and when he does, Hobie simply wants Theo to correct it and make it right.

In section xvii, Theo wants someone to talk to about The Goldfinch. Theo has found relief in the facts printed in the newspaper, whereby speculators think the painting fell from its frame and burned in the fire. The frame hangs in the Mauritshuis. Or possibly, whoever stole the other paintings stole the Goldfinch too.

Analysis

In section i, when Theo finds out about his friend Andy's death and the death of Mr. Barbour, Theo realizes that he had made himself a ghost in the lives of the Barbours.

In section ii, the details behind Mr. Barbour's life and illness that Platt divulges act to pull Theo in to the Barbour family as an adult versus the child he was when he lived with them. The Barbours shielded the children from all of these details prior to Mr. Barbour's death; now, the children are adults and they are no longer protected from the knowledge.

In section iii, when Theo visits Mrs. Barbour, he says her room is like the Sargasso Sea, which has been depicted in various literary works as a ship graveyard, where ships get stuck permanently in seaweed, turning them into ghost ships. The sea symbolizes death. When Theo puts his hand on Mrs. Barbour's hand and when he says he is so sorry for the death of Mr. Barbour, Theo has advanced in his coming of age to the point where he is more able to express his feelings in a responsibly adult-like manner. At the end of this section, when Mrs. Barbour says that the visit was like old times, we can see that this is partially true, but the characters find themselves in the opposite position, where Theo can possibly help the Barbours after the death of the father and son.

In sections iv and v, the past and the present meet in Theo's mind, where Andy has recently died and Theo's mother died thirteen years ago. Theo says that death is all he saw. We find out that Theo is not as different from Tom Cable as he originally thinks. Theo is running an antique furniture scam – selling the changelings as if they were authentic pieces – and selling items for escalated prices. We see that Theo has some of the gifts of Welty, in the business and sales ends of the partnership. As a salesman, Theo finds he has a knack for playing up to who the customers want to be, the image they want to portray, versus allowing them to wander in and fall into a trap. Theo finds it a game to size up a customer and figure out what image they want to project. Here, we



see Theo still operates on the outskirts of life, only in reverse; Theo actively participates in this game. It is ironic because when Theo began his sales career, did he know who he was, or was there any image that he wanted to project? The career Theo has chosen for himself is one in which he has much control, versus the way he grew up, without any control.

In section vi, Theo remembers his tortured feelings during the unrequited, imagined love he feels for Pippa; Theo is coming to terms with those feelings somewhat, after all this time. This all ties in with the theme of unrequited love throughout the book; Theo psychologically engages in transference, i.e., his love for his mother is transferred to Pippa. Theo admits that Pippa represented the “unbruised” part of himself that had vanished with his mother. Theo had been mistaken, as a child, about feelings of love for a girlfriend, and now that he is twenty-six years old, he seems to have the relationship in more perspective in light of the conditions surrounding their first meeting.

In sections vii through ix, Todd’s gratitude toward Theo should help Theo realize some of his worth, and how good things can come out of tragedy. In section viii, the parallel to Charles Dickens’s *A Christmas Carol* arises when Theo mentions the evening at the Barbour’s was like the ghosts of Christmas Past and Christmas Yet to Come had joined the party. The ghosts here represent the memories of the past and the dreams of the future, i.e., hope. Theo has a new connection with Kitsey: both of their lives are poisoned with regret and if-only thoughts that may have saved the lives of their family members. Theo thinks positive thoughts in section ix when he gains the insight that the past and the present can live harmoniously together as one; nothing need be destroyed.

In section xi, Theo is withdrawing physically and mentally from drugs. The choice to withdraw proves that Theo is thinking in more responsible and adult terms, thinking about his health and well-being.

The suspense picks up when Lucius Reeve, in section xiii, tells Theo they should probably meet in person. Theo takes Reeve to a crowded downtown restaurant, and Reeve tries to call out Theo on his and Hobie’s criminal art scam to make money off the painting. Theo is shocked, yet he calls upon what his father would do in this situation, as this event is a parallel to his father’s gambling debacle. Theo denies any knowledge.

In sections xv and xvi, Theo decides to do the right thing by telling Hobie about his selling the changelings as if they were the real thing. This is probably the most responsible, grownup decision Theo has made in the novel so far. This is another minor turning point or climax, where Theo tries to head down the right path in his life. In the parallel to Theo’s father’s gambling situation, Theo now understands how his father could run away from the problem. Yet, Theo acts more grownup than his father when he admits his mistake. Theo thinks for himself now. Theo also says, in section xvi, that he is glad to be telling the truth, regarding the changelings not being junk; Theo tells Hobie that his work is good. In an adult, rational manner, Hobie tells Theo the he himself is as much to blame for the scam, because Hobie did not pay attention to the business and sales ends of the shop.



In section xvii, Theo gains insight into the major error he made in keeping The Goldfinch, especially as it is locked up in the dark. Theo's appreciation and love of art, something which touches the heart of humans across all cultures, helps him to see the error of his ways.

Discussion Question 1

What does Theo's mother's bench at the Rendezvous Point at the pond in the park signify? What does the saying, "EVERYTHING OF POSSIBILITY," mean?

Discussion Question 2

Where is Theo in his coming of age journey? How does he act more like a psychologically responsible adult?

Discussion Question 3

What causes Theo to put his partner Hobie's business reputation at risk? Discuss not only the immediate motive, but Theo's upbringing and background.

Vocabulary

morose, insolence, deftly, acuity, reticence, gallantly, swish, surmise, changeling, perusal, perverse, obfuscation, connoisseur, bon vivant, auspices, bilious, lucid, cuckolded, maudlin, malinger, anomie, stupor, provenance



Part IV, Chapter 10: The Idiot

Summary

In section i, Theo and Kitsey go apartment hunting and shopping for china before they are to get married.

In section ii, Theo reports how the engagement to Kitsey happened within two months of seeing her again and in fact, Kitsey proposed to Theo, which Kitsey says would make Mrs. Barbour so happy. Theo finally makes a conscious decision to let go of Pippa and is able to move forward with his life, though he still feels some pain with which he will need to live. Mrs. Barbour discloses to Theo that she always thought of him as one of her own.

In section iii, Theo remembers and worries over Lucius Reeve, who sent Hobie a correspondence card regarding moving forward with the deal; the mysterious men who stalk Theo, whom Grisha asked about; and the fairness of marrying Kitsey with his potential financial problems looming.

In section iv, as Theo leaves Kitsey after he lied to her about having something to do, he walks past a bar and three movie theaters, and considers calling his drug dealer, hoping the family and friend social gatherings will slow down closer to the wedding. What Theo does not expect, as he goes from bar to bar looking for a woman with whom his drug dealer works, is that he will run into Boris.

In sections vi through ix, Boris and Theo continue their conversations of past and present, with Boris telling Theo how depressed and suicidal Theo was back in Vegas. Boris admits to stealing The Goldfinch painting from Theo; he made a fortune on the painting and wants to give back to Theo. Boris wants Theo to work for him, but Theo wants to set his life straight. Boris's driver Gyuri pronounces Theo's name as "Fyodor" in his Russian accent.

In section x, Theo goes to the storage locker to retrieve the painting, only to find a Civics book in its place.

In sections xiv through xvii, Boris takes Theo uptown with him to Horst's house with a lead on where The Goldfinch painting may be located. Horst is a junkie who works in the criminal underground drug culture. Theo and Horst find common ground in their love of art and dissect The Goldfinch painting. After a twenty-two-year old boy overdoses, Boris and Theo leave immediately.

In sections xviii through xxii, Theo catches his fiancée Kitsey walking hand in hand with and kissing Tom Cable. When he calls her on it, she first denies, then she then acts unjustly persecuted, then she lies, and she finally admits it.



When Theo returns home from Kitsey's, in section xxiv, he runs into Pippa at Hobie's, whose plane was re-routed on her way to Montreal, and Theo asks her out to see a movie.

In sections xxv through xxviii, Theo and Pippa go on their movie date, and afterward, sit in a quiet, cozy wine bar to talk one on one.

In sections xxix through xxxv, Theo continues to remember the quality time he spends with Pippa, but he must get ready for his engagement party with Kitsey. Theo does not want to be at the party, so he takes some OxyContin. At Hobie's nudging, Theo attends to the guests, only to find out from Hobie that a man who now calls himself Havistock Irving, named Sloane Grisman when Hobie met him, attends and is notorious for scamming wealthy, elderly people out of their antiques, after Irving discloses to Theo that Lucius Reeve, named Lucian Race when Hobie met him, is a close associate of his. In the end of chapter 10, Boris swoops in to the party and steals Theo.

Analysis

In section i, while apartment shopping in the present, Theo hears an ominous hum sound in the dwelling units, which foreshadows happenings in Kitsey and Theo's relationship. Theo is so sensitive that he senses by intuition negative happenings in the past in the vacated apartments, but he doubts himself, as he thinks he may be mentally ill. He rationalizes that other people's problems from the past cannot hurt him and Kitsey, yet the past rears its ugly head as Theo thinks of his mother's apartment being cleared out. Theo still suffers a great deal of pain, where the past meets the present, or the subconscious mind meets the conscious mind. The china represents Theo's skepticism about the future.

In section ii, Theo's newly found conscious insights include: he must let go of the idea of Pippa because the fantasies are a sickness stemming from childhood; he really can make someone else happy (Mrs. Barbour); he feels depressed in the winter and tries to figure out why; he is not the social butterfly that Kitsey is; and Kitsey is not as deep and warm a person as he would like for her to be, but he keeps waiting.

In section iii, Theo's conscience questions the fairness of marrying Kitsey with the potential financial problems he is likely to have when the customers come to return their changelings. Theo continues to slowly grow toward adulthood as he cares more for his health and for other people in his life.

In section iv, while Theo resists the temptation to have a drink in a bar, he does not resist the temptation to seek out drugs. On his journey to secure drugs, he ironically, or not so ironically, runs into Boris, in New York City, which carries with it a foreshadowing of a suspenseful adventure.

In section vii, Boris's driver Gyuri pronounces Theodore's name "Fyodor" in his Russian accent, which is also a parallel to the Fyodor Dostoyevsky who wrote the novel *The Idiot*, considered one of the most brilliant literary works of the Golden Age. In *The Idiot*,



a twenty-six-year-old trusting and naïve prince with the last name Myskin returns to Russia after being in a Swiss sanatorium. Disasters strike Prince Myshkin, despite his good and honorable nature. We see the parallel between Theo's character and Prince Myshkin, whereby despite Theo's inherent goodness, bad things do indeed happen to good people, which is an example of the randomness of fate theme.

In section ix, after Boris invites Theo to work for or with him, Theo tells Boris he is trying to set his life straight, a conscious and responsible decision on Theo's part. Boris then tells Theo that he took The Goldfinch painting, made a fortune off it, and wants to share the profits with Theo, giving back. When Theo says he has not looked at the painting in years, and he thought he still had it, Boris tells Theo he is the "Idiot." Also in section ix, Theo finds out how depressed, suicidal, and grief-stricken he really was in Las Vegas, which is an eye-opener for Theo in his coming of age journey.

In section x, the Civics book in place of the painting is an irony. The pictures on the cover show many different cultures working together for the benefit of the community in America. In this underground world of crime and drugs that Theo has found himself, there is no democracy or government. It is a world driven by a lust for money, greed and power, and it is a far cry from the light and truth of The Goldfinch painting. Theo discovers that the whole time he has been obsessing and worried about what to do with the painting, it has all been for naught; he never had the painting once back in New York.

In section xvi, Theo and Horst, an underground criminal art thief and junkie, have the love of art in common, which ties in with the theme that art touches the heart, crossing all boundaries of different cultures, even legal and illegal cultures. Theo finds himself caught in the two cultures, at a crossroads of which way to turn. Horst dissects the beauty of The Goldfinch painting in front of Theo, concluding that all of the great master painters make jokes within their work, building up an illusion; it is not until one takes a closer look that one realizes the farce. This is an internal parallel to what happened when Theo holds onto what he thinks is The Goldfinch painting, but in reality, it is a civics textbook. When Horst says he knows The Goldfinch as Der Distelfink, in German, we see that art transcends and speaks to all cultures, bringing different worlds together.

In section xvi, Theo is forced to confront his own drug demons of his past when he witnesses the boy overdosing on Horst's floor. One would think that this would frighten Theo into abandoning his drug habit for good. Also in this section, one can see Boris's intelligence and skill in investigating and strategizing when it comes to finding the twice stolen artwork.

In sections xviii through xxii, Theo finds out Kitsey really loves Tom Cable but cannot be with him because no one in her family likes him. Theo and Kitsey will have a marriage of the head, not the heart, meaning they will marry because it is the right thing to do for the Barbour family and for Theo, who Kitsey says is a better person when he is with her. There is no love. We see that Kitsey first denies, then acts and then lies about her relations with Tom, actions which tie in with the notion that humans are actors on a stage.



In section xxiv, Theo finds the confidence to ask Pippa to see a movie with him. He follows his heart in an act of self-confidence and bravery for him; he takes a chance of his own.

Sections xxv through xxviii: At the busy seven o'clock showing of the movie, Theo's anxiety and fear of crowds goes underground while he is with Pippa; this helps Theo come out into the light of the world and really live his life, whether it is a chance he is taking with Pippa or not. Theo is following his heart, boosting his spirit, and taming the fears in his head. When Theo sees Pippa is troubled by the movie, his head and heart sink, and we see that his emotional state is very susceptible to outside forces, possibly indicating that he has inherited some of the bipolar tendencies of his father, or that he is still very much a child in the eyes of love. Theo identifies with genius and eccentric pianist Glenn Gould, who is a parallel to the real world. Through what Theo begins to see through Pippa's eyes while watching an interview with Mr. Gould regarding the legal declaration of Mr. Gould and a recording engineer as brothers, Theo connects the unusual blood brother ceremonies of his with Tom Cable and Boris, seeing these as unacceptable. Theo grows via an engagement in his community, with other people, via movies and other arts, via his own thought processes. Theo has a deeper relationship with Pippa than he does with Kitsey because Pippa listens to Theo, she cares, and she makes Theo feel like a better man. The two open up with one another about the bombing, their feelings and about Welty. Theo feels like Welty is a kindred spirit to him. Here, we see Theo has found some permanence to life through his short earthly relationship with Welty and Welty's continued spirit; Theo says everything in the shop draws him like a flame. This flame is a symbol for the mothlike spirit of Welty and the convergence of Theo's and Welty's lives, earthly and spiritual. At the end of section xxviii, Theo reinforces in his own mind that Pippa just wants to be friends with him, thinking she really does care, especially that she feels bad because she knows his condition. Here again, Theo thinks he can read minds, while all along he may be wrong; there is always hope.

In sections xxix through xxxv, the element of suspense arises when a connection is made between engagement party guest Havistock Irving (Sloane Griscam) and Lucius Reeve (Lucian Race). When Irving walks away with Kitsey, teasing that they will gossip about her fiancée, this intensifies the suspense that Theo's life may be turned upside down yet again.

Discussion Question 1

How did holding on to the painting give Theo such strength and power in his adult life to date? What is his realization now that he knows he does not have the painting anymore?



Discussion Question 2

What does Horst mean when he says that all of the greatest master painters on earth make jokes to amuse themselves? How is art a metaphor for life? Trace this throughout the novel up to this point.

Discussion Question 3

How does Pippa make Theo want to be a better person?

Vocabulary

tacit, ardor, fetishism, consolations, ostentatious, skive, riposte, elided, ebullient, sublime, venerable, diaphanous, saturnine, proclivity, patois, placidly, renunciate, vexed, scurrilous, dammit



Part V, Chapter 11: The Gentleman's Canal

Summary

In section i, Theo discovers he is traveling to Amsterdam, Netherlands, Boris's suspected location of The Goldfinch, where Theo will act as the American buyer of the painting.

Before leaving Hobie's, in section ii, Theo leaves Pippa a note by her bright summer green boots, telling her he loves her, and draping an expensive topaz necklace he bought at auction over her boot.

In Amsterdam, despite the Christmas festivities, Theo finds the setting quite dreary, in section iv. Theo, Boris and Gyuri discuss the meeting in which the man who supposedly has The Goldfinch will sell it to Theo, all arranged by Boris's colleague Cherry (Vitya or Victor Cherry). Theo's hotel room is the rendezvous point, just as his house used to be in Vegas.

In sections v through xvii, Boris and Gyuri dress Theo so he resembles a wealthy American, but when Theo sees Boris's gun, he wants to back out of the plan. On the way to the meeting, Boris puts their passports in the glove box of the car. They park the car in a parking garage where Victor Cherry (Vitya) and Shirley T meet them, and they take the white Range Rover to The Purple cow restaurant to exchange their money for the painting. As Theo hands the bank draft to the gray-haired man, Cherry, in an improvised, spur-of-the-moment action, hits the gray-haired man with the butt of his gun. While Boris, gun drawn, forces the other man, the Indonesian, to his knees, Victor Cherry retrieves The Goldfinch painting from the broom closet in the kitchen, flexcuffs the Indonesian, and the trio flees the scene to return to the parking garage. Boris was not about to pay the men one penny to retrieve property they had stolen from him in the first place. Boris gives the money case to Gyuri and Shirley T. for their work. Cherry was simply repaying a debt he owed Boris, for after Cherry was erroneously arrested for a crime he did not commit, Boris found the true culprit and saved Cherry's life. Back in the parking garage, after Gyuri, Cherry and Shirley T. left, two middle-aged men, named Martin and Frits, and the Asian boy, hold up Boris and Theo at gunpoint, demanding the painting. Theo's order to Boris to give Martin the painting went unheeded until Frits pulled Boris's hair and shoved his gun under Boris's chin. After Martin takes the package from Boris, he tells Frits to take Theo and Boris in a dark corner of the parking garage. Boris flicks his cigarette so it lodges in Frits's shirt collar, four shots rang out, killing Frits, and hitting Martin and Boris. Theo retrieves Frits's fallen gun, and when Martin raises his gun at Theo, Theo shoots Martin in the shoulder, and then above the eye. The Asian boy ran away with the package. After Boris and Theo clean up in a garage bathroom, Boris plants drugs, a white powder, at the scene in the garage to throw off the authorities, and begins driving to Theo's hotel. Stuck in traffic, Boris orders



Theo to walk to his hotel, which is close. Theo showers his body and clothing, takes some of the drugs Boris gave him, and falls into a subconscious haze.

Analysis

In section ii, the bright summer green of Pippa's wellies, plus Emerald City, and Ozma of Oz's color symbolize multiple meanings for Theo's relationship with Pippa. First, the bright summer green represents Theo's growing love and the freshness of his deeper feelings for the young woman. Second, the Emerald City, which is the fictional capital city of the Land of Oz in the Wizard of Oz, represents a false world, for in this parallel, visitors to the Emerald City were made to wear special glasses which turned the City green and beautiful. Theo chooses to wear a pair of illusion-creating glasses when he sees Pippa. Finally, Ozma of Oz is a fictional story whereby Dorothy saves the queen and her ten children from the evil Nome King's spell which turns them into ornaments. Pippa is parallel to Dorothy in that Theo thinks she can be his savior.

In section v, when Theo awakens in his hotel room to the sound of his cell phone spinning on the bedside table, the language paints a picture of being under water, as reflections of the canal shine on the ceiling of his room. Theo feels the heavy weight of the excursion. In section viii, when Theo looks at the full bright moon, the only point of reference for him in this foreign country, it is not the stable, anchoring moon of Vegas. This represents the surreal feeling Theo experiences, and the dread he has at the light going completely dark. It is a mistake, what he is doing with Boris.

In section xiii, after Theo shoots and kills Martin, he stares at his shoes in the car ride back to the hotel with Boris. The shoes symbolize who Theo is as a person. He was a very different person when he put his shoes on the day he killed a man, than when he takes them off later. When Theo shoots Martin, this is the climax of Theo's story, the point where the main character is forever changed.

In section xvi, Theo has a revelation, while under the influence of drugs, within his subconscious mind, that worry is the mark of a spiritually unevolved person. He thinks the scriptures are correct when they give advice to look at the lilies of the field that never worry. Here, as an adult, Theo looks more to religion for the answers to life's great questions. One can seek answers via enlightenment, via the dark underworld, via religion, or via any number of other means.

In section xvii, Theo comes to the conclusions that humans are basically temporary, and that it is impossible to nail down any sort of pattern in life, which fit in with the nature's mortal theme and the randomness of fate theme, respectively.

Discussion Question 1

How does Theo attempt to exert the responsible adult he has grown into in this chapter? Give one example of where this does not work, and why? Give one example where it works, and why.



Discussion Question 2

What changed in Theo to make him express his love for Pippa?

Discussion Question 3

What does the canal signify in Amsterdam?

Vocabulary

accretions, jubilation, verso, jocular, adder, disincarnate



Part V, Chapter 12: The Rendezvous Point

Summary

Alone in his hotel room in Amsterdam in section i, with only his thoughts, Dutch television and room service in the dark, Theo thinks about his past, present and the lack of his future. He waits for Boris to contact him, but when his cell phone becomes permanently damaged, he brainstorms a way out of Amsterdam and back to the States.

In sections ii and iii, Theo heads to the train station, dropping the soiled shirt in a trash can on his way. Without his passport, however, he cannot travel anywhere, and getting a new one takes time and documentation; he goes back to his hotel, where he drinks gin, runs through his choices, slips into deep depression, and works on writing suicide letters to Kitsey, Hobie, Mrs. Barbour, and Pippa.

In section iv, Theo remembers his mother after she died and how he used to have nightmares of her absence, continually. Theo's mother comes to him in a dream.

In section v, Christmas church bells toll, shaking Theo from the reverie of his mother. Theo gets up, showers, packs, flushes his drugs down the toilet, and decides to go to the American consulate to turn himself in. Boris visits, bringing a bag with legal reward money in it, after Boris and his organization implement a set up and call the art cops to deliver information about the whereabouts of The Goldfinch. Soon, other artwork is located and returned as well. Theo travels around the country buying back the fraudulent antique pieces in the end.

Analysis

In section i, one irony, which arises when Theo sees his father on the television back in his acting, is that Theo looks like his father; indeed, they could be twins. No matter how much Theo denies the similarities between him and Larry Decker, they are a lot alike in looks and manner. The fact that Theo does not know what will play on Dutch television parallels the unknowns in Theo's life currently, intensifying his fear and confusion. Theo hides in the dark, living underground, as he orders room service in only the "blackest pre-dawn" hours. There is an unreal, hellish quality of light in the weather of Amsterdam, which parallels the surreal of Theo's situation, despite the festive Christmas atmosphere. This contrast is a parallel to Theo's coming of age journey, whereby he grows from a child to an adult.

Theo tries repeatedly to clean Martin's blood stains off his shirt, to no avail. This alludes to the permanence of Theo's action in murdering the man; this knowledge will stay with Theo for the rest of his life. There will be no undoing what he has done. Although the snow white swan on the label of the Dutch cleanser symbolizes purity and light, the



snow-capped mountains seem to symbolize lightness out of reach to Theo, and the skull and crossbones simply represent poison. It is important to note that swans also symbolize the muses who provide inspiration to poets and artists. Theo says that he died after murdering Martin.

It is as if Theo has come full circle, like the canals in Amsterdam. At the young age of thirteen, Theo held a delusional belief that he killed his mother; now twenty-six, Theo holds a realistic belief that he killed Martin. Yet, here, Theo does not necessarily mourn the loss of Martin; he mourns the loss of *The Goldfinch*, a symbol of his mother, and what he thinks is his permanent extinguishing of a light at the heart of the whole world.

While Theo does not want to leave Boris in Amsterdam, Theo seems better able to control his thoughts and emotions, much as a responsible adult would, when he says that the thought of Sascha's men getting Boris is not a thought he can allow himself to follow.

In section iii, Theo thinks about his choices: he can wait for Boris, he can run, he can turn himself in, or he can kill himself. We see that Theo has had a lifelong battle with depression, with suicide always in the back of his mind. "It was nothing I hadn't thought of, plenty, and in far less taxing circumstances; the urge shook me grandly and unpredictably, a poisonous whisper that never wholly left me, that on some days lingered just on the threshold of my hearing but on others roared up uncontrollably into a sort of lurid visionary frenzy, ..." (paragraph 3). While Theo has grown to learn how to control his thoughts somewhat, he is not able to control his emotions as well. In fact, Theo may never be able to control his emotions if he is bipolar like his father. In an irony, Theo's act of writing his suicide letters is actually therapeutic and may possibly have helped him to abandon the idea of killing himself, especially when he is writing the letter to Hobie with the analogy of the sick puppy, a puppy who was already sick before Theo and his mom got it and had to put it down. The presentation of Theo's dead body is another thought which brings him up short in his preliminary plans to commit suicide. Finally, the Christmas music he hears is not quite the right note to go out on either. Theo is scared of death, as he discovers, when he seriously considers killing himself, when realistic thoughts of his own death face him. After this, Theo thinks about the "what-ifs" as people go by in the hallway outside his hotel door. Theo has circled back to the "what-if" questions of the mind, not reality, but fantasy, not something he has been able to create in his own life.

In section iv, Theo finally finds his mother; she comes to visit him. After all of his continual nightmares regarding the absence of his mother, and his inability to find her, Audrey comes to Theo in his greatest time of need, hopefully giving Theo some closure to the endless destructive loop or cycle of his life to date. This signifies the ultimate in hope. This is the very thing to which Theo never found a healthy closure. The canal in Amsterdam is a symbol for the endless, continual, destructive loop of Theo's life. Theo entertains some more positive thoughts on the topic of death, i.e., what if someone familiar came to greet you at death's door? This alleviates some of Theo's fear of death, making this trip to a foreign country less scary. When Theo's mother says to him that he will just have to wait and see, she could be talking about what it is like on the other side,



in death. The final revelation for Theo is that his mother will always be with him, in her exasperated breath which he can still hear, and all of the other memories he has of her.

In section v, Theo feels tremendous relief after his mother visits him; he now knows what he will do: turn himself in. When Boris arrives at Theo's hotel room, we see a change in Theo. He is disgusted by the sight of Boris, and he wants nothing to do with the money that Boris brings in the bag. It is not until Boris tells him it is legal money that Theo begins to feel an abstract gratitude toward Boris. The biggest irony of all in *The Goldfinch* is how Boris's (and Theo's) wrong decisions and actions prompted something great to happen in the world: the return of many stolen artworks.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the multiple ironies which arise when Theo sees his twenty-five-year-old father on television in Amsterdam in the American cop show.

Discussion Question 2

What happens to Theo after his mother visits him in a dream? Is this the climax of Theo's story? Or is the climax the moment when Theo pulls the trigger and kills Martin? Or is the climax the tolling of the Christmas church bells? Or are there several climactic points in this novel?

Discussion Question 3

How does Theo justify living out the rest of his life? What matters the most to him?

Vocabulary

variform, displacement, stolidly, empirical, endogenous, plainchant, liturgical, hexachords, incongruous, maudlin, inexplicable



Characters

Theodore Decker

Theodore Decker is the thirteen-year-old main character of *The Goldfinch*, whose life and coming of age are highlighted in this novel up until he turns twenty-six. After Theo's mother dies in a terrorist explosion in a New York art museum, and he survives, young Theo is left to pick up the pieces and make sense of a life which is foreign to him without his mother, his only true landmark. First, Theo is temporarily placed with the Barbours, a wealthy Park Avenue family, whose son Andy has been friends with Theo ever since elementary school, where they both skipped a grade and suffered beatings at the hands of bullies. Theo begins his journey as a fairly innocent teenager, who is depressed and grief-stricken over the loss of his mother. Mrs. Barbour held Theo in high regard because she thought Theo protected Andy and helped Andy to socialize more. Toward the end of the novel, Mrs. Barbour told Theo that she always thought of him as one of her own. While it was difficult for Theo to get used to the rich, posh surroundings of the Barbour home, and the fact that he felt like he was always on display there, Theo longs to return to the Barbours' home after his father and his father's girlfriend, Xandra, sweep in to take Theo to live in Las Vegas.

In Las Vegas, with his gambling, alcoholic father, Theo has no rules, no boundaries, and no parental guidance. Although Theo meets Boris, the greatest friend he will ever have, in Vegas, Boris is a bad influence on young Theodore. The two smoke cigarettes, drink alcohol, do drugs together, and steal food, because this is the life that Boris knows. Theodore experiences a different type of love in Vegas, the love of a best friend. Theo's subconscious and conscious minds continue to converge and certain truths make themselves apparent. The first is that things always change, like the wind. The second is that time passes, represented by sand. And the third is that the conscious mind helps one navigate the vast world in a responsible, knowing manner, represented by the stars. Since Theo gets no professional help with his grief, toward the end of Theo's stay in Vegas, his father dies in a drunk-driving car accident, running away from a gambling debt that he owes. Theo is now an orphan. Theo makes a grownup decision to leave Las Vegas and return to New York because he does not want to get caught up in the social services system of Nevada.

Once back in New York, Theo goes to Hobie's house. Back at Hobie's, once again a minor who cannot buy alcohol, Theo throws himself into his studies for the early college program entrance examination, because he thinks the adults in his life and society want him to take this path. Theo quickly finds that he loves to work with Hobie in the shop, instead of attending school. Theo discovers his calling, which is similar to Welty's. He is a great salesman and businessman; although he loses his way when the IRS demands the back taxes Hobie owes, and Theo devises a scheme to sell the changelings as authentic antique pieces.



Theo still has The Goldfinch painting, which he realizes is one of the only permanent pieces of light, and hope, in the world; he realizes his act of taking the painting was most detrimental to the entire world; people, Theo says of Martin, whom he murdered in Amsterdam, are temporary beings, whose acts can outlive them. Another important lesson Theo learns is that life is not set up in black and white thoughts of good and bad, and good begets good, and bad begets bad. Sometimes, as Boris tells Theo, good begets bad, and bad begets good; there is a preordainment of events in life which were simply meant to happen.

In the end, Theo concludes five basic lessons: (1) life is short, (2) fate is cruel, but maybe not always random, (3) death always wins, (4) our job is to immerse ourselves in life, wading right into the cesspool, and (5) it is a glory and privilege to love what death cannot touch. Theo's story ends with hope: "For if disaster and oblivion have followed this painting down through time—so too has love. Insofar as it is immortal (and it is) I have a small, bright, immutable part in that immortality. It exists; and it keeps on existing. And I add my own love to the history of people who have loved beautiful things, and looked out for them, and pulled them from the fire, and sought them when they were lost, and tried to preserve them and save them while passing them along literally from hand to hand, singing out brilliantly from the wreck of time to the next generation of lovers, and the next." (Chapter 12, part viii, last paragraph.)

Boris Volodymyrovych Pavlikovsky

Boris is the greatest friend Theo will ever have and the first one with which he experiences love, even for all of his inadequacies. Despite Boris's bad influence on Theo with drug and alcohol use, and criminal acts, Boris perhaps helped Theo learn two of the most important lessons of all: that fate may be preordained, which is what Theo's father believed, and that the world cannot be seen by black and white thinking of good and bad. Sometimes, good actions deliver bad results (Theo had good intentions when he saved The Goldfinch from the museum, while simultaneously denying the world the opportunity to view the beauty of the artwork); and sometimes bad actions deliver good results (Boris stole Theo's painting, and it got caught up in the criminal underground, complete with ransom and murder, yet its recovery led to the recovery of many other stolen works of art).

Boris helped Theo when he suffered from his post-traumatic stress disorder, as Theo screamed in the middle of the night. Theo never felt self-conscious over these episodes because he saw in Boris that it was not so unusual to awaken screaming in the middle of the night.

Boris is a character who Theo respects and enjoys because Boris is fearless; Boris dives right into who he is, the good and the bad. Boris enjoys himself and can see the positive in the negative and vice versa. In the same respect that Boris was a bad influence on Theo, Theo is a good influence on Boris.



James Hobart (Hobie)

James Hobart, or Hobie, was Welty's partner at the Hobart and Blackwell shop; he is a mild-mannered, respectable antique furniture restoration artist who represents the stability, love and a part of the semblance of permanence Theo needs in his life. Hobie is the most solid, guiding parental force in Theo's life after his mother dies.

As Hobie shared his unjust stories about his own father, he bonds with Theo, and helps to put Theo's understanding about his own father into a different perspective.

Hobie is actually a character who remains a positive influence in Theo's life on a continual basis. Hobie teaches Theo about furniture restoration, eventually making Theo a partner in the business, and getting Theo started in his career.

Samantha Barbour

Samantha Barbour is the high society, charity-minded lady, who takes Theo in after his mother dies. Samantha tells Theo that she always thought of him as one of her own, and she was always so touched at how Theo befriended Andy, her son, and made his life better.

When Mrs. Barbour's husband and son Andy die in a sailing accident, she withdraws from society, not going out anymore. Theo returns the kindness that Mrs. Barbour once gave him when she took him in to live in their home; Theo gets Mrs. Barbour to go out more and to help her with her grief over the passing of her husband and son. Theo also protects Mrs. Barbour from scam artist Lucius Reeve when he tells Kitsey to keep Reeve away from the apartment.

Theo experiences a different kind of love with Mrs. Barbour. In fact, he loves her so much that he would waive his own happiness to make her happy, i.e., he would marry Kitsey, who thought she was in love with someone else (Tom Cable).

Larry Decker

Larry Decker is Theo's alcoholic, gambling, manic-depressive father who dies in a drunk-driving car accident as he runs away from Mr. Silver, a man to whom he owes a gambling debt which he cannot pay.

Theo's father is not a very likeable character to his son in the beginning because Larry abandoned Theo and Theo's mother Audrey when he took off to Las Vegas with his booze, his girlfriend Xandra, and Theo's mother's emerald earrings. Throughout the novel, however, Theo comes to terms with and understands his father a bit better, especially with the help of Boris, who can identify with Larry more so than Theo. But Theo never mourns his father's passing.



In the end, when Theo is consciously collecting his thought patterns and lessons, he says that we are who we are, we cannot choose who we are born to be. Theo does, however, give his dad credit for trying to want the sensible thing, i.e., Theo's mother, a steady job, and Theo. Now Theo understands his father's urge to run away; it was simply not who his dad was.

Audrey Decker

Audrey Decker is Theo's mother who is Theo's hope, light, life and world. Her death in the terrorist attack on the New York art museum throws Theo out into a vast world, grief-stricken, confused, depressed and dealing with the other blows that life had in store for him. Through Theo's coming of age journey, what he seeks is the type of love and landmark that his mother provided for him. With that gone, Theo becomes numb and gets lost in a sea of drugs and alcohol in Vegas, other deaths, and the criminal underground. Theo realizes that many things that happened after her death were his own fault.

Chance Barbour

Chance Barbour is the manic-depressive father of Andy, Platt, Kitsey and Toddy Barbour, who dies in a sailing accident, along with his son, Andy. Mr. Barbour was always an excellent model of fatherhood while Theo stayed with them, but he struggled with his own demons.

Tom Cable

Tom Cable is Theo's friend from school, who he gets suspended with for smoking on school property, and who he enters homes for sale with, stealing various items like cash and video games. Theo defriended Tom after Tom treated him poorly after Theo's mother died. Tom also sees Kitsey Barbour, Theo's fiancée, while Theo is engaged to her.

Xandra

Theo's father's girlfriend who is an over-forty, sexy, non-maternal woman who provides no parental guidance whatsoever to Theo.

Mr. Pavlikovsky

Mr. Pavlikovsky is Boris's Russian alcoholic and abusive father.



Mrs. Lebowitz

Mrs. Lebowitz is Theo's cinema professor, who points out to him that his essay discusses the randomness of fate, a major theme of this novel.

Naaman Silver (Bobo Silver)

Naaman Silver is the gambling debt collector who visits Larry Decker's home, causing Larry Decker to flee. Silver also hires Boris for awhile after Theo returns to New York.

Enrique

Enrique is the social worker helping to place Theo, searching for Theo's relatives. He also attends official interviews and police interrogations as Theo's representative.

Marjorie Beth Weinberg

Marjorie Beth Weinberg is the social worker at the Department of Child and Family Services who calls Theo looking for his dad.

Andy Barbour

Andy Barbour is Theo's highly intelligent, physically awkward elementary school friend whose family takes Theo in after his mother died. Andy dies in a sailboat accident with his father, Mr. Barbour.

Mrs. Swanson

Mrs. Swanson is the school counselor who suggested Theo throw ice cubes at a tree to deal with the anger stage of grief.

Dave

Dave the psychiatrist is the psychiatrist appointed to Theo after his mother died.

Mr. Beeman

Mr. Beeman is the principal of Theo's school in New York during the time that Theo's mother dies.



Dorothy Decker

Dorothy Decker is Theo's alienated paternal grandmother who offers to put Theo up in a hotel near their home after Theo's mother's death. Dorothy sends Theo a sympathy card with a wilted red tulip on the front of it.

Bob Decker

Bob Decker is Theo's alienated grandfather on his father's side.

Margaret Blackwell Pierce

Margaret Blackwell Pierce is Pippa's aunt, Welty's half-sister, who comes to take Pippa to Texas to heal after her injuries.

Horst

Horst is a druggie/junkie who has ties with The Goldfinch painting.

Sascha

Sascha is the one Boris thinks took The Goldfinch painting to pawn for money and drugs.

Victor Cherry

Victor Cherry is a colleague of Boris's. He is instrumental in getting The Goldfinch returned to the art cops.

Gyuri

Gyuri is Boris's driver, after Boris is convicted of drunk driving.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Goldfinch Painting

The Goldfinch painting is a link between Theo and his mother; while Theo could not save his mother, he was able to save the painting, which is a metaphor for permanence, beauty, hope and light in the world.

The Blackwell ring

The Blackwell ring symbolizes the circle of life and how, generation after generation, artwork and its permanence and beauty are there for all countries to enjoy. The Blackwell ring also serves to pull Theo into Welty's circle of friends.

The drooping tulip greeting card

The sympathy card which Dorothy Decker, Theo's paternal grandmother, sent to Theo after his mother's death, is a symbol for the theme of nature's morte or death in life. This card is also a sign that something is inherently flawed in Theo's grandmother.

Rain

The rain symbolizes sadness.

Pigeons

Theo feels like a sick pigeon because while he is relieved that none of the dead bodies are his mother in the museum, he is traumatized for those known dead.

Another meaning for pigeons surfaces when Theo backs out of a restaurant because he remembers his mother and him eating there. The pigeons outside are flying low, they are symbols for house and home; they also signify determination, and the sighting can be a reminder to be brave and hang in there despite the challenges in life.

The skies

The wide open skies symbolize freedom, peace and infinity.



Red/Orange sunset

The color red can mean danger or love; the color orange can mean adventure and excitement. The flames shooting from the sky on one of Mr. Barbour's sailing trips provide a dichotomy in symbolism. On the one hand, flames/fire represents destruction; on the other hand, fire provides light and can cleanse and purify.

The color green

The color green evolves and its symbolism changes throughout the novel. First, the green bell at Hobie's could signify to Theo that he must go and take action. Green could also mean youth and inexperience. Second, the bright summer green of Pippa's boots represents Theo's growing love and the freshness of his deeper feelings. Third, green can symbolize money, as in the criminal underground art organization. Lastly, green can symbolize decay and death.

The sea

The sea is a symbol whose meaning changes throughout the novel. The sea can represent wants or desires, freedom, loneliness, death, or rebirth, depending upon the context of its usage.

The full moon

The moon is a symbol of the awareness of the subconscious mind.

Wind

The wind symbolizes change.

Sand

The sand symbolizes the passage of time or something which is temporary.

Stars

The stars symbolize an awareness of the conscious mind.

White swan

A white swan symbolizes purity and light.



Settings

New York art museum

In the art museum, the theme of nature's mores, or death in life, is established through The Anatomy Lesson painting and others in the same exhibit. The foreshadowing of The Anatomy Lesson painting itself comes to pass in the art museum when terrorists detonate a bomb, which kills Theo's mother and others.

Sutton Place

This is the building where Theo and his mother's apartment is located. Theo goes through a plethora of emotions and learns different lessons about his home. First, after his mother dies, Theo does not want to leave the apartment, instead wanting to preserve things the way that they are. Second, after Theo is forced to leave by the social workers, he feels incredible pain as his mother's things are boxed up, sold or donated. Third, when the building is being gutted by construction workers, Theo feels another sense of loss. This ties in with the themes of death in life and nothing is really permanent in the world.

The Barbours' apartment

The Barbours' apartment, with its subdued, relaxed lighting, its Chinese and other antiques, is like a gallery which acts as a dichotomy for Theo. On the one hand, he likes the low, relaxed lighting. On the other hand, he feels as if he is on display, in a museum, or such.

After Theo falls in love with the Barbours, he wants to protect them from the scamming antics of Lucius Reeve, so he warns Kitsey to never let Reeve into their apartment home on Park Avenue.

Hobart and Blackwell

The Hobart and Blackwell shop and apartment is Theo's favorite place to be. With its low light, the richness of the brown walls and furniture, and its safe, permanent feeling, Theo is happy that he can make himself a "permanent" fixture between its walls.

The furniture shop, where Hobie repairs and renovates furniture, is a place of refuge for Theo. After the many deaths in the book (Audrey Decker, Larry Decker, Chance Barbour, and Andy Barbour) and along the lines of the theme of death in life, Hobie and his work represent a repair to the decay, a re-creation of something once too damaged.

Theo finds his professional calling in the shop.



Las Vegas

Las Vegas, or Sin City, is the home of Theo's father and his girlfriend Xandra, and the place Theo goes to live after Larry Decker comes to retrieve his son from the Barbour's. Vegas is also the place Theo meets Boris, where the two drink and do drugs in excess, and engage in stealing food from grocery stores so they can eat. While Theo does not gamble, Theo learns an important lesson from his father, who is an avid gambler. Once Larry loses a large amount of money gambling, and the debt collector comes knocking on Larry's door, Larry runs away, only to find himself a victim of a drunk driving accident. Las Vegas is the place where Theo's father dies. Theo, like his father in this respect, flees Las Vegas, so he will not end up in social services custody.

Amsterdam parking garage

The parking garage is the location of Theo's murder of Martin.

Amsterdam hotel

The Amsterdam hotel near the canal is Theo's self-imposed jail cell after he murders Martin.



Themes and Motifs

Death in Life (Natures Mortes)

This major theme, death in life or natures mortes, highlights the significance of the temporary existence of life in this world. Master painters have addressed this theme in depth. For instance, the "Portraiture and Natures Mortes" exhibit at the museum in New York, which Theo and his mother go visit, shows paintings by Carel Fabritius (The Goldfinch), Rembrandt (The Anatomy Lesson), and Frans Hals (The Boy with the Skull), which are parallel to the real world. In the novel, Theo's mother tells Theo that a painter's use of wilted flower petals or black spots on a piece of fruit has special meaning to the painter and the painting's audience. The painter is sharing a secret or symbolic meaning with the onlooker.

Death in life is something that people must be cognizant of in their lives, as all humans, as biological beings, begin dying from the moment they are born. It is not only the decay and natural aging process in the paintings that entails death in life, humans may die of other causes, on a moment's notice, at any time. Audrey died in a planned terrorist attack on the museum; Larry died in a car accident while drunk; and Chance Barbour and Andy died in a sailing accident.

Death in life, or decay, does not only happen to fruit, flowers, and people. Indeed, when Hobie discusses patination as one of the worst problems with which an antique furniture restoration artist deals, he speaks of the "decay" which happens to metal. Even furniture has a way of "dying."

Finally, even great buildings have a way of being destroyed. Indeed, when the Sutton Place building is being gutted, Theo thinks not only of the temporariness of the great big building, but the temporariness of a home. Here, we can see the impermanence of all things in the world.

The Randomness of Fate

Is fate random? Or is there a pattern that one can pick up on to predict what will happen? Humans have, since the beginning of time, searched for some meaning in life, for some belief that wraps up the existence on earth in a nice, neat package.

Audrey Decker sought answers to these questions in her love of art. Larry Decker sought answers to these questions in his horoscope books, in the alignment of the stars, in the patterns which he tried to find in luck, chance and fortune. In an ironic twist, Boris's driver Gyuri asks if God plays jokes on people. Gyuri thinks he will go to heaven to meet with his colleague who passed away early. Some people seek religion for the answers. All of the above cases seem to state that there is a preordained quality to fate; someone or something is responsible for the acts which happen, whether it be God, Fortune, or the universe.



Theo seeks answers as well, and even at the end of the novel, some questions simply do not have answers yet. It can be a lifelong quest for answers which may or may not be found. If fate is not random, if we are born into who we are and there is really nothing we can do to change who we are, Theo asks at the end if someone can explain to him what one would do if one were born with a heart which could not be trusted? Does one ignore the callings of one's heart? Or does one dive, head first, into the "holy rage" (chapter 12, part viii, paragraph 11) calling one's name, like Boris does?

When Theo writes an essay in his early college program, his teacher, Mrs. Lebowitz, points out that his essay is about the question of fate being random, why good people suffer, and about the basic chaos and uncertainty of the world we live in. Since Theo is unsure that his essay is about those things, we can see that these questions have arisen in his young mind subconsciously, as a reflection of his tragic experiences to date. At this point Theo thinks perhaps fate is random. It is not until the end of the novel that Theo realizes that fate may not be random; there may be something to what his father and Boris say about patterns in the universe.

Coming of Age

Thirteen-year-old Theodore Decker is forced to grow up on his own after the death of his mother in a terrorist explosion in a New York art museum, after his father abandoned them approximately a year before.

We find out that Theo began writing down his story, or keeping a journal of some kind, after his mother died. His intention was to write letters to his mother about his life. This was a healthy choice for Theo, and this was a choice which contributed to his coming of age and further indicates his growth from a child to a well-adjusted man. Those letters to his mother became this novel.

Mrs. Barbour examines the Blackwell ring that the elderly man gave to Theo after the museum's explosion. The griffin or winged lion she sees on the ring is possibly a symbol of Theo's coming of age journey, where Theo is half man/half child. The ring is a souvenir of the Grand Tour, which was an educational rite of passage of wealthy young men, from about 1660 to 1840, who toured Europe, in search of art and culture. With unlimited funds, these young men commissioned art, i.e., hired painters to create and paint works of art. This historical rite of passage is a metaphor for Theo's rite of passage; herein lies a connection between Theo and the elderly man. As a child, Theo followed the instructions of Welty, which led him to a place with the proper parental guidance. For the first time, Theo eats with Hobie. Theo is beginning to move forward in his coming of age journey and begin the healing process through grief.

When Theo goes to Las Vegas, he has no rules. He and his newfound friend, Boris, are left to their own devices, which include the demons of addiction to alcohol and drugs, and a life of petty burglary. Theo's grief and depression are simply numbed and self-medicated away for the majority of the time he is in Vegas, so that Theo does not advance much in his coming of age. However, later in the novel, Boris tells Theo that he



talked about his feelings regarding his mother's death when he was out in Vegas. Theo did learn how to care for a great friend in Vegas, Boris. The stars Theo sees in Vegas are symbols of awareness in the conscious mind. Theo sees a scattering of stars in the sky, of which some are confusing to him, yet we see him slightly advancing in his coming of age journey. The majority of the things Theo learned in Vegas are things not to do in life.

Back in New York, after Theo learns of Andy's and Mr. Barbour's deaths, Theo feels as if he is a transparent ghost, which means that he can see through himself, and he realizes things that he should have done, like contact Andy when he returned to New York. It is like Theo either lets go of things and people too easily, or he was so obsessed and ruminating over his own troubles, that he neglected to take part in the lives of the people who did so much for him. This is a minor turning point for Theo in his coming of age journey. When Theo tells Mrs. Barbour he is so sorry for the death of Mr. Barbour, Theo has advanced in his coming of age to the point where he is more able to express his feelings in a responsibly adult-like manner.

When Boris comes to New York, he tells Theo how depressed, suicidal, and grief-stricken he really was in Las Vegas, which is an eye-opener for Theo in his coming of age journey.

Regarding Pippa and the unrequited love, Theo has learned how to not agonize over Pippa any longer. He has learned how to reconcile the thoughts in his head with the feelings of his heart, as an adult.

Through Theo's coming of age journey, what he seeks is the type of love and landmark that his mother provided for him. With that gone, Theo becomes numb and gets lost in a sea of drugs and alcohol in Vegas, other deaths, and the criminal underground. Theo realizes that many things that happened after her death were his own fault.

Styles

Point of View

The point of view is first person, with Theo telling his story as if he is writing to someone, as indeed, he admits to doing in his last chapter, to his mother. The reader catches glimpses of a stream of consciousness element used throughout, where one can really get inside the head and emotions of the main character. The reader sees through the eyes of Theo his surroundings, thinks through the brain of Theo his thoughts, whether under the influence of drugs and alcohol or not, and the reader feels through Theo's heart his feelings. Since one of the main themes of the novel is Theo's coming-of-age journey, this first-person stream-of-consciousness point of view fosters the best understanding of the main character's growth from a grief-stricken thirteen-year-old to a well-adjusted man.

Theo's story includes dialogue, which he documents as he goes through his life in order to preserve the verity of the events, and poetically vivid descriptive passages, which many times parallel the greater theme of coming of age. As Theo writes down his story, we can see he has psychologically grown into a man who has come to terms with his feelings. We see that the metaphor of art as life, or life as art, has come full circle. Indeed, Theo has "written" a novel, told his story, documented how he has grown. In essence, his life is art; in essence, his life as art has permanence. Theo has further found himself in that he is a true artist, a writer.

Language and Meaning

In some parts, the language of *The Goldfinch* is both flowing and easy to understand, and in other parts, it is filled with poetic descriptions of characters, setting, thoughts, and feelings, reminiscent of the language of F. Scott Fitzgerald's works. The language adds to the various thematic developments through the use of symbolism, simile, personification, metaphor, allegory, and other literary devices.

The main character, Theo, has an artist and writer's mentality, and as such, he uses very rich language in his descriptions of characters and settings, and feelings and thoughts. His descriptions are oftentimes long, vivid, and poetic, creating a startlingly bright picture in the reader's mind, so that the reader remembers the character or setting long after the passage is read. This type of language fosters an in-depth understanding of the main character and works to weave precision into this coming-of-age story.

Poetic justice is given the contrasts and paradoxes in the novel, as in this quote: "... the brocades were rich and the carpet was soft, still the winter light carried a chilly tone of 1943, privation and austerities, weak tea without sugar and hungry to bed." (Chapter 1,



paragraph 4.) The language and its meaning are works of art, in that the reader has some leeway in interpreting them, and finding their own form of beauty.

The language includes the accents of the characters, most notably Boris and his Slavic accent, where the reader can actually hear Boris's voice in their heads. Boris's character jumps off of the pages and into the reader's mind in vivid reality, like so many of the other characters in the novel.

Structure

There are five main parts, broken into twelve chapters, mostly with multiple parts of varying lengths, in this 864-page novel. The five main parts each begin with a famous quote which alludes to a profound human insight made before by another writer or artist, and tie in directly with the content of each part. Quite possibly, this element of the structure shows that these thoughts have all been thought before, through the passage of time.

The chapters each have titles which have symbolic meanings for the particular section, foreshadowing what the reader will read in the chapter. Some of the parts of each chapter are shorter in length than others, which depict a very quick pace in the action. For example, when Theo, his father and Xandra leave New York and head to Las Vegas, where all have warned Theo of the crazy life he will have, the structure of the story mimics the mentality of living life in the fast lanes. Other times, the parts of each chapter are long, melodic, and mesmerizing, in order to help establish a setting, or feeling, or character. The majority of the novel is a flashback, with the main climax in the first chapter, after the man has killed another man.

The plot of the novel is simple, with no subplots. The novel is about a young boy's coming of age after his mother, his sole landmark, dies in a terrorist bomb explosion of a New York art museum. The boy moves to a plush Park Avenue apartment, where he begins grieving the loss of his mother, to Las Vegas, where he lives with his gambling, alcoholic father, and back to New York, where he lives with an antique furniture restoration artist, finds his calling, and sees the girl he credits for saving him from the bomb's explosion. The boy learns to release himself from the blame he feels for his mother's death when, in the end, he fatally shoots a man, and the ghost of his mother visits him.



Quotes

The room. The radiator. Een Amerikaan met een strafblad. Olive green water of the canal.

-- Theodore Decker (Chapter 1, Section i paragraph 3)

Importance: The translation of the Dutch portion of the quote is: An American with a criminal record. This quote provides one example of the stream of consciousness mode that the author uses to draw the reader into the mind of Theodore Decker. This is done purposefully and with meaning by the author; the reader can see that Theodore Decker is lonely, scared, depressed and perhaps suicidal.

('Van Gogh loved Hals too. Somewhere, he's writing about Hals and he says: Frans Hals has no less than twenty-nine shades of black! Or was it twenty-seven?')

-- Audrey Decker (Chapter 1, Section iv paragraph 34)

Importance: Black is a symbol for death. This foreshadows Audrey's death.

'Well, the Dutch invented the microscope,' she said. 'They were jewelers, grinders of lenses. They want it all as detailed as possible because even the tiniest things mean something. Whenever you see flies or insects in a still life—a wilted petal, a black spot on the apple—the painter is giving you a secret message. He's telling you that living things don't last—it's all temporary. Death in life. That's why they're called natures mortes. Maybe you don't see it at first with all the beauty and bloom, the little speck of rot. But if you look closer—there it is.'

-- Audrey Decker (Chapter 1, Section iv paragraph 32)

Importance: This quote introduces the theme of death in life, or natures mortes, in the novel.

Addition and subtraction were useful mainly insofar as they helped me track her movements (how many minutes till she left the office? how many minutes to walk from office to subway?) and even before I'd learned to count I'd been obsessed with learning to read a clock face: desperately studying the occult circle crayoned on the paper plate that, once mastered, would unlock the pattern of her comings and goings.

-- Theodore Decker (Chapter 2 paragraph 1)

Importance: Theo's mother, Audrey Decker, was Theo's whole world. Theo's past converges with his present here as he waits for his mother to return home.

Trying to stop thinking about it was like trying to stop thinking of a purple cow. The purple cow was all you could think of.

-- Theodore Decker (Chapter 2 paragraph 79)

Importance: A purple cow is something so outrageous that one cannot forget such a thing, just as Theo cannot stop thinking about the events of the day when the museum



was bombed. The Purple Cow is also used as a foreshadowing device, for there is a Purple Cow restaurant in Amsterdam where Theo and Boris meet the people who are said to have the painting.

But sometimes, unexpectedly, grief pounded over me in waves that left me gasping; and when the waves washed back, I found myself looking out over a brackish wreck which was illumined in a light so lucid, so heartsick and empty, that I could hardly remember that the world had ever been anything but dead.

-- Theodore Decker (Chapter 3, Section iv paragraph 30)

Importance: Through hyperbole, personification and metaphor, Theo describes his feelings of grief.

My English class had read Macbeth in the fall, but only now was it starting to make sense why Lady Macbeth could never scrub the blood off her hands, why it was still there after she washed it away.

-- Theodore Decker (Chapter 3, Section ix paragraph 7)

Importance: Theo can identify with Lady Macbeth, as he knows what it is like to not be able to wash away the blood. This a parallel to an outside literary work.

Watching the curtains disappear and the pictures taken down and the carpets rolled up and carried away, I was reminded of an animated film I'd once seen where a cartoon character with an eraser rubbed out his desk and his lamp and his chair and his window with a scenic view and the whole of his comfortably appointed office until— at last— the eraser hung suspended in a disturbing sea of white.” (Chapter 4, part xxii, paragraph 1)

-- Theodore Decker (Chapter 4, Section xxii paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote signifies the fleeting pace at which life and home can be taken away. The disturbing sea of white, after all is erased, symbolizes a subconscious nothingness.

It was as if I'd suffered a chemical change of the spirit: as if the acid balance of my psyche had shifted and leached the life out of me in aspects impossible to repair, or reverse, like a frond of living coral hardened to bone.

-- Theodore Decker (Chapter 8, Section ii paragraph 1)

Importance: This shows a sign that Theo has changed. He thinks more with his conscious mind than his subconscious mind here.

Bloedend. Moord. The sun didn't seem to rise until about nine in the morning and even then it was hazed and gloomy, casting a low, weak, purgatorial light like a stage effect in some German opera.

-- Theodore Decker (Chapter 12, Section i paragraph 3)

Importance: Blood, death, haze, gloom, and purgatorial light are the reality of Theo's situation after he has murdered another human being. The weather and lack of light



parallel Theo's state of mind, the darkness which has swallowed him. Yet, there is an air of unreality, like this is an actor's stage, like the lighting is created by something beyond Theo's control.

We were easily forgotten. It was a social and moral lesson, if nothing else. But for all foreseeable time to come -- for as long as history was written, until the icecaps melted and the streets of Amsterdam were awash with water -- the painting would be remembered and mourned.

-- Theodore Decker (Chapter 12, Section 1 paragraph 8)

Importance: After Theo kills Martin, he says that people are easily forgotten. All biological entities die. The death of a painting such as *The Goldfinch* is what is significant to him.

Because, between 'reality' on the one hand, and the point where the mind strikes reality, there's a middle zone, a rainbow edge where beauty comes into being, where two very different surfaces mingle and blur to provide what life does not: and this is the space where all art exists, and all magic.

-- Theodore Decker (Chapter 12, Section xiii paragraph 67)

Importance: Theo describes what makes each human unique in their life, in who they are.