

How We Are Hungry: Stories Study Guide

How We Are Hungry: Stories by Dave Eggers

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Another - Climbing to the Window, Pretending to Dance

Another - Climbing to the Window, Pretending to Dance Summary

The unnamed narrator heads to Egypt, suffering from depression and anxiety. He travels to Egypt even though his government doesn't advise traveling to the region. Despite his depression, the man seems to live a full life -he has friends and has people who work under him. On Tuesday, the visiting narrator heads to the pyramids, where meets a local man named Hesham, who offers to take the narrator to the Red Pyramid. The narrator agrees to go, although he is unsure whether Hesham intends to kill him or rob him. They go racing across the desert on horseback to reach the Red Pyramid, recently reopened to the public. They go inside, and Hesham does not kill or rob the narrator. The narrator wants to know that he will not die like a bug. Hesham explains the dead occupants of the Pyramid were robbed, and had their bodies stolen and sold over and over again, that there is nothing in the pyramids. He then asks the narrator if the narrator wishes to see another, they race across the desert once more.

There are plenty of things that need doing at the unnamed main character's house. But the main character sees a photograph in the newspaper that morning, of a soldier from his country, torn apart by a mob in their country. The man, sitting comfortably at home, feels outrage, unease, as though he has been raped or robbed. The soldier is alone, just as the man is alone. The man does not feel the same way when he hears about domestic accidents or incidents, but feels a personal connection to the soldier who has been mutilated. None of the things that need doing get done that day.

Pilar heads to Costa Rica to meet her friend Hand, who is working in Nicaragua for Intel. They have both agreed to meet in Costa Rica, because Hand doesn't want a break from Nicaragua. Pilar, though her name sounds Latin, is actually of Irish descent. Her decision to go to Costa Rica has nothing to do with her personal life, for it is good. Pilar arrives in San Jose, full of people and bustling, though the architecture style -of the late 1960s- is forgettable to her. Hand had dated three of Pilar's friends, wants to go to space, and cries whenever he reads about men who have been falsely imprisoned, be freed. Pilar meets Hand at a hotel called Shangri La.

Hand and Pilar go walking, and pass some unfenced horses. Pilar finds it interesting, because she has never seen horses without fences. They go to eat, and Hand says something to the waitress in Spanish, which makes her laugh. But Hand will not tell Pilar what he said. They continue through town, full of American, Canadian, and Swiss tourists. As they walk, Pilar goes over the reasons she wants to sleep with Hand -from wanting to see him naked, to loving him. Her thoughts about Hand are confused, and vary. For example, she wants him to be the father of her children, but also wants him to be her father. They pass by the horses again. They do not sleep together that night.



The next day, Pilar and Hand head to the beach, and go surfing. Pilar does her best to surf, but isn't very good. She wipes out. They go out at night, to bars, for drinks and to play pool. Outside, they find an injured anteater, and bring it back to the hotel room. Hand believes the animal will survive the night. Then they get naked, and get into bed. While out and about the next day, Pilar attracts the attention of several men because she isn't wearing a bra -and Hand cautions her against this. They continue sleeping together after they have some drinks, because they feel that having sex sober is awkward.

While surfing on their last day in Costa Rica, Pilar sees the water, which reminds her of oil, and thinks of God being present in all of His creations. She thinks about how people have individual perceptions of God -of being love, a judge, one who compels extreme choices. She doesn't want to choose which God she accepts yet. She and Hand sleep together again their last night, and the wind blows the skylight off, leaving a hole in the roof.

While his wife is helping her mother get ready for a Christmas party, the husband works on a house in the backyard in the light snow, which he hopes his children will one day use as a clubhouse or a fort. He loves his wife deeply, and always wants to impress her, so he wants to have at least three walls of the house up before his wife gets home.

Fish is on his way to see his cousin Adam, heading from Galena to Aurora, Texas. Fish would kill Adam if he could get away with it. Adam has made his seventh suicide attempt. The five-hour drive always gives Fish time to think over what he will say, what he will do.

Adam and Fish have grown up together, but they are very different. Adam has never held a job, sponging off of people carefully. Fish himself has given Adam \$2200 over the years. Adam has tried to kill himself by drinking poison, shooting himself, electrocuting himself, and so on. The latest attempt involves a drunken jump off a motel roof. Fish reflects on Adam's life, especially on his younger days, when he stayed with Fish's family for a few weeks, playing football with Fish and his friends on the weekend. Adam was always rough and extra aggressive.

Fish goes to see Adam, who is in the hospital in room 318. Adam is 40, but doesn't look it. Fish doesn't mince words with Adam when Adam asks about their cousin Mary, and where she is living now. Fish won't tell Adam, because Adam has tried to kill himself. Fish leaves for the night to get Adam's things from the motel, and discovers that Adam has jumped from the low section of the motel roof. This means Adam knew that the jump wouldn't kill him, and it angers Fish. Fish then wants to head to spend the night with his old friend, Annie.

He is met in the parking lot by a girl who wants to go to San Diego. He tells her he isn't going that far, but offers her a ride anyway. The girl's name is Wendy, and she is a prostitute. He drops her off at a gas station, and calls Annie, who says he has called her too late. He then returns to the hotel, but it is too late to go in, so he goes to Adam's window, intending to go in, but can't. He decides to go to a Red Roof for the night, and



then thinks better of it. He decides not to visit Adam or Annie the next day, but contemplates getting a shotgun, shooting cows, taking off their heads and wearing them just to see what it's like to be one.

Another - Climbing to the Window, Pretending to Dance Analysis

Dave Eggers begins his short story anthology "How We Are Hungry" with the relentless journey of the unnamed narrator in "Another" to find out whether his life will be more consequential than that of a bug. This is contrasted dramatically with the events of "What It Means When A Crowd in a Faraway Nation Takes a Soldier Representing Your Own Nation, Shoots Him, Drags Him from His Vehicle and then Mutilates Him in the Dust ". One can look at the death of the soldier as something done in the service of his country; or one can look at the death of the soldier as a terrible tragedy, in which is death is not consequential at all; and one can indeed see the event as a mixture of both. The civilian who reads about the incident feels violated, for reasons he cannot understand, and for which he searches. Indeed, the search for answers becomes a common theme throughout the stories in the book. Each of the characters searches in some way for truth.

Tenderness and selflessness are also present in Eggers's stories, as demonstrated in "On Wanting to Have At Least Three Walls Up Before She Gets Home," which concerns the dedication of a caring and loving husband, and soon-to-be-father. But tenderness is also in short supply on the part of Fish, who travels five hours to see his attention-craving pseudo-suicidal cousin, Adam. Fish is himself the victim of deception from Adam, a cold shoulder from Annie, and a come-on by a prostitute. Fish is attempting to handle the difficulties of his life, doing what he can for others, but receiving little in return. This leads him to the gory imagining of trying on the skulls of cows to see what he can see through their eyes. This can be seen in the metaphorical sense of Fish failing to see the world the way others see it, only through their own eyes. Indeed, Fish's character emerges as the only character not wholly self-interested. Annie, for example, didn't have enough kindness to stay up a little later for Fish's arrival; and the prostitute and Adam are fully self-absorbed and self-serving.



She Waits, Seething, Blooming - Notes for a Story of a Man Who Will Not Die Alone

She Waits, Seething, Blooming - Notes for a Story of a Man Who Will Not Die Alone Summary

A single mother stays up late waiting for her son, who is fifteen, who has not yet come home. She wants to smack him with a golf club for making her worry. She decides to put together a list of criticisms when he shows up at 2:47.

Tom travels to see Erin, for them to spend a long weekend on the Isle of Skye. Erin had left Tom and Washington, D.C., the year before for England. They had met while protesting the potential bombing of Afghanistan. Erin is missing her left arm, and works for the Treasury as a liaison to the IMF. Erin's parents are divorced and seeing other people, while her favorite cousin is a Marine in Kabul. Erin wants to begin an expatriate community somewhere.

When Tom meets Erin, he is working for a statistics-processing firm -the American Institute for Statistical Studies -and works there under Dean Denny, and works with Michael and Derek. Michael is Dean's son; Derek is Michael's old friend and former personal assistant to Senator Alan Simpson of Wyoming. Erin comes to work at the firm at Tom's urging. Tom soon falls in love with her, but Erin has no shortage of suitors. Erin confides in Tom about how she always feels men want to extract something from her.

They drive over the bridge to the quiet Isle, and Tom hopes that he and Erin will be forced to share a cozy, warm room with one bed. As it turns out, room are scarce, for bird-watchers have descended on the island for the puffins. As they drive, Tom wants to know about Erin's love life, and it causes some discomfort between them. They finally find a hotel in the town of Portree.

Tom and Erin explore the island, and Erin wants to see a lighthouse before it gets dark. They come across an old utility shed, and have sex beside it. She tells him he should have waited. They return to Erin's hotel room. After Scotland, Tom will never hear from her again.

The unnamed narrator tells his child about how he and his wife brought the nation to alternative energy, what the child's Uncle Frank called "The Age of Wind and Sun." The narrator explains that at some point, everyone simply had to suck it up and do it. He also recounts banning bicycle shorts except for professionals, and eliminating school funding tied to property taxes. They eliminate genocide and lobbyists. They create a 20,000-man military force of elite troops to respond to global problems. They also ban billboards.



They also establish a global minimum wage, invent remotes to turn off fire alarms, and make George Soros buy the Amazon River. They handle Parkinson's and make inhibiting drugs for AIDS copiously available. The narrator's other child, mother, and Uncle Frank have all awakened from sleep, and the mother has her hair up, just the way the narrator likes it.

Stephanie and James are in Stephanie's bedroom. Even though their lives are about to diverge -James will go to Oregon to fight fires -she wants to have sex with him. James has amazing forearms, and sleeping with him will mean that Stephanie has slept with thirteen men. She wonders how her future husband will react to such a statistic - a baker's dozen - and it may lead to the end of their love. So she therefore must sleep with James and one more man, whom she decides will be named Naveed.

A man in his seventies does not want to die alone. He likes people and wants to be around people when he dies. His name is Basil. He is divorced, and a doctor who has delivered many babies. He has terminal cancer, but does not want to die alone. He tells his children. His two daughters are horrified. His son, Derek, who is a college graduate, agrees to help him with his project. Basil calls his friend Helen, a woman known for organizing parties, and an old flame.

Basil wants thousands of people around, friends or strangers, who can say hello and goodbye to him. They consider a football stadium. They contemplate music. Food and wine will be served, but no serious alcohol. The planning moves on, and people want to help, and the legal aspects are handled. The day arrives and the setting is a minor-league ballpark. Many of the children Basil has delivered arrive. The music plays, people say goodbye, and Basil dies content.

She Waits, Seething, Blooming - Notes for a Story of a Man Who Will Not Die Alone Analysis

Unlike Annie in "Climbing to the Window, Pretending to Dance," the mother in "She Waits, Seething, Blooming," has the compassion to stay up late waiting for her son. The reunion of mother and son is contrasted by the failed reunion between the lovers Tom and Erin in "Quiet," a fateful meeting in Scotland in the vain attempt to reignite a romance. A romance that evidently thrives is in the short story "Your Mother and I", about a husband and wife team with children that remake the world exactly the way they want it to be remade. Indeed, one wonders if the items on the checklist of the improved world are items on the list of the author himself.

The reader is further given a glimpse of personal stories when the reader examines the life of Stephanie, who has had thirteen sexual partners, and wants one more to avoid jokes about having been with a baker's dozen worth of men. Such thoughts are crass and strange to the reader, and will be shocking to those who place faith in the concept as sex as an extension of love. Also jarring and intriguing to readers is the story of the man who does not want to die alone, Basil. Death is normally a private thing, but in Basil's case, he wants to die before an audience not just of hundreds, but of thousands.

People have a habit of avoiding death, but Basil -and those in attendance- make his death front and center.

Though all of Eggers's stories so far have an extraordinary quality to them in terms of the events that take place, each of the stories are grounded in reality, in everyday life, and therefore, the events could occur to anyone, anywhere. This gives Eggers's depictions of simple events -such as the mother waiting up or the father working in the snow - a timeless quality to them, and also a personal intimacy with which to be able to relate. The mother or the father could truly be anyone. There is nothing extraordinary about Basil, except the way he wishes to die; and Stephanie is simply a product of her times, giving the reader pause to think about human sexuality in the present age.



About the Man Who Began Flying After Meeting Her - After I was Thrown in the River and Before I Drowned

About the Man Who Began Flying After Meeting Her - After I was Thrown in the River and Before I Drowned Summary

The unnamed narrator, meeting a girl, discovers that he is a better person for her, that everything makes sense. They would build and fly machines and learn all about flying. He has always wanted to fly and hopes he will fly with her.

Rita comes to Moshi, Tanzania, to hike up Mount Kilimanjaro. She is picked up at the airport by a man named Godwill, who brings her to the hotel. Rita had originally planned the trip with Gwen, but Gwen -who is married -had gotten pregnant six months earlier than anticipated. So Rita had gone on anyways, for the tickets are nonrefundable. Rita is unmarried, but has taken care of foster kids before. She has almost adopted them, but then decided not to. Her parents adopt the kids.

The bus to the mountain leaves with Rita and a few others, led by an American guide from Oregon named Frank. Mike and Jerry are Australians, and are father and son. Grant is quiet and keeps to himself. Shelly is forty, slim, and fit. Porters will be carrying around their possessions. It is chilly, about fifty degrees, and raining. Grant has forgotten his poncho. As Rita helps Shelly with her Poncho, she thinks about how she wants her foster children with her.

They are headed to the peak of the mountain, four days up, and two days down. Rita and Grant press on ahead of the rest of the group. Grant is a telephone systems programmer. He is not very attractive, but Rita discovers she would rather be with him than the others. She wants Grant to accept her, though she feels that Grant believes she is just an average tourist. They make it to camp early, and when the rest show up later, Frank is furious. Pushing too far too fast is dangerous, he explains. Each of the hikers already have some problem -stomach aches or headaches or injuries -except Grant and Rita.

Fires on the mountain are illegal, ever since half the mountain was burned by fires started by honey-collectors, to drive away the bees with smoke. The only way to dry clothes is by sunlight. Some of the porters have already left to head back, for they are superstitious and tired. The next morning, Rita overhears Mike and Jerry talking about how Jerry wants to turn back, but Mike tells his son to stick with it. Mike gets sicker through the day, though, even as the sun comes out.



As the day goes on, Rita feels happier and happier. But Mike looks worse. The next campsite is fully in the sun, and clothes are hung up to dry. There are about four hundred other people there as well. Jerry announces he is ready to turn back, but his father says nothing. Rita later finds him sprawled out while hiking, semi-conscious. Mike improves the next day, but something else happens overnight that Shelly wants to let Grant explain when they meet up with him. Mike will not be going to the summit. At the summit, Shelly admits to Rita that the commotion was that three of the porters -boys- had died and were being carried back down in duffel bags. But Shelly didn't want to spoil the trip for Rita.

When she comes down the mountain, she signs a logbook, stating that she has made it to the top.

Americans of a certain age always end up yelping. Yelping is something that is not practiced or forced, but is compelled. It can happen anywhere to anyone at anytime. A yelp-free life is instead what is aimed for.

The narrator - a dog - is a fast dog. He can run and eat fast. He sees and hears all. In the woods, the dog runs and places and races with his friends. The narrating dog and his companions like to race and leap the river. One one such jump, the dog hits his head and dies. One day, he wakes up in Heaven, and discovers that God is the sun. The dog theorizes that everyone in the previous life is cranky, because they don't know where God is.

About the Man Who Began Flying After Meeting Her - After I was Thrown in the River and Before I Drowned Analysis

Tenderness tends to prevail in this collection of short stories by Eggers, and tenderness returns with the story "About the Man Who Began Flying After Meeting Her". The story, which focuses on a man who wants to fly, can viewed in two respects: the love of a girl gives the man the inspiration to fly; and in a metaphorical sense, can be viewed as the man feeling as if he can fly because of the love shared between him and his girl.

Perhaps particularly moving among the stories in the book is "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly", the story of Rita's climb up Mount Kilimanjaro. By far the longest story in the book, the tale deals with all three major themes mentioned in the themes section of the study guide, as well as making at least one important point about adventure-seekers. The porters who carry supplies up the mountain for hikers wonder why people would subject themselves to such a difficult and dangerous climb for fun, especially when such a climb isn't necessary. Thrill-seeking, it seems, is viewed as a source of entertainment for some, while the facilitation of that entertainment is the work of the porters. When the three boys die in their work as porters, the point is rammed home: people have died for their entertainment of others.



Certainly the most unusual story of the anthology comes in the form of "After I Was Thrown in the River and Before I Drowned." The story is narrated by a dog, who lives a happy life with his dog friends, playing with them and racing them in the woods. When the dog dies, and wakes up in Heaven, he realizes that the sun is God, giving light and warmth to everything, and the dog has the philosophical rumination that people are so often on edge because they are unaware where God is.



Characters

Unnamed American Narrator in Egypt

The unnamed American narrator in Egypt is a forty-something man who has traveled to the region despite the warnings of the government not to do so in the post-9/11 landscape of "Another." The narrator is moderately successful, has been married twice, but suffers from anxiety and depression. He goes to Egypt, searching for an answer to the question of whether or not he will die like a bug -forgotten and inconsequential. He is given a tour of the pyramids by Hesham, a local man, to whom the narrator posits the question. Finding inconsequentiality in the Red Pyramid, the narrator and Hesham set off again to continue seeking answers, to see other pyramids.

Hesham

Hesham is an Egyptian man in the story "Another" who meets the unnamed American narrator while in Egypt. Hesham offers to show the narrator to the Red Pyramid. There, the narrator asks if he will die like a bug, to which Hesham explains that the bodies of the pharaohs have been stolen and sold countless times. It is an answer, and it is not an answer, and so the two of them set off for more pyramids, and perhaps other answers.

Pilar

Pilar is the main character of the short story "The Only Meaning of the Oil-Wet Water". She is relatively happy, though slightly unsure, and travels to Costa Rica to be with the man she loves, Hand. She feels many different things for Hand, including that she wants him to father her babies, and that she wants him to be her own father. She spends a week in Costa Rica with Hand, surrendering herself sexually to him, though he has a dubious sexual past. But following the week, they go their own separate ways -Pilar back to America, and Hand back to Nicaragua where he is working for Intel.

Hand

Hand is the love interest of Pilar in the short story, "The Only Meaning of the Oil-Wet Water". Hand is described as being slightly heavy around the midsection, but very charismatic and flirtatious. He has a very deviant sexual past, but he is loved by Pilar anyway. He is very confident and outgoing, and somewhat self-absorbed. He sleeps with Pilar regularly on their trip, only to go his own way at the end of the week.



Tom

Tom is the main character of the story "Quiet". He works for a statistical analysis firm in Washington, D.C., and travels to Scotland with his ex-flame, Erin, whom he hopes to win back. Tom has a strong desire to belong to Erin, and to protect her in turn. He seduces her, and has sex with Erin, but following the weekend in Scotland, she never speaks to him again.

Erin

Erin is the beautiful love interest of Tom in the story "Quiet". She is described as having many suitors, even though she is missing her left arm. She breaks up with Tom at some point, and moves overseas in the hopes of beginning an expatriate community. She agrees to meet with Tom in Scotland, but following an awkward sexual encounter, never speaks to him again.

Rita

Rita is the main character in the story "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly". Though her age is not given, one suspects she is somewhere in her thirties. She is hiking up Mount Kilimanjaro after her sister, married and expecting a baby, canceled. Rita appears to be drifting through part of her life, at one time having the courage to care for two foster kids, but not to adopt them, allowing her parents to take the responsibility instead. She is shocked and saddened by the deaths of the three porter boys while on the hike, and returns back down the mountain quickly.

Basil

Basil is the main character of the story, "Notes for the Story of a Man Who Will Not Die Alone". He is suffering from terminal cancer, and is in his seventies. He has had a long and full life, but doesn't want to die alone. So together with his first love, Helen, and his son, Derek, he plans an elaborate event where he will die, surrounded by thousands of people, including friends and strangers. Surrounded by everyone in a minor league baseball field, Basil passes on.

Derek

Derek is the son of Basil in the story "Notes for the Story of a Man Who Will Not Die Alone". Derek is a year out of college, and works as a forest ranger/firefighter. Derek agrees to help his father with his elaborate plans to not die alone.

Fish

Fish is the main character of the story "Climbing to the Window, Pretending to Dance". He lives in Texas, and is the cousin of Adam, who repeatedly attempts suicide, mostly for attention as it later turns out. Fish lives five hours away, and always comes to see Adam in the hospital. But after Adam's latest stunt of jumping off a motel roof, Fish decides that enough is enough, and decides not to visit Adam in the hospital again.



Objects/Places

The United States of America

The United States of America is the home and country of origin of the narrators and main characters in the stories. It is also the location of Texas, and the statistical analysis firm where Tom works in "Quiet."

Tanzania

Tanzania is the country where Mount Kilimanjaro is located. It is the country which Rita plans to visit with her sister, but only Rita ends up going in "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly."

Mount Kilimanjaro

Mount Kilimanjaro is located in the country of Tanzania. It is the mountain that Rita and her sister plan to climb in the story, "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly". It is where three porters, all of them boys, die.

Texas

Texas is located in the United States, and is the home of Fish and Adam in the story "Climbing to the Window, Pretending to Dance". It is where Adam attempts suicide seven times, and where Fish visits him after each attempt.

The Isle of Skye

The Isle of Sky is located in Scotland, and is where Tom and Erin plan to spend a long weekend in the story, "Quiet". It is where Tom and Erin have an awkward sexual encounter, leading Erin to never speak to Tom again.

Costa Rica

Costa Rica is the country that Pilar and Hand go to visit for a week on vacation in the story "The Only Meaning of the Oil-Wet Water". Costa Rica is where they surf, and where Pilar gives herself sexually to Hand.

Nicaragua

Nicaragua factors into the story "The Only Meaning of the Oil-Wet Water". It is where Hand lives for a year to work for Intel.

Surfboard

Surfboards are used by Pilar and Hand in the story "The Only Meaning of the Oil-Wet Water" to surf. It is while on a surfboard, looking at the water, that Pilar reflects on God.

Duffel Bags

Duffel bags are used to cart possessions up and down Mount Kilimanjaro by porters in the story "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly". Duffel bags are also used to carry down the bodies of three dead boys.

Playhouse

A playhouse is what the husband is constructing for his children, and to impress his wife in the story "On Wanting to Have At Least Three Walls Up Before She Gets Home". It is constructed by the dedicated husband in the snow around Christmas.



Themes

Individualism

Individualism is a consistent and dominant theme throughout Dave Eggers's collection of short stories, "How We Are Hungry." Individualism consists of being independent, self-reliant, and responsible for oneself. The effects of individualism among many of the main characters in Egger's stories vary. Sometimes, the outcomes of such individualism are positive and refreshing, while at other times, individualism is bittersweet at best, and tragic at worst.

In terms of the positive outcomes of individualism, character growth is somehow present. Characters in the stories "The Only Meaning of the Oil-Wet Water" and "Quiet" experience these sorts of growth. Pilar, while trekking halfway around the world to see the man she loves, may at first glance not seem to be much of an individual, for the object of her desire is the catalyst for her journey. Yet, in a deeper sense, the journey to Costa Rica demonstrates that she is capable of caring for herself, and of determining things for herself. Indeed, her own relationship with God grows and develops as she contemplates the surface of the water upon which she surfs. In "Quiet", Erin -long pursued by Tom, the narrator -has left the United States, hoping to begin an expatriate community. Yet she continues to move around the world alone, until Tom enters her life once more. Tom wants to take care of her. But his appearance demonstrates to Erin that she does not need Tom to continue on with her life, and Tom reports that he never hears from her again following their weekend in Scotland.

The negative consequences of individualism in Egger's writing are much more frequent. The effects of this individualism are felt deeply in "What It Means When A Crowd in a Faraway Nation Takes a Soldier Representing Your Own Nation, Shoots Him, Drags Him from His Vehicle and then Mutilates Him in the Dust," and "Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly." In "What It Means...", there are two individuals: a soldier who is torn apart, and a civilian reading about the incident in a newspaper. The soldier is alone, vulnerable, and susceptible to the whims of those around him. Indeed, his individualism - whether imposed or voluntary -helps cost him his life. The civilian, upon learning of such an act of barbarism and apparently living alone, feels much more isolated, self-competent though he may be. In "Up the Mountain...", Rita has come on a trip alone that she was originally planning with her sister, who is married and beginning a family. While Rita wants children, she gives up her foster children to her parents. Throughout the trip, she wishes that her children were with her again. The deaths of the porters also strikes her especially hard, making her question her individuality.

Belonging

Belonging is a major and dominant theme in Dave Eggers's collection of short stories, "How We are Hungry." Belonging occurs in primarily a romantic sense in the stories,



affecting those who wish to belong especially hard, and deeply influencing positively those who do belong.

In "On Wanting to Have Three Walls Up Before She Gets Home," the narrator -a dedicated husband and soon-to-be father -works in the snow around Christmas to erect a playhouse, out of love for, and because he wants to impress his wife. Indeed, he feels wholly at home, and wants to continue belonging to his wife. In "Your Mother and I", a dedicated married couple reworks the world exactly the way they would want it, in a story told to a child by a father. What is concurrent through the adventures of changing the world is the togetherness of the narrator and his wife. In fact, he believes, the things they do to remake the world positively influence the world.

The desire to belong also dramatically influences those characters who wish to belong. Two notable stories of this kind include "The Only Meaning of the Oil-Wet Water" and "Quiet." In "The Only Meaning...", Pilar travels around the world to be with Hand, whom she wants to be the father of her children, and whom she can see spending her life with. Though she wants to go to Nicaragua, Hand wants to go to Costa Rica, and so they go to Costa Rica. Her desire to be with Hand also includes her surrendering herself sexually to him, despite Hand's sexual past. In "Quiet," Tom's desire to be with Erin is so strong that he crosses the world to go to Scotland with her, even after she is no longer living in America. He wants to keep her for always, to protect her, but Erin simply doesn't feel the same way. After a terse sexual encounter, and after the weekend ends, Erin never speaks to Tom again. Tom's desire for belonging therefore ends in disaster.

Quest for Truth

A major and dominant theme in Dave Eggers's collection of short stories, "How We Are Hungry" is that of the eternal quest for truth. In many of Egger's stories, the characters undertake physical journeys for various reasons, but at the heart of the matter is a spiritual and emotional quest for truth- with the answers being sought by each of the individuals varying to the individual. Three stories in particular are representative of this search for answers.

In "Another," the unnamed narrator is in Egypt even when it is dangerous to do so. He is suffering from anxiety and depression, and is seeking something unknown to the reader, at least until the end of the story. There, the narrator explains to Hashem that he is seeking to know that he will not die like a bug -in other words, die without meaning and consequence to his existence. Unfortunately, the answers are not totally forthcoming, and the unnamed narrator continues his journey in the search for those answers.

In Eggers's story, "What It Means When A Crowd in a Faraway Nation Takes a Soldier Representing Your Own Nation, Shoots Him, Drags Him from His Vehicle and then Mutilates Him in the Dust," the civilian who receives the story of the soldier's death is very much unnerved by the news. Indeed, his day stops, feeling compassion and outrage for the soldier, for the native son of his own country. The civilians is unaware

why he feels such outrage, and his inability to perform physical tasks is indicative of his emotional and mental journey to attempt to understand his reaction.

The story "Quiet" concerns the journey of Tom to reunite with Erin in Scotland. He has loved her for years, and his journey to Scotland to see Erin is a physical extension of his emotional journey to connect with her, and to belong to her. The answers he is seeking are those of love, of whether or not he can win back Erin. Unfortunately, for Tom, he does not. The answers he finds are exactly the answers he was hoping not to discover: Erin never talks to him again.

Style

Point of View

Dave Eggers tells the stories in his anthology "How We Are Hungry" from both the first-person perspective, and the third-person omniscient narrative. He switches between the forms of narration for each story, adopting one perspective or the other, as is fitting to the story. In the story "On Wanting to Have At Least Three Walls Up Before She Gets Home", Eggers adopts the third-person omniscient narrative to describe the efforts of a husband and soon-to-be father, totally in love with his wife, hard at work in the snow on a playhouse. Such a mode of narration gives the reader a brief glimpse into this man's life and love, and the third-person omniscient allows the reader to understand him without disturbing him. In "After I Was Thrown in the River and Before I Drowned", Eggers adopts the first-person perspective for his narrator, a dog. This allows him to tell the story in a perspective that is ordinarily not given, and allows the reader to step outside his or her human confines, to follow the path of a four-legged animal.

Setting

The settings of the stories in Dave Eggers's short story anthology "How We Are Hungry" are far-flung and varied, as well as close at hand and nondescript. Some places are strikingly familiar and well-known, such as Texas in "Climbing to the Window, Pretending to Dance"; and in stories like "On Wanting to Have At Least Three Walls Up Before She Gets Home", the setting is not named, but detailed enough to be vague so that the setting could be in any neighborhood in any state. Overseas, Eggers places his characters in popular places for tourists -such as Scotland- but then also takes the readers to places like the shores of Costa Rica and Tanzania. Each of the settings, like the perspective, are tailored specifically to suit the stories. The husband in "On Wanting to Have At Least Three Walls Up Before She Gets Home" might be any husband in any town, and the setting is therefore vague enough to reflect the husband.

Language and Meaning

Dave Eggers tells the stories in his anthology "How We Are Hungry" in language that varies according to both the plot and the narrator. For example, stories told in the third-person omniscient incorporate language that is much more confident and knowledgeable, as evidenced by "Naveed" or "About the Man Who Began Flying After Meeting Her". Stories told in the first-person perspective, such as "Your Mother and I" and "Quiet", the language is much more personal, much more emotional as one would expect from a firsthand account related by one to another. And in stories like "After I Was Thrown in the River and Before I Drowned", Eggers adopts the first-person perspective in language that is simple and straightforward, but as equally poignant, for the narrator is a dog.

Structure

Dave Eggers structures his anthology of short stories, "How We Are Hungry", as clearly-defined individual stories, assuming chapter-like breaks. Some stories occupy the spaces of dozens of pages, while some stories incorporate single paragraphs and single pages. The simple, straightforward structure of the novel ensures that the attention of the reader will be devoted to the stories themselves, and not to other distractions.

Quotes

"He feels tunneled, wrapped, dessicated. His eyes feel the strain of trying for too long to see in the dark" (What It Means When A Crowd in a Faraway Nation Takes a Soldier Representing Your Own Nation, Shoots Him, Drags Him from His Vehicle and then Mutilates Him in the Dust, p. 18).

"The horses had no symbolic value" (The Only Meaning of Oil-Wet Water, p. 32).

"The story is equally or more about surfing. People are no more interesting than waves and mountains" (The Only Meaning of Oil-Wet Water, p. 39).

The fact that he was alive to hear the suffering meant that he was meant to stop it" (Climbing to the Window, Pretending to Dance, p. 63).

"He had an aura that wasn't right, the wild glow of a scientist who'd discovered a formula that could kill millions" (Climbing to the Window, Pretending to Dance, p. 67).

"Many of us leave the TV on when we go to sleep... Why, when young, did we take the greatest comfort in falling asleep under the dinner table with guest all around?... Because we don't want to be alone when we leave the waking world?" (Notes for a Story of a Man Who Will Not Die Alone, p. 127-128).

"I feel guilty, I guess. Everyone does. But I just don't know how our quitting would have brought those porters back to life" (Up the Mountain Coming Down Slowly, p. 197).

"What is this you mean?" their friends abroad said. "This business about you have not yet learned to yelp? What is this, you are Canadian" (When They Learned to Yelp, p. 201).

"I have listened and long ago stopped. Just tell me it matters and I will listen to you and I will want to be convinced" (After I Was Thrown in the River and Before I Drowned, p. 207).

"You should do this sometime. I am a rocket. My time over the gap is a life. I am a cloud, so slow, for an instant I am a slow-moving cloud whose movement is elegant, cavalier, like sleep" (After I Was Thrown in the River and Before I Drowned, p. 211).



Topics for Discussion

In the short story "Another", what is the unnamed narrator looking for? Does he find it? What do you believe the answer to the narrator's question is? Can it even be answered?

Discuss the theme of individuality in Dave Eggers's anthology, "How We Are Hungry". What is individuality? Describe the presence and effects of individuality in three of the stories. Is individualism a positive or negative thing in these stories? Why?

Why does Basil, in the story "Notes for a Story of a Man Who Will Not Die Alone", not want to die alone? What are his plans? How do various people react to his plans, and why?

Discuss the quest for truth in Dave Eggers's anthology, "How We Are Hungry". What does the quest for truth entail? Describe the quest for truth and its effects in three of the stories. Is the individual's quest for truth a positive or negative thing in these stories? Why? Is the quest for truth in life a positive or a negative thing? Why or why not?

In "Quiet", Erin refuses to recommit to Tom, the narrator. Why does Tom want to win Erin back? Why does Erin refuse to speak to Tom anymore following the weekend in Scotland?

Discuss the theme of belonging in Dave Eggers's story anthology, "How We Are Hungry". What is belonging? Describe the theme of belonging as it relates to three of Eggers's short stories. Do each of these characters find their feelings and sense of belonging? Why or why not?