

The Infatuations Study Guide

The Infatuations by Javier Marias

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Plot Summary

“The Infatuations” was a murder mystery told from the point of view of a woman, Maria Dolz, whose infatuations lead her into the heart of the mystery, forever altering her perception of the world around her.

In the beginning of the novel, Maria was a naïve young woman who led a dull life working at a publishing house. Before work each morning, she would watch the Desverns, a couple she had nicknamed “the perfect couple” eat breakfast together. She became infatuated by the perfect love she saw embodied by the two of them. They offered her the only moments of happiness in her dull day.

After years of watching them, Maria noticed that the couple stopped coming to the coffee shop. Maria learned from her coworker that Miguel, the husband, had been savagely murdered. After offering her condolences to Luisa, the wife, Maria was invited into the woman’s home. There, Maria met Miguel’s best friend, Javier.

Shortly after their initial meeting, Javier and Maria met again. They then began a romantic relationship, during which Maria became infatuated with Javier. For, Javier, however, the relationship was purely physical. As Maria quickly learned, Javier was infatuated with Miguel’s wife Luisa.

One day as she was sleeping in Javier’s bed, Maria heard a conversation between Javier and Ruiberriz. In this conversation, Maria learned that Javier and Ruiberriz were accomplices in the murder of Miguel. Maria was stunned and frightened by Javier. She was, however, still hopelessly in love with him.

After a few weeks without word from Javier, Maria received a phone call from him, practically begging her to come over. When she arrived, Javier explained his side of the murder. He claimed that Miguel had received a fatal diagnosis shortly before the murder. Javier said that Miguel had asked him to have him killed in order to avoid a slow and painful death to illness.

For years after, Maria struggled with whether or not to believe Javier’s account of the events. She finally concluded that she did not believe him. One evening, she saw Javier and Luisa at a restaurant, obviously married. She went over to their table, contemplating whether or not to reveal the truth about Javier to his wife. She finally realized that she could not. She would be forever infatuated with Javier and thus could not possibly betray him despite her knowledge of his wrongdoing.



Part 1 - Section 1

Summary

“The Infatuations” is a story told from the point of view of a woman, Maria Dolz, who becomes infatuated by the lives of a “perfect couple” she sees habitually at her local coffee shop before work. For Luisa, this couple offers a refreshing break from her dull existence. When the couple stops arriving at the coffee shop, however, she finds herself involved in a violent mystery.

Part 1 began in the coffee shop, where Luisa watched the “perfect couple” enjoy breakfast. It was the last time Maria would see the man of the couple, Miguel Desvern. At this time, Luisa had not yet spoken to either Miguel, or his wife, Luisa. She knew them only through her observation of their interactions. Later that day, Miguel would be stabbed to death. When Miguel left the café, it was the last time Maria or Luisa saw him.

Maria thought about the finality of death and how it can change the living’s entire existence. She also thought about how large a role Miguel had played in her life, although she had never even spoken to him. She had been too afraid to introduce herself and scare away him and his wife. Instead, she enjoyed their company from afar each morning. Witnessing their perfection gave her monotonous days a bit of joy.

Maria considered Luisa and Miguel to be the perfect couple for the obvious joy they brought to one another. They always acted as if they were just meeting, although they were certainly married. Maria never saw one of them without the other by his or her side. She wondered if they noticed her at all.

Maria did not know what the Desverns did for a living when she used to watch them, but knew that they must be rich. Towards the end of June, Luisa noticed that the Desverns were no longer coming to the café. She assumed they were away on vacation.

During that time, Maria came upon a news story about a businessman who had been stabbed to death. She was horrified by the gruesome images of the dying man on the cover of the paper. She thought it horribly disrespectful for the end of one’s life to be portrayed in such a way for all to see. She wondered what kind of situation the man may have been mixed up in that caused such a gruesome murder. She did not consider linking the death to the recent disappearance of the Desverns.

After returning from a business trip, Maria was surprised to find that the couple was still not present at the café. She continued on to work, feeling much more irritable than usual. After a conversation with one of her firm’s author’s, she found that without the influence of the perfect couple, she lacked any amount of optimism or understanding.

Shortly after, a coworker, Beatriz, informed Maria of Miguel’s misfortune, assuming she must have already heard. She recounted the events, saying that the man’s name was Miguel Deverne. He was a member of a large film distribution company, Deverne Films,



and went by Miguel Desvern to preserve his privacy. He had been stabbed to death by a crazy homeless man, Luis Felipe Vasquez Canella, while parking his car. It was then that Maria connected the events to the story she had seen in the paper. At first, she had not recognized Miguel without his wife.

When Maria returned home that evening, she searched the internet for details on Miguel's death. She read multiple reports, citing that his assailant had said different things before killing him. One report shared that the killer believed Deverne to have taken his inheritance. Another said that he believed Deverne had sold his daughters in prostitution. Still another shared that the killer had reminded Deverne in his final moments that his wife would forget him by the following day. Maria knew Deverne could not possibly have any association with negative business. He was too good a man. She found it especially curious that his death was only reported for two days after it took place given his success and notoriety, she would have thought it to be more highly recognized.

At the end of the summer, Luisa reappeared at the café. On her first visit back, she was accompanied by female friends. The group was speaking of funeral arrangements, which Luisa seemed not to want to speak of. As it was her first return to the café, waiters approached her table to offer condolences. Maria wanted to do the same, but was still too shy. She decided to go to work instead.

About a month later, Maria saw Luisa again, this time accompanied by her children. Luisa's daughter was stroking her cheek. The child appeared to be comforting her mother. After the children had eaten, a car pulled up to pick up the children. It was the same car Miguel had driven to work each day. Luis waved absently as her children departed, gazing lonely at the car that was once her husband's.

After Luisa's children left, Maria decided to finally approach her. She introduced herself, telling Luisa that she was sorry for the loss of Miguel. Maria also shared that she had watched the two dine each morning. Luisa told Maria that she and Miguel knew her well by sight. They had referred to her as "The Prudent Young Woman." The two begin talking and Luisa asks Maria to come over later in the day. In this conversation, Maria learned Luisa's name for the first time.

Analysis

The story is told from the perspective of Maria Dolz. All actions of the story is told in the past tense, as if Maria is recounting this period in her life. Maria's recounting the events tells the reader, from the start, that this period in her life was very significant.

Although Maria begins her narration at a time in which she did not know the "perfect couple" she observed in the café, she suggests that she would meet the wife, Luisa, later on. Although Maria began as a third party observer, she came to be connected with those she observed.



In the opening of the novel, Maria is characterized as being a quiet observer with little satisfaction to gain from her own isolated existence. She is not satisfied with her job and appears to have few close personal relationships. Rather, she gained her satisfaction in her infatuations with others. For years, she reveled in the perfection she saw embodied by Luisa and Miguel. Rather than approach the couple or strive for her own romantic relationship, she chose to observe. Just being in their presence was enough for her.

Luisa and Miguel were also characterized as being Maria's image of the "perfect couple." The joy they brought one another was obvious to the eye of the observer. They were also characterized as a single entity, rather than two unique beings. This characterization provides reasoning for Luisa's inability to cope after her husband's death. She had not only lost her husband, but a part of herself.

Maria's consideration of the finality of death in the opening pages of the novel introduces the predominate theme of metaphysical questioning throughout the novel. Throughout the entire novel, Maria questions the meaning of life and death, among other phenomenon. In this way, the novel comes to serve as a murder mystery entwined with a metaphysical analysis of the circumstances presented by the narrator.

When the Desverns stopped breakfasting at the café toward the end of June, Maria considered how easy it was for one to disappear. Just as coincidence can draw people together, it can seamlessly draw them apart. This notion foreshadowed the mystery and circumstance involved in the murder of Miguel Desvern.

Maria's dissatisfaction with her job is seen in her interaction with Garay Fontina, an author her firm had signed. Throughout the entire interaction, Maria was not even slightly interested in what he had to say. She also found his work to be unbearable. Her lack of interest in her occupation is contrasted with her infatuation with the Desverns.

Miguel's killer uttering that his wife should forget him after his death foreshadows the reason for his arranged killing.

Maria considered, after reading of Miguel's death, how death could strip a person of all his or her material worth. Having been a highly successful and kind man, Miguel had led an enjoyable life. In his death, however, he was portrayed only a photograph of his bloody body in the street. Regardless of his wealth or status, he would be seen as a poor man. This emphasized death's inherent power over all people. Sadly, it is not one's life that is remembered, but his or her death.

When Luisa was in the café with her children, her young daughter appeared to be comforting her. This emphasizes the impact the loss of her husband has had on her life. As she and Miguel lived as a united entity, his loss, to Luisa was like a loss of half of her self. For this reason, she was less able to cope and recover from his loss than her children were. As Maria spoke with Luisa, she noticed that she continued to refer to herself and Miguel as "we" although the latter was no longer alive. Even in his death, she could not separate herself from him. Thus, she had died symbolically with him.



After deciding to approach Luisa, Maria analyzed the woman's thoughts and emotions. Although Maria had only been left by choice, not by death, she imaged how Luisa might be feeling after the loss of her husband. In this sense, her infatuation went so far as to attempt to feel with her subjects. Through her distant connection, Maria felt she could empathize with those she was infatuated by. In doing so, she allowed her infatuation to grow, imagining a connection with these peoples far greater than what actually exists.

Discussion Question 1

Examine Maria's characterization. Is her infatuation with the couple strange or understandable?

Discussion Question 2

Is Maria a credible narrator? How could her infatuation with the "perfect couple" add bias to the story?

Discussion Question 3

When Maria saw the photograph of Miguel in the street, she did not recognize him without his wife present. Examine the relationship between Miguel and Luisa. Did they exist as separate entities or simply in the context of their connection with one another?

Vocabulary

albeit, anachronistic, sycophantic, incongruously, castigating, macabre, ignominious, sanguine, fob, calcareous, sonorous, commiseration, penultimate, novice



Part 1 - Section 2

Summary

That evening, Maria and Luisa sat in Luisa's living room. Luisa told Maria that the death had changed the ways she thinks. Whenever she heard an ambulance or police siren, she would put herself into the mind of the victim. She would imagine their thoughts and always find herself back in the mind of her late husband. She wondered what his final thoughts had been as he was killed.

As Luisa recounted the suffering she believed Miguel to have gone through in his final moments, Maria felt the need to interrupt. She told Luisa that he could not have possibly thought or suffered much as the attack happened so quickly. After sharing this, Maria was not sure why she had interjected. Luisa agreed with Maria. She did not know why she had started to imagine the thoughts of others as she had never been imaginative in the past.

After Luisa was finished speaking, Maria advised her not to think so much about what Miguel had thought, saying it would only cause her more pain. Maria, realized, however, even in saying this, that her advice was hypocritical as she had been imagining the same thing the whole time Luisa spoke.

Luisa then told Maria that many people had told her the same thing. They believed that life now was not as bad as those moments. Luisa, however, felt forever trapped in those moments continuously. She also told Maria that it was particularly difficult to recover from the loss as she had no one to hate for his murder. As he was killed by a deranged man in an act of random, violence, there was no particular person or group for which to assign blame.

Maria wondered if Luisa was so open with her only because she was the only person who would listen. She realized that in polite society, grieving seemed to have an expiration date. After this, even the closest of friends no longer showed support.

Trying to bring some positivity to the conversation, Maria remarked that Luisa's children must bring her hope and joy in this time of constant sorrow. Luisa told Maria that this was not true. Rather, they brought her nothing but pain. She felt eternally sorry for her children and could not find the strength to comfort them.

The doorbell then rang and Maria realized that regardless of who entered, her conversation with Luisa was ending. Luisa spoke into the entry phone, telling the person outside she would let him or her in. She did not seem the least bit surprised, which signaled to Maria that the person at the door was a habitual visitor.

When Maria answered the door two men entered, Miguel's best friend Javier Diaz-Varela, and his friend Professor Rico. Javier introduced Professor Rico to Luisa. Professor Rico went on to make pompous observation while the others merely stood



and listened to him speak. Although Javier was much more understated than his friend, Maria noticed at once that he was confident and handsome.

Maria also observed that Javier seemed to be a constant presence in the home. She imagined Miguel had asked Javier to look after his wife should anything happen to him.

Analysis

Although Maria and Luisa were strangers, Luisa immediately opened up to Maria about the most personal details of her feelings about her husband. Maria wondered if she was the only person Luisa was able to be so open with. She also wondered if Miguel's death was the only thing Maria was capable of thinking about.

Luisa's changed thought process since the time of her husband's death shows that she had developed an unhealthy infatuation with the lives of the dying. As she suffered a symbolic death with her husband, her mind remained in his final moments. Though she was not there, she longed to understand what he had felt in those final moments. As she was no longer able to be truly alive without it, these final moments served as the final moments of her life as well.

As Luisa rambled on with her notions of what Miguel had been thinking in his final moments, Maria pondered the strangeness of the entire situation. She found it particularly upsetting that Miguel had died at the hands of a man who bore such small significance in his life. He did not even know the man, nor had he done anything to offend him. Maria thought it horrible to die to someone so insignificant, completely by chance. This stream of thought lies in direct juxtaposition to the truth behind Miguel's murder. Although the events were arranged to appear random, Miguel had in fact been killed by someone he knew well. This contrast adds a sense of irony to the thoughts of Maria.

Luisa's feeling that she was forever trapped inside Miguel's final moments emphasized their identity as one single entity, rather than two separate human beings. Luisa could not live without Miguel because without him, she was not a complete being. Thus, she remained trapped in those final moments, unable to free herself and continue living.

When Luisa spoke of the misery of having no one to blame for her husband's death, she foreshadowed the irony of the situation. Although she believed his murder to be completely random, she should have hated the very man who supported her in her time of loss. Far from random, the murder was planned by Miguel's best friend.

Luisa's assessment of her relationship with her children since Miguel's death emphasized the pessimism and hopelessness of her character without her husband. She told Maria that she always felt bad for her children, as they had so much more life to live and so much disappointment to face. Losing their father, she thought, was just an added misfortune on top of all they would inherently face as human beings. This point of view lied in stark contrast to the liveliness and love for life Luisa possessed in her relationship with Miguel. His loss had drained her of all hopefulness and zest for life.



When her conversation with Luisa ended, Maria considered the strangeness of their relationship. Luisa had confided in Maria because she had been part of her past life with Miguel. Ironically, the two would have never have developed such a close bond had Miguel still been alive. She would have remained an outsider.

Maria considered how little the living tended to consider the loss of one's life had on the dead. While the living were fully capable of mourning the loss of a loved one for the effect this loss had on their own life, they were rarely capable of seeing death from the point of view of the dead. Maria found this odd as the one who had died had suffered the greatest loss, the inability to live on. This consideration on the part of Maria added to the theme of metaphysical questioning throughout the novel.

Maria's imagined conversation between Miguel and Javier emphasized her infatuation with the men. In addition, it foreshadowed the chain of events that would be revealed later in the novel. Maria imagined Miguel had asked Javier to look after Luisa if he should pass. Miguel then told Javier that Luisa would never love him as she would see him as a friend of her husband. In hearing this, Javier came to resent Miguel and desire Luisa. Although Maria did not know if this conversation took place in actuality, the imagined events provide evidence for Javier's motive in killing Miguel. When Maria's focus shifted back to reality, Professor Rico's comment on jealousy served to further foreshadow Javier's motives.

Discussion Question 1

Do you predict Luisa will ever recover from the loss of Miguel? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Luisa find herself trapped in Miguel's final moments?

Discussion Question 3

Examine the strange relationship between Luisa and Maria. Would Luisa have been so open with Maria had she introduced herself while Miguel was alive?

Vocabulary

disparate, abstruse, intemperance, albeit, incited, cessation, denizen, inquisitorial, interlocutor, pretexts, tacit, anomalous, indolent, melancholy, abeyance, virile, myopic, usurped, ignoramuses, eunuchs



Part 2 - Section 1

Summary

Part 2 began with Maria's sharing that she did not see Luisa Alday for a very long time after their first encounter. In the mean time, however, she began seeing a man she liked vaguely, Leopoldo. Simultaneously, she fell madly in love with Javier Diaz-Varella.

Maria had encountered Javier at the Natural History Museum some time after their first meeting at Luisa's house. Maria was surprised that he remembered her and especially impressed when he recalled her last name. After they left the museum, Javier began asking her about Luisa. He said he was worried because she did not seem to be making any progress toward recovery. He began rambling to Maria about how she would one day recover from the loss and marry again. He seemed especially certain of this possibility.

As Javier spoke, Maria thought of how strange it was that to Luisa, this man was virtually invisible. After just this brief conversation, Maria became completely infatuated. Maria began contemplating coincidence and chance. She remarked, in her thoughts, how strange it was that had Miguel still been alive, she and Javier would never have met.

Javier went on to say that death is out of the control of the deceased, with the exception of suicide. He also said that the living could never truly wish one had not died because his or her death was now a part of the identity of the one left alive. Although Maria did not agree with Javier, she did not say so. She just wanted to listen to him speak.

When Maria finally spoke it was to say that there was no way Luisa could ever recover from the senseless killing of her husband. Javier told Maria that she did not understand the truth and that Luisa should surely recover in time. He said that soon she would remarry and love her new husband even more than Miguel, leaving his memory in the past.

In the next scene, Maria tells the reader that she had been spending many nights in bed with Javier, although she never slept over. Each time, he would speak of the prospect of Luisa's remarriage. It became increasingly evident that he wanted to be her second husband. Maria wondered why she had such an interest in Javier as he made it obvious he loved another woman. She held on to the hope that if he failed with Luisa, he might end up loving her.

The next time Maria visited, Javier took out a French novella by Balzac. In the novella, a colonel, Chabert, was brutally injured in battle and believed to be dead. He was placed among many other corpses, where he regained consciousness. For many years, he tried to regain his identity, using the scar on his head as proof of his struggle. When he finally reconnected with his wife, he found she had remarried. His wife found his rebirth



to be a burden, as she had gotten used to the idea of his death. Maria wondered if Javier sought out novels to defend his arguments or if he just read often.

Javier also read a segment from the end of the novel. In this segment, a lawyer explained the evils he encountered on a daily basis. He explained the wicked things he had seen people do to one another, saying no work of fiction could ever be as horrible as the atrocities of life itself. Javier remarked that the most vicious of crimes are not those of the battlefield, but those committed by one's closest friends.

Luisa returned home after an evening with Javier and fantasized about the possibility of Luisa's death. She felt that Miguel's infatuation with Luisa was the only thing standing between them. With Luisa gone, she thought, perhaps Javier would finally let himself fall for her. Although she knew that the possibility of this was extremely slim and that she would never commission the murder herself, she could not help but hold onto the hope.

Analysis

Although Maria entered into a romantic relationship with Javier Diaz-Varella, she continued to refer to him primarily by his last name. This showed that the majority of their relationship existed in her infatuation with him. In reality, they were quite distant despite their sexual encounters.

As Javier rambled to Maria about the probability of Luisa's marrying again, he first revealed his infatuation with her. Just as Maria had been infatuated with the perfect couple and later with Javier, Javier was infatuated, although much more severely with Luisa. This infatuation also seemed suspicious, as Javier was supposed to be the best friend of Luisa's late husband.

When Javier quoted Macbeth, saying, "She should have died hereafter," he introduced a recurring symbol throughout the novel. In saying this, he called to attention the fact that no one is ever ready for the death of a loved one. Regardless of when the death takes place, people will always wish the person had held on longer. This quote served as a kind of justification by Javier in killing his friend. It also added to the overarching theme of metaphysical questioning.

As Maria pondered the powers of coincidence over her life, he also added to the theme of metaphysical questioning. Strangely enough, Miguel's death was Maria's only physical connection to her infatuation. Before his death, Maria had solely existed as an outsider. She was infatuated by the relationship of Miguel and Luisa, yet never so much as spoke to them. After Miguel's death, Maria met Luisa for the first time, forming a personal connection with her. In her romantic relationship with Javier, she was at once infatuated with and physically connected to the man. In Miguel's death, Maria was no longer an outsider. She was more than an observer, but an active participant in her life.

As Javier spoke of murder and death, Maria let him speak although she did not agree with what he said. Although she found his views irrational, she could not help but be



infatuated by him. This segment emphasized the lack of logic and meaning found in Maria's infatuation.

The hopelessness of Maria's infatuation is shown in her thought process as Javier spoke about Luisa. She knew very well Javier did not love her but stayed with him with the hope that he may fail with Luisa. She even considered the possibility of Luisa's death working in her favor. In this way, the twisted thought process of Javier was mirrored in the narration of Maria's thoughts. Just as he had killed for his obsession with Luisa, Maria considered the death of Luisa for her infatuation with Javier. In this way, the reader is able to look more closely at the beginning of Javier's infatuation through the thoughts of Maria.

Javier's take on Balzac's novel showed his perverse rationalization of his own misdeeds. He had come to see Miguel's death as a simple fact to which he had no emotional connection. He even tried to think of how inconvenient it would be if he were to return. In this way, he attempted to put the death completely behind him, viewing it as an event of the past.

As Javier told stories, he had a tendency to digress into metaphysical inquiry. Often, he wondered aloud on the meaning of life and death, always phrasing his opinions as if they were mere facts. This characterized Javier as entirely self-consumed. Although she rarely agreed with him, Maria rarely interrupted as she found everything he said to be fascinating. She was infatuated with Javier just as he was infatuated with himself.

While telling the story of Chabert to Maria, Javier began to digress. Hooked more on the story than on Javier's digressions, Maria asked him what happened when Chabert found his wife. Javier told her it did not matter, as a novel's true importance laid in the thoughts and feelings it evoked. This exemplified Javier's mindset that the results of actions are far more important than the actions themselves.

Javier's remark that the worst crimes are those committed by the closest of friends foreshadows his feelings for himself. Later on in the novel, Maria was confused when she noticed Javier did not try to defend his actions. Rather, he categorized himself with the worst of violent criminals. At some level, Javier understood the magnitude of what he did and thus did not try to defend his action, but rather, focused on the prospect of its consequence: a life with Luisa.

When Maria read the novel, she found that Javier had misread a key line in the conclusion. When Javier had read the line aloud, he had said that mothers have poisoned their legitimate children in order to benefit their love child. What Maria found was that the line actually stated that women brought their children up in such a way that would poison them. Although there was a distinct difference in the two actions, Javier seemed to view them as one in the same. This explained why he continued to feel guilty for the killing of Miguel, so much as he tried to avoid it. Conversely, Maria thought that this interpretation served as Miguel's way of separating himself from the murder.



When Maria fantasized about the possibility of Luisa dying, the intensity of her infatuation with Javier became apparent. She not only understood that this would almost never happen, but also understood that should it happen, she would be Javier's second choice. In her mind, this was nothing to be offended by. She equated it with being the second love in someone's life and felt that all things in some way, fell together by chance. In thinking this, Luisa emphasized the importance of chance and circumstance throughout the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Explain what Javier meant when he tells Maria that the events of a novel are less important than the thoughts and feelings it evokes. Do you agree with Javier?

Discussion Question 2

Why is the line about the mother poisoning her child important? What does it symbolize in the context of the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Why do you predict Javier had Miguel killed? Was it solely for Luisa or do you predict there was more to the murder?

Vocabulary

enervation, bequeathed, caprice, compendious, forays, expatiate, lucubration, despot, pernicious, pusillanimous, megalomaniac



Part 2 - Section 2

Summary

After wondering about the death of Luisa, Maria wondered if Javier had ever wondered the same things about his friend, Miguel.

One night, after a sexual encounter with Javier, Maria fell asleep in his bed. Although Maria never spent the night at his apartment, she occasionally dozed off to find Javier awake and fully clothed when she awoke, acting as if nothing had happened. On this particular occasion, Maria was awakened by a ringing doorbell. She at first ignored it, knowing that it did not concern her. She feigned sleep as she felt Javier leave the bed and answer the door.

Maria listened as a man entered Javier's apartment, complaining that Javier had turned his mobile phone off. Javier warned him to be quiet as he had a "bird" over, who knew the "the wife." He then came to the bedroom to check that Maria was still asleep. He closed the door on his way out, although he failed to do so entirely.

Knowing she was not supposed to hear the conversation the two men were sharing and eager to do so, Maria crept out of bed and held her ear to the door. From their conversation, Maria gathered that Javier and the visitor, Ruiberriz, were accomplices in the murder of Miguel. They had convinced Canella, the homeless man, to kill Miguel by telling him that Miguel was responsible for his daughters' prostitution. They were beginning to panic because Canella was beginning to talk to the police. Canella had reported that a man had persuaded him to kill Miguel through a cell phone. The cell phone, provided by Ruiberriz, had been disposed of since. The men felt that they had left enough space between themselves and Canella to avoid being found out. Still, however, his sudden insistence on talking was a scare to them both.

Having listened to the entire conversation, Maria felt an urge to see the man, Ruiberriz, she now knew to be an accomplice in Miguel's murder. She knew that in order to do so, she would have to appear as if she had just woken up and had not expected a visitor. She busted into the room, wearing only her shirt and a bra. Javier immediately looked at her with great distrust. Ruiberriz, however, only showed appreciation for her figure. He appeared to Maria to be an obvious rogue.

Although Maria had grown afraid of the men as she listened to their conversation behind the door, she found that when she entered the room, her fear dissolved. After Ruiberriz left, Maria began asking Javier questions about him in an attempt to appear as if she hadn't heard the conversation. Javier, however, seemed not to believe her. He attempted to show his power over Maria by tightly grasping her shoulder. The heaviness of his grasp, coupled with his unrelenting stare, made Maria very uncomfortable. She began to fear him again, just as he had wished for her to. Maria knew then that he did not believe her and felt this trip to his apartment would likely be her last.



Analysis

As she thought about the possibility of Luisa's death, Maria wondered if all people thought of the possibility of losing one close to them. She tried to rationalize her thought process with herself in considering that perhaps all people thought of ways in which their situation might be better should they lose someone close to them. In doing so, she allowed her infatuation to grow ever more overpowering while trying to convince herself that it was completely ordinary.

Javier's habitual dressing after sex with Maria exemplified his strong aversion to any kind of emotional closeness with her. Although he allowed himself to be fully present in their sexual encounters, he preferred to act as if nothing had happened when outside of the bedroom. He wished for their relationship to be sexual inside the bedroom and platonic friendship outside of it. He did not wish for any romantic feelings to blur the boundaries. When he referred to Maria as a "bird," to his visitor, he emphasized the lack of commitment he had for her.

As Maria listened to the conversation between Javier and Ruiberriz, she continued to question whether or not what she was hearing was true. Given her infatuated love for Javier, she could not allow herself to believe that he was, in fact, a murderer. Although she had heard the details quite clearly, she forced herself to doubt them as her love for him created an internal conflict.

When Maria emerged from the bedroom in her bra, Javier showed an immediate distrust for her. Knowing he had much to hide, he trusted no one with his greatest secret. Due to his guilty conscience, he overanalyzed every move Maria had made, deciding she must have heard him.

After meeting Ruiberriz, Maria thought him to be an obvious rogue. She thought it strange that Javier had selected him to help with the murder as he appeared obviously suspicious. Again, she thought of the quote, "she should have died hereafter." She thought that this quote related more to the wishes of the living than the dead. She found it unbelievable that the two men had conspired in the premature death of Miguel. She compared their relationship to that of secret lovers. Only the two of them knew what they were capable of. In revealing herself during their conversation, Maria had exposed their secret relationship and herself entered into it.

Discussion Question 1

Why did Maria fantasize about Maria's death?

Discussion Question 2

Why did Javier suspect Maria had heard his conversation? Do you think he will act of his suspicion?



Discussion Question 3

Why did Maria feel so empty as she left Javier's apartment at the end of Part 2?

Vocabulary

penury, impediment, acquiescent, clandestine, elided, salacious, punctilious, obfuscate, calumny, ineradicable, deduction



Part 3 - Section 1

Summary

Part 3 began with Maria's stating that Javier had not called to ask her to come over in a quite a while. As Javier had held the position of power in the relationship, he was always the one to arrange meetings.

Nearly two weeks passed with no word from Javier. Before learning of his murder plot, Maria had always felt hopeful Javier would call again and worried that he would not. Now, Maria felt only apprehension upon waiting. She hoped, for her own safety, he would not call. Simultaneously, due to her infatuation with the man, she hoped he would.

As the weeks past with no sign of Javier, Maria began to wonder if it was her duty to warn Luisa of the man. She thought that it would be the just thing to do but also knew she did not possess a strong sense of justice. Rather, she favored mercy. She could not help but see Javier as a normal man who had done one extraordinarily wrong thing.

On the fourteenth day without word from Javier, Maria answered the phone to find it was he. He wanted to meet up that night. When Maria at first refused, he pressed her, saying the matter was urgent and would only take a minute to discuss. Begrudgingly, Maria agreed to see him that evening if time allowed.

After work, Maria waited a while before going to Javier's apartment. She did not know why she had agreed to go and why she did not report him. Pondering this, she remembered a quote from "The Three Musketeers" her father used to repeat when she was younger. The quote was from a story in which Athos, the Count de la Fere, was out riding with his young wife. She was thrown from her horse and became unconscious. In an attempt to save her, Athos tore her dress open to allow breathing. In doing so, he revealed a fleur-de-lys imprinted on her skin, the mark of a criminal. He took her to a tree and hung her. Later, retelling the story, he had said the killing was "a murder and nothing more."

Maria finally decided to leave for Miguel's apartment. On the way, she considered a second story from "The Three Musketeers." After Athos had thought that he killed his wife, he crossed her path again. She remarked on how much easier it was to forget the one that caused one grief when that person is dead. Maria considered the relevance of the story in her life as she approached Miguel's home.

When Maria entered Miguel's apartment, she acted as if she had not heard his conversation with Ruiberriz. Miguel confronted her on the matter, saying that he knew that she had heard and there was no sense denying it. When she attempted to protest, he told her he had known she had heard by the fear she had shown the last time she was there. He told her that he needed to explain to her what she had heard. Maria



considered the strangeness of allowing him to discuss and clarify civilly despite the atrocity he had committed.

Javier explained to Maria that he needed to explain the situation to her, as he did not want to hurt her any more than he already had. Javier discussed the different options he had had for killing Miguel. He said that he had finally decided to go through Ruiberriz and then Canella as it was the option with the lowest risk as it left a great distance between him and the murder. He went on to explain how Ruiberriz had discovered Canella's daughters were prostitutes and that this troubled him deeply. Ruiberriz had provided Canella with a cell phone through which he convinced him that Miguel was responsible for selling his daughters into prostitution. He had then provided the knife and convinced Canella to kill Miguel. After the murder, the cell phone was disposed of, leaving no trace of manipulation.

Analysis

Part 3 began with Maria pondering how strange the nature of her relationship with Javier was. Although Javier consumed her thoughts and dreams at all times, their relationship was never even the least bit permanent. If Javier stopped calling, it would not be the least bit suspicious, as Maria was never sure if a visit would be her last. She considered her powerlessness in the relationship. Although it bothered her, she could not help but love Javier. He was the object of her infatuation.

Maria considered the story of Chabert. When she had first heard the story, she had immediately related Desvern to Chabert. She thought that Javier had identified with the story as he yearned for the memory of Miguel to disappear entirely. Seeing as Luisa could not recover from his memory, Javier felt plagued by his ghost. Now, however, Maria began to identify Javier with Chabert. He had gone through many a struggle to make Luisa his wife and now found that despite his best effort, she would never be his. She imagined the hopelessness Javier must be feeling. She wondered if he wondered about her turning him in.

Maria's resolution not to warn Luisa of Javier due to her lack of a sense of justice foreshadowed her eventual decision not to mention Javier's misdeeds to anyone. As she continued to love the man despite all he had done, she resolved to show mercy rather than justice.

When Javier called Maria after 14 days, she, for the first time, tried to resist his invitation. This emphasized the power she had had gained in the knowledge she had gleaned from overhearing his conversation with Ruiberriz. With this information, she - for the first time - possessed a power over Javier.

When considering why she had not yet turned in Javier, Maria recounted the story of Athos in "the Three Musketeers." Finding his young wife had once been a criminal, Athos made the hasty decision to kill her without even considering her side of the story. In doing so, he was said to be upholding justice. Maria related this example to her



current situation. She considered that to do what is believed to be just may not always be correct, as complete justice did not leave room for mercy.

When Athos recounted the story of hanging his wife, he told his friend, that the act was “a murder, nothing more.” Maria considered the language he used. In calling it a murder, he did not even attempt to mask the severity of the action. Yet, in adding “nothing more,” he diminished the value of the action and thus the value of the life he had ended. This mirrored Javier’s rationalization of his murder of Miguel. When speaking, he never denied that the act was a murder. He did, however, attempt to present a case in which murder seemed the favorable outcome for Miguel, diminishing the act he had committed.

When considering the story of the reappearance of Athos’s wife, Maria considered how much easier it would be to remove herself from her situation with Javier if he were dead. If he were to die, she would not have to worry if she should report him. The entire matter would be resolved in his ceasing to exist. With him dead, she would be able to finally remove herself from the situation and move on with her life. She would also be able to finally end her infatuated love for him.

When Javier told Maria that he needed to explain himself, she considered the strangeness of the age she lived in. No matter the magnitude of the wrong one had committed, others were expected to listen as they explained and even justified their actions. Although she could not help but be disappointed by the strangeness of her generation, she accepted herself as a part of it and chose not to rebel. In doing so, Maria once again assumed a passive role, knowing what she was doing was inherently wrong but doing nothing to change it.

As Javier began his explanation of the murder, Maria thought about what Javier would do without her. She saw herself as a much needed break from the perpetual sadness waiting for Luisa to stop mourning her husband. This pondering was an example of Maria trying desperately to assign herself value in Javier’s life. She wanted to be as irreplaceable to him as he was to her.

As he went on to describe how he had arrived at his decision to have Javier murdered through a chain of accomplices, Maria recalled Luisa’s defining envy earlier in the novel. She had read that it was often engendered by one’s closest friends. This definition had foreshadowed the eventual revelation of Javier as Miguel’s murderer.

Throughout Javier’s entire description of the murder, Maria found it surprising that he did not attempt to share blame for his actions. He took full responsibility for the plot to kill Miguel although he did have conspirators. He described his actions as murder and did not attempt to sugarcoat the situation. Maria found this odd, as he could have easily attempted to place blame with an accomplice or lessen the severity of what he did. This showed that Miguel had completely rationalized his actions to himself and was prepared to accept full blame for them. He had convinced himself that what he had done was just, just as Athos had in “The Three Musketeers.” He had thus detached himself from the actions, seeing what he had done as “a murder and nothing more.”



Discussion Question 1

Consider Maria's discussion on justice. Is it wrong for her not to reveal the truth about Javier? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

In "The Three Musketeers," was Athos correct in killing his wife? Does justice have limits?

Discussion Question 3

Why didn't Javier attempt to shift the blame for Miguel's murder to his other accomplices?

Vocabulary

phantasm, pique, antipathy, adulation, maelstrom, mete, resuscitated, simulacrum, obstinacy, dogsbody, unperturbed, phantasmagorical, innocuous, perdition, recapitulations, deduced



Part 3 - Section 2

Summary

Javier continued explaining his side of Miguel's murder to Maria, giving special emphasis to all of the chance elements that went into making the ultimate act possible. He then went on to describe his love for Luisa. He told Maria his desire for her defied all morals and scruples.

After talking in great length about his desires for Luisa, Javier explained that the root of his desires were inexplicable. He compared his desire for Luisa to Maria's desire for him. Maria was embarrassed because she had gone to great lengths to keep her desires secret from him.

Seeing Maria was embarrassed, Javier went on to explain that he, of course, knew she did not love him, for if she did she would not suspect him of the crime. Maria considered this statement but replied that if she were in love with him, she could have Luisa killed without soiling her hands quite as much as he did.

Offended by this statement, Javier went on to explain that he had not soiled his hands. He had hired a hot man for the same reasons politicians and gangs do. Maria wondered why he grouped himself with such horrible people rather than attempting to defend himself. Maria decided then that her affair was over. She had finally accepted he was indeed a killer.

Frustrated, Maria asked Javier how he could possibly disconnect himself from the murder he had set into motion. He answered that he did not know. He did his best to distance himself but was never truly distanced. Maria then remembered that Javier had mentioned Miguel asking a favor of him. She asked what that favor had been.

Javier told her that all of the details he had shared regarding the planning of the murder had been true. There was only one thing he had not yet mentioned, and this detail was the most important of them all. Only he and Ruiberriz were aware of the favor Miguel had asked.

After again diverging into a soliloquy on Luisa's condition, Javier returned to the topic. He told that Maria that months before Miguel's death, he had experienced a period of general lassitude. He then began to develop blurred vision in one eye. He went to a doctor to find he had ocular melanoma with general metastasis. With this diagnosis, he had at most two months before he began to face a slow and painful death.

Javier went on to say that Miguel had asked him to have him killed before this deterioration began. He did not want to know when or where he would be killed. He said that the uncertainty was the only thing that would keep him sane. Although Javier never verbally agreed, he knew from the moment he asked that he would have to fulfill his



friend's dying wish. Given he had never agreed, he was uncertain as to whether Miguel even connected him to the murder.

Maria at once expressed her skepticism of Javier's story. Javier told her that he was, in fact, being truthful and went on to elaborate on the details of Miguel's dying wish. He told her that Miguel could not kill himself. He had looked into traveling abroad to be euthanized but could not deal with the certainty of deciding when he should die. He desired uncertainty.

When Javier finished recounting the story, he was aware of Maria's unending skepticism. He told her that her choice to believe him was not important. What was important was that she knew the truth. He appeared physically exhausted, as if, Maria thought, he had just killed a man.

Analysis

As Javier emphasized the importance of luck and chance in the murder of Miguel, he attempted to further detach himself from its happening. In this detachment, it was clear to see that he felt a certain degree of guilt for his actions. The guilt he faced and his clinging to the case of circumstance added a degree of uncertainty to his account of the murder.

When Javier described his love for Luisa, he mentioned that the love defied all scruples. In saying this, he led Maria to believe that he had killed Miguel for personal gain, rather than to save him from illness. In describing his love in such a way, he negated his defense before he had even tried to relay it to her. No matter what reason he gave for killing Miguel, he had rendered himself unbelievable.

When Javier spoke of Maria's desire for him, Maria was immediately embarrassed. She had gone to great lengths to keep her desire a secret from him. This exemplified Maria's controlled nature. Although her infatuation with Javier consumed her thoughts at all times, she would not allow him to know he held this power over her. Maria wanted to always give the impression of being in a position of control, even if she was undeniably powerless.

In grouping himself with gang members commissioning murders, Javier admitted a certain level of guilt for the murder of Miguel. Although he tried to separate himself from the murder as much as possible, he undoubtedly retained a certain level of guilt, causing him to associate himself with other cold-blooded killers. This guilt suggested he had killed Miguel for his own gain, rather than to save him from illness. Had he commissioned the murder with good intentions, he probably would not hold such a negative image of himself.

As Maria asked Javier about the favor Miguel had asked of him, she again considered the strangeness of having such a civil conversation of such a horrid subject. She considered how her relationship with Javier had changed since the discovery of the murder. Everything had changed yet their conversation, ironically, was as civil as ever.



As Javier prepared to inform Maria of the favor Miguel had asked him, he mentioned that all the details he had shared up to that point were true. He would not deny his love for Luisa and he felt that the most pain free course of action would be to allow the dead to depart. Colonel Chabert, he said, caused his wife great pain by returning after he was thought dead. Maria argued that she caused him far greater pain in denying him when he returned. This debate signified Javier's lapse in moral judgment. In order to defend his love for Luisa and immoral decision, he was willing to support unethical viewpoints. This lack of compassion also served to diminish the credibility of Javier's story. He was willing to go to any length to make his decision seem acceptable.

When Javier spoke of Miguel's dying wish, Maria was immediately skeptical. Having heard his frequent deviations on his love for Luisa, she could not believe his motives were anything but his desire to be with her.

When Javier told Maria that Miguel had wanted to be killed before the disease could kill him, her mind jumped to the line from Macbeth, "She should have died hereafter." She considered the strangeness of knowing when one would die and requesting that this date be pushed forward. She also questioned the morality of Javier's decision if his story were true.

At the end of Javier's story, Maria equated his visible exhaustion to the exhaustion of one who had just committed a murder. In recounting the story, Javier had again reconnected himself with it, again taking on the burden he tried his best to separate from. She related his story back to the quote, "a murder, nothing more." In saying that he had killed his friend in order to save him from suffering, Javier decreased the magnitude of the murder. He diminished it to a level of guilt he could live with. Whether the story was true or not, Javier had forced himself to believe it in order to live with the burden of the atrocity he had committed.

Discussion Question 1

Do you believe Javier's story? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Is Maria a credible narrator? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of the final line of Part 3, "a murder, nothing more?"



Vocabulary

perpetuity, digressions, didactic, odious, iconoclast, surreptitious, abjure, introspection, lassitude, chivvied



Part 4

Summary

To begin Part 4, Maria shares that her last visit to Javier's home was the last time she would ever see him alone. She wondered how he felt after telling her his story.

In an effort to avoid thinking about Javier and Miguel's murder, Maria began spending copious amounts of time at the office. One day, she exited her building to find Ruiberriz waiting for her outside. She was immediately frightened, thinking Javier had sent him. When the two began talking, however, it appeared that Ruiberriz had come to meet her on his own accord. He asked her if she would like to get a drink at the café where she usually had breakfast. No longer frightened, she accepted.

After exchanging a bit of pleasant conversation, Maria finally thought it time to confront Ruiberriz on her suspicions. She asked him why Javier had sent him. Ruiberriz was genuinely surprised. He told her that he had spoken to Javier, who had told him their relationship was over. He then decided to try to ask her on a date. Maria was still suspicious. She asked why he would want to see her after her last interaction with Javier. Ruiberriz was confused. Finally, Maria revealed that she knew about the murder and Miguel's illness. Ruiberriz was shocked. He thought that that information was between he and Javier alone.

Still suspicious, Maria pressed him further. She was suspicious his shocked reaction had been planned by Javier. She asked Ruiberriz why, if Miguel was sick, would Javier be after his wife. Ruiberriz had no idea what she was talking about. He told Maria she was mistaken. Javier would always be a bachelor. Sufficiently confused, Maria decided to stop pressing him for information on the murder.

As time went on, Maria's infatuation with Javier began to lessen. She tried her best not to think of him and to focus on her work. She met a man and married him.

Two years after she lost contact with Javier, however, she sees him again. This time, he is dining with - and obviously married to - Luisa. She sees them at a Chinese restaurant, where she is celebrating a book launch with a writer and his friends. Throughout dinner, she cannot help but watch them. She contemplates approaching their table.

When Maria finally does leave for the table, she does so almost instinctively. She does not know what she will say to the couple. When she finally reaches the table, she is greeted warmly by Luisa. Maria knows then she cannot tell her the truth. Maria is forever infatuated with Javier and, thus, finds it impossible to betray him.



Analysis

When Maria considered what Javier had told her, she thought of how his actions had affected her. She now found herself inseparable from the things that he had shared. They had become a part of her whose influence she would never escape. After spending her life embodying the role of the “prudent young woman,” this experience had changed her in a very significant way. She no longer lived life solely as an outsider, but now found herself lost in the middle of the action.

When Maria saw Ruiberriz outside her building, she was immediately suspicious. Still infatuated by Javier and the murder he had committed, Maria related every occurrence back to him. Even as Ruiberriz spoke to her, she became offended as his courting probably meant that Javier had told him they were over. Despite herself, she could not help but remain in love with the man she knew had committed a horrid murder.

When Maria revealed that she knew about Miguel’s illness and the plot to kill him, Ruiberriz was genuinely shocked. Still suspicious, Maria pressed him further. It was clear her connection to the murder was making her paranoid. Through her interaction, Maria showed an all-consuming lack of trust she had not had before learning of the murder. She was no longer the innocent girl she had been before. Her involvement with Javier had taken away her innocence.

Maria, after her conversation with Ruiberriz, realized that she would receive no further clarity on the truth about the murder. She decided that all she could do was distance herself from it and Javier. It was then that she began calling him by his surname. She knew the habit was childish, but it was the only defense she had against falling deeper into her infatuation.

At the end of the novel, Maria mentions that she had married to a man she found “sufficiently interesting and amusing.” It is clear from her description that she does not love the man as she loved Javier. This signals that she has never truly gotten over her infatuation with him, foreshadowing the ending scene of the novel.

As Maria watched Javier and Luisa dine, she considered the strangeness of seeing them married. She wondered again whether or not it was her moral duty to tell Luisa the truth. She contemplated approaching them, and what she would say if she did approach them. When Maria left the table to speak with them, the reader is left in suspense as to what would happen in their interaction. This suspense mirrored the suspense Maria felt as she approached. For the first time, she was inclined to act on instinct rather than a set plan.

In the closing scene of the novel, the magnitude of Maria’s infatuation is made clear. She now feels certain Javier’s story of Miguel’s illness was untrue. Still, she cannot bring herself to “betray him” with the truth. Despite all that had happened, she still holds an allegiance to Javier. She is forever tied to him in the inescapable bond of infatuation.



Discussion Question 1

When Maria approaches Javier and Luisa, did you predict she would tell Luisa the truth?

Discussion Question 2

What does Maria's inability to reveal the truth to Luisa say about her characterization?

Discussion Question 3

If you were the author, would you have had Maria tell Luisa the truth? Why or why not? What does the ending do to the story as a whole?

Vocabulary

loitering, cohabit, turfed, precept, credulity, corroborate, ingenuous, tedium, veracity, attenuation, diaphanous, tympana, vestiges, adulatory, gauche



Characters

Maria Dolz

Maria Dolz is the narrator of the “The Infatuations.” As the entire novel is told from the perspective of Maria, the events represented take on somewhat of a biased tone. As Maria describes her interactions with other characters in the novel, she attempts to represent and analyze their thoughts and feelings. In this way, the reader is not presented with the true thoughts of other characters but, rather, with Maria’s interpretation of their words and actions.

In the opening of the novel, Maria is characterized as being a quiet observer with little satisfaction to gain from her own isolated existence. She was not satisfied with her job and appeared to have few close personal relationships. Rather, she gained her satisfaction in her infatuations with others. For years, she reveled in the perfection she saw embodied by Luisa and Miguel Desvern. Rather than approach the couple or strive for her own romantic relationship, however, she chose to observe. Just being in their presence was enough for her.

When the Desverns mysteriously stopped frequenting the café that Maria breakfasted at, Maria began to find her days unbearable. The Desverns provided her the only happiness in her day. Shortly after their disappearance, Maria realized that Miguel had been killed. The next time she saw Luisa, Maria finally approached her. In her encounter with Luisa, Maria was, for the first time, truly connected with the object of her infatuation.

At Luisa’s home, Maria was briefly introduced to Javier, the late Miguel’s best friend. After meeting him again following this initial introduction, Maria began seeing Javier and fell madly in love with him. Thus, a majority of the novel focuses not on Maria’s initial infatuation with the Desverns, but on her all-consuming infatuation with Javier.

Javier Diaz-Varela

Javier Diaz-Varela is introduced as the best friend of Miguel Desvern before he was mysteriously stabbed to death. The narrator, Maria, was first introduced to Javier at the home of Luisa Alday, Miguel’s widow. After the initial meeting, Maria and Javier met again in the Natural History Museum, after which they began a romantic affair.

Javier played a major role in the novel as the object of Maria’s infatuation. For the majority of the novel, Luisa analyzed Javier’s every thought and action, hopelessly desiring his love. Throughout the entire affair, however, Maria was aware that Javier was infatuated with another woman, Luisa. Javier showed a strange obsession with the idea of Luisa’s remarriage to him.



As Maria listened from his room one day, Javier conversed with an accomplice about the murder of Miguel Desvern. Javier and his accomplice, Ruiberriz, had convinced Canella, a homeless man to kill Miguel. Later, Javier told Maria that Miguel was terminally ill and had asked to be murdered in order to escape a slow and painful death. Maria, however, did not believe him. She believed he had conspired to kill Miguel in order to marry Luisa, the object of his obsession.

The murder of Miguel was left very much a mystery at the end of novel, adding to the elusiveness of Javier's character. In the end, the reader had to determine whether to believe Javier or Maria, the narrator of the story. Both characters, however, possessed major infatuations and used twisted logic in order to justify their actions. Therefore, neither character possessed full credibility, leaving the truth of the situation a mystery.

Luisa Alday

Luisa Alday started the novel married to Miguel Desvern. Luisa and Miguel dined each morning in the same café. Maria observed them each day, noting their genuine happiness at being in each other's company. She described them as the perfect couple. In the novel's beginning, Luisa was described as beautiful and carefree.

When Miguel was killed, Luisa became completely distraught. She found herself trapped in the moments just before his death. As Luisa and Miguel had lived as one single entity while he was alive, she had suffered a symbolic death with her husband. She was trapped in those final moments as they were the final moments of the life she had shared with Miguel.

Although the reader is not privy to how exactly it happened, when Luisa is reintroduced at the end of the novel, she has remarried her late husband's best friend, Javier.

Miguel Desvern/Deverne

Miguel Desvern was a successful Spanish businessman whose family owned a large film company. He went by the name Miguel Deverne in order to protect his identity from his connection to his family's film company. He and his wife, Luisa, came to the same café together each morning to have breakfast before he left for work. The two were visibly in love and seemed extremely excited to be with one another each morning. Their obvious happiness caused Maria to nickname them, "the perfect couple."

On his birthday, Miguel was stabbed to death in an alley by a homeless man named Canella. The murder was arranged by his best friend, Javier Diaz-Varela. According to Javier, Miguel had been diagnosed with general metastasis as a result of ocular melanoma. He had claimed to have arranged the murder at Miguel's request to save him from suffering. Maria believed that Javier had killed Miguel in order to marry his wife, Maria. The death of Miguel was left very much a mystery at the end of the novel.



Only the main plotline of the novel was the murder of Miguel, Miguel himself was only a minor character, appearing briefly in the novel's beginning. This emphasizes the point made throughout the novel that the world belonged very much to the living and not the dead. Although Miguel was the person who had died a horrid death, the novel focused primarily on the reaction of the characters to his death, not on his perspective on the matter.

Ruiberriz de Torres

Ruiberriz de Torres was the middle man in the murder of Miguel. An old friend of Javier, Ruiberriz acted as a go between for Javier and Canella. He played a major role in convincing Canella to murder Miguel. Ruiberriz always wore leather and was described by Maria as an obvious rogue. His character was shrouded in mystery as Maria knew little about him besides her overheard conversation on Miguel's murder.

Luis Felipe Vasquez Canella

Canella was the homeless man who carried out the murder of Miguel. Ruiberriz convinced Canella to murder Miguel after being commissioned by Javier. Ruiberriz convinced Canella to murder Miguel by talking to him through a cell phone that he had provided. After convincing Canella that Miguel had sold his daughters into prostitution, Ruiberriz provided Canella with the butterfly knife to commit the murder of Miguel. As Canella had shown signs of mental illness before the murder, his account of the murder was not taken seriously, allowing Ruiberriz and Miguel to escape without blame.

Leopoldo

Leopoldo was the man that Maria dated while carrying on her affair with Javier. He was rarely mentioned, emphasizing the all-consuming nature of Maria's infatuation with Javier.

Garay Fontina

Garay Fontina is a conceited and untalented author signed by Maria's firm. In Maria's interactions with Gary, her dissatisfaction with her career path is expressed.

Professor Francisco Rico

Professor Francisco Rico was Javier's friend. Javier had brought Professor Rico to Luisa's home the first time he met Maria. Professor Rico was characterized as being pompous and flirtatious. The overabundance of these characteristics in Professor Rico underwhelmed the same characteristics in Javier.

Beatriz

Beatriz was Maria's coworker. She was the person who first informed Maria that Miguel had been killed.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Prudent Young Woman

In the beginning of the novel, Luisa and Miguel Desvern nicknamed Maria, “The Prudent Young Woman” after noticing she observed them at breakfast. In doing so, they noticed Maria’s careful attitude toward the future. She enjoyed observing the couple, yet never approached. She feared that approaching them would scare them away, ruining her ability to observe them in the future. Maria never acted on impulse, but rather did everything with caution and regard for the future.

The Perfect Couple

In the beginning of the novel, Maria nicknamed Miguel and Luisa Desvern “The Perfect Couple” because they appeared to be so entirely happy with one another. This title was ironic as although the couple was perfectly happy, they were completely unaware of the tragedy that would befall them in Miguel’s murder.

Butterfly Knife

When Canella stabbed Miguel to death, he used a butterfly knife. Butterfly knives were illegal in Spain because of their deceptive and dangerous nature. The butterfly knife symbolized the deception and trickery of Javier, who killed Miguel despite appearing to be his best friend.

Miguel's Death

Miguel’s death served as a symbolic death for his wife, Luisa. When Miguel was alive, he and Luisa had functioned as a single entity. When he died, she suffered a symbolic death with her husband. As she and Miguel had existed as one single entity, Luisa could not be truly alive without the part of her Miguel made up. After he died, Luisa found her mind remained in his final moments. Though she was not there, she longed to understand what he had felt in those final moments. As she was no longer able to be truly alive without him, these final moments served as the final moments of her life as well. In her husband’s death, the self Luisa had embodied in her relationship with him died as well.

Miguel’s death also served as a type of rebirth for Maria. Before Miguel had died, Maria watched Miguel and Luisa eat together each morning, but never approached them, afraid to scare them off. She carried on her infatuation from afar but never had any connection to the couple. After Miguel’s death, Maria finally approached Luisa. Her meeting with Luisa led to her infatuation with Javier, a man with whom she carried on a



romantic relationship. After Miguel's death, Maria shifted from the role of observer to actor in her own life.

Macbeth

Throughout the novel, the line, "She should have died hereafter," from Macbeth was repeatedly quoted. This line was significant as it called into question the timing of one's death. For the living and for the deceased, in most cases, it always seemed as if the person dying should survive longer. In the case of Miguel, Javier claimed that his murder was just as it saved him from a long, painful death to illness. This quote raised the question of whether or not one could rightly say when another should or should not die.

Spider's Web

When describing her infatuation with Miguel, Maria compared it to a spider's web. She felt trapped in her infatuation with him and desired nothing but his presence, although she knew it was never permanent. In the end of the novel, Maria repeated the spider's web comparison, conveying that one could never truly escape the web once entangled.

Chabert

On one of Maria's visits, Javier took a French novella by Balzac off of his shelf. In the novella, a colonel, Chabert, was brutally injured in battle and believed to be dead. He was placed among many other corpses, where he regained consciousness. For many years, he tried to regain his identity, using the scar on his head as proof of his struggle. When he finally reconnected with his wife, he found she had remarried. His wife found his rebirth to be a burden, as she had gotten used to the idea of his death. Maria wondered if Javier sought out novels to defend his actions or if he just reads often. As Chabert's rebirth was perceived as a bother, Javier seemed to use the example as justification for killing Miguel.

Later in the novel, Maria reconsidered the story of Chabert. When she had first heard the story, she had immediately related Desvern to Chabert. She thought that Javier had identified with the story as he yearned for the memory of Miguel to disappear entirely. Seeing as Luisa could not recover from his memory, Javier felt plagued by his ghost. Now, however, Maria began to identify Javier with Chabert. He had gone through many a struggle to make Luisa his wife and now found that, despite his best effort, she would never be his.

Lawyer Derville

At the end of Balzac's novel, the lawyer, Derville described the ugliness he had witnessed in the world. He said that in his profession, he had seen the most heartless



acts committed between friends and family on a regular basis. This reemphasized the magnitude of the treachery Javier had committed in murdering his best friend.

Fleur-de-Lys

In “The Three Musketeers,” the fleur-de-lys served as a marker for criminals. Athos killed his wife after finding a fleur-de-lys on her body. In deciding not to turn Javier in for the murder he had committed, Maria decided that she would not be a fleur-de-lys. In making this decision, she considered that pure justice might not always be the correct course of action as it did not allow for mercy.

Athos

Maria considered a passage from “The Three Musketeers” her father used to repeat when she was younger. The quote was from a story in which Athos, the Count de la Fere, was out riding with his young wife. She was thrown from her horse and became unconscious. In an attempt to save her, Athos tore her dress open to allow breathing. In doing so, he revealed a fleur de lis imprinted on her skin, the mark of a criminal. He took her to a tree and hung her. Later, retelling the story, he had said the killing was “a murder and nothing more.” The detachment he had from the murder he believed he had committed mirrored the detachment Javier felt for the murder of Miguel. Both men had convinced themselves their actions were correct and thus lacked emotional attachment to the atrocities they had committed.



Settings

Madrid

The novel took place entirely in Madrid. All of the novel's characters lived and worked in Madrid.

Javier's Apartment

Most of the interactions between Maria and Javier took place in Javier's apartment. As Javier was in the position of power in their relationship, he always called on Maria to come to his apartment. This apartment was where Maria developed her infatuation with Javier and where she learned of his plot to kill Miguel. Much of the novel's significant action took place in Javier's apartment.

Cafe

The novel opened in the café where Maria had watched Miguel and Luisa Desvern breakfast for years. There, she became infatuated with the couple as their perfect happiness brought her the only joy of her mundane day.

Luisa's Home

After Miguel was killed, Maria approached Luisa in the café for the first time in order to offer her condolences. Luisa invited Maria back to her home, where Luisa discussed in great detail the grief she faced without Miguel. In Luisa's home, she and Maria developed a very deep bond through one isolated interaction. This was also the place where Maria met Javier, the object of her most intense infatuation.

Alley

Miguel Desvern was killed in an alley where he regularly parked his car. The alley was significant as it was the site of Miguel's mysterious death, the event the novel centered around.



Themes and Motifs

Justice

One prevalent theme throughout the novel was that of justice. Throughout the novel, the narrator, Maria grappled with the question of what justice truly meant and whether it was always right to be just. Throughout her relationship with Javier, these questions constantly weighed on her conscious. Through Maria contemplation on the topic, many questions of morality and perspective were raised, adding a deeply philosophical tone to the text.

When Javier revealed himself to be the mind behind the murder of Miguel, Maria struggled with whether or not it was her duty to turn him in. She knew it would be the just thing to do but did not personally see herself as a strong advocator of justice.

Maria considered a passage from “The Three Musketeers” her father used to repeat when she was younger. The quote was from a story in which Athos, the Count de la Fere, was out riding with his young wife. She was thrown from her horse and became unconscious. In an attempt to save her, Athos tore her dress open to allow breathing. In doing so, he revealed a fleur-de-lis imprinted on her skin, the mark of a criminal. He took her to a tree and hung her. Later, retelling the story, he had said the killing was “a murder and nothing more.” In doing so, he was said to have “ a strong sense of justice.” Seeing as she had escaped the law once, he felt that killing her would be the just thing to do, regardless of the circumstance.

When Maria considered the story of Athos, she became all the more confident in her decision not to turn Javier in. Despite her knowledge of his horrible actions, she could not help by love him. She came to the conclusion that doing the just thing may not be the right thing in every situation. For her, betrayal was far worse than injustice.

Metaphysical Questioning

Metaphysics is a branch of philosophy that attempts to explain the nature of existence. Throughout the novel, the narrator, Maria, continually engaged in metaphysical questioning when examining the events she found herself in the middle of. This contemplation added a deeply philosophical tone to the novel.

At the beginning of the novel, when considering the brutal death of Miguel, she contemplated how one’s death can permanently damage the legacy of his or her life. She also considered the lack of volition Miguel had in his own death. She thought it strange that the world belonged so much more to the living than to the dead. Even in their mourning of Miguel, his loved ones seemed to consider their own loss rather than his own loss of life. This caused Maria to contemplate the very nature of existence and life after death.



Throughout her interactions with Javier, Maria contemplated the nature of goodness and justice. When Javier claimed to have killed Miguel to save him from a slow and painful death, Maria contemplated the morality of that decision. She wondered whose choice it really was when one was to do something like that. She also considered whether or not quickening one's death was as immoral as simply causing it.

Throughout the novel, Maria continually pondered the meaning of life and death as well as the morality of actions in one's life. In this way, the narration of the story was essential for the existence of the predominate theme of metaphysical questioning.

Infatuation

Infatuation was a very strong theme throughout the novel. In the opening of the novel, Maria described her infatuation with Luisa and Miguel, who she believed to be "the perfect couple." In the novel's closing, Maria revealed her unending infatuation with Javier, saying such infatuations were forever inescapable. The similarity of the opening and closing of the novel added thematic unity to the story and stressed the importance of this central theme to the reader.

As the novel was told entirely from the point of view of Maria, her various infatuations greatly contributed to the tone of the story. Throughout the story, Maria tended to imagine the thoughts and emotions of those with whom she was infatuated. In doing so, Maria's own feelings and biases toward certain characters affected the way the story was told and the way characters were presented. For example, although Javier had confessed to murder, Maria could not help but continue to love him. This caused the reader to wonder if she had portrayed the man in a better light than he deserved.

Maria's infatuations also affected the reader's understanding of the other characters in the novel. The emotions of these characters were rarely presented as direct quotes from the characters themselves. Instead, their emotions were perceived and analyzed by Maria, who seemed to act as a mind reader for many of the characters.

Throughout the story, infatuation played a key role in the choices of the characters, Javier, through his infatuation with Luisa, committed and even justified the murder of his best friend. Likewise, in her infatuation with Javier, Maria failed to do what was just and report him. For the infatuated characters, their obsessive love was a stronger force than any considerations of morality.

Love

Love, as well as the question of what love truly is, was repeatedly addressed and analyzed throughout the novel. Through the various relationships represented in the novel, the notion of love came to embody many different meanings.

In the beginning of the novel, Maria was infatuated with the Desverns, or as she called them "the perfect couple." The love the Desverns shared was obvious to even the most



distant onlooker. The two seemed to complete one another. When Miguel was killed, Luisa was lost. For the Desverns, being in love meant existing as one. The two completed one another, and one without the other was truly lost.

When Maria met Javier, however, her definition of love seemed very much changed. Maria began her relationship with Javier accepting that it was purely sexual. Although she was admittedly infatuated with the man, she knew that he would not return the sentiment. Although the two shared a very weak bond, Maria considered herself to be in love with Javier. In this relationship, love was portrayed very much as a one-sided emotion.

Throughout Maria's various encounters and relationship, her understanding of love progressed and changed. In the end of the novel, she said that she was married, yet her description of the man she had married carried much less passion than her descriptions of Javier. Although Maria was able to recognize true love in the Desverns, it seemed that in her own life and relationship, love seemed to be equated much more with infatuation than mutual endearment.

Fear

Fear served a very important role throughout the novel. In the beginning of the novel, Maria was infatuated with the Desverns. For fear that she might scare them off, Maria never approached the couple. She spoke to Luisa only after Miguel had been murdered. Her fear kept her from ever truly knowing the couple that had brought her joy for so many years.

According to Javier, he had had Miguel killed in order to save Miguel from a slow and painful death to illness. Out of fear for the disease inside him, Miguel (supposedly) chose to be brutally murdered by his best friend. In Javier's version of the story, Miguel had not feared his murder, as it would save him from the suffering he did fear.

Toward the end of the novel, Maria heard Javier speak of his plot to have Miguel murdered. When she approached Javier afterwards, she said that he knew she had heard, as he could sense the fear in her. Once fear is born, she said, it will never disappear. This quote described not only Maria's interactions with Javier, but throughout her life. Maria allowed herself to be controlled by fear. In doing so, she was a prisoner to her internal anxieties which did not allow her to act on impulse but instead left her leading a controlled and unfilled lifestyle.



Styles

Point of View

The novel is told from the first person point of view of Maria. Throughout the novel, Maria analyzes and ponders the events she found herself to be a part of in her infatuation with the Desverns. Because of this narration style, the events of the novel are told entirely from one perspective, allowing a deep understanding of the character of Maria but only a secondhand understanding of the other characters.

In her infatuation with the Desverns and later with Javier, Maria may have presented a biased depiction of the events of the novel. Throughout the story, Maria attempted to understand and even rationalize the action of Javier, as she felt an obsessive love for him. When Maria overheard Javier speak of the murder of Miguel, she had a hard time believing the story could be true, as she was deeply infatuated by the man at that time. When Javier confessed to the murder of Miguel in order to save him from illness, Maria, having distanced herself from her obsession, found his excuse difficult to believe. In the end of the novel, Maria decided that his excuse must not be true. She believed he had killed Miguel in order to have Luisa to himself. As Maria's viewpoint was clearly affected by her infatuation and later by her bitterness at her failed relationship, the reader was left uncertain as to why Javier truly killed Miguel.

Language and Meaning

The novel contains a great deal of metaphorical language. Throughout the novel, the narrator, Maria uses symbolism and metaphors in order to explain the thoughts and emotions she faced regarding the events that surrounded her.

The novel also contains a great amount of high-level vocabulary. This vocabulary adds depth and intelligence to the characters and to the novel itself. As many of the characters were educated and well read, the use of high-level vocabulary adds authenticity to their dialogue.

Structure

The novel contains four parts and is written from the first person point of view. The narrator, Maria, is also the protagonist of the novel. The first three parts of the novel are of equal length, with the fourth being a shorter piece serving mainly to conclude the novel. The first three parts of the novel each hold a specific focus. The first focuses on Maria's infatuation with the Desvern couple. The second focuses on her infatuation with Javier. The third focuses on her infatuation with the murder Javier had committed.

Throughout each section of the novel, Maria alternates between recounting the events that she had experienced through her interactions with the Desverns and Javier and

engaging in metaphysical questioning about these events. This format gives the novel a deeply philosophical tone. Not only is the novel meant to tell a story, but to give the reader a deep understanding of the narrator's inner thoughts and feelings.



Quotes

In any circumstance, they would have spontaneously chosen each other – not out of conjugal duty or convenience or habit or even loyalty – as companion or partner, friend, conversationalist or accomplice, in the knowledge, that, whatever happened, whatever transpired, whatever there was to tell or hear, it would always be less interesting or amusing with someone else. Without her in his case, without him in her case. There was a camaraderie between them and, above all, a certainty.”

-- Maria (Part 1 - Section 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quotation captured the perfection Maria observed between Miguel and Luisa. They appeared to love one another unconditionally, knowing that no matter the circumstance, they would always have one another to depend on. The irony of the quote, however, was that, according to Javier, even as at that very moment, Desvern knew that he would die a very uncertain death. The certainty observed by Maria also served as a further reason for her doubt in Javier’s confession at the end of the novel.

And now, there were no two ways about it, he would be that way forever: poor, unfortunate Miguel Deverne. Poor man.”

-- Maria (Part 1 - Section 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote explained the commanding impact one’s death had on the legacy of his or her life. Regardless of the success or impact one had while living, a tragic death could forever mark him or her a poor man or woman.

The world belonged so much to the living and so little to the dead...that the former tend to think that the death of a loved one is something that has happened more to them than to the deceased, who is, after all, the person who has died.

-- Maria (Part 1 - Section 1 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote captures the irony of death. Although the person who has passed is the one who has truly suffered the greatest loss, in the loss of his or her life, the living tend to focus on their own personal loss. Although Luisa found herself trapped in the final moments of Miguel’s life, attempting to feel for him, it was her own emotional state that she dwelt on. She considered the impact of his loss of her life and the lives of her children, not the impact his death had on his own inability to continue living.

Nothing more can be taken away from us if we are not here. Nothing more can die on us if we are already dead.

-- Maria (Part 1 - Section 2 paragraph 1)

Importance: In this segment, Maria imagined how Luisa must be feeling since the death of her husband. Having lost the love of her life, Luisa saw no reason to continue living. She knew that she could not recover from the loss and thus did not see the sense in pretending she was recovering. Rather, she felt as she had already died with her



husband. As the two lived life as one, Luisa was unable to remain alive without her husband.

Although if he hadn't died, we wouldn't be together anywhere. We wouldn't even have met."

-- Maria (Part 2 - Section 1 paragraph 2)

Importance: In this quote, Maria considered the impact Miguel's death has had on her life. Before Miguel had died, Maria had been a mere observer to his life with his wife, Luisa. She took joy in the happiness of the couple, yet never shared in the relationship herself. Since Miguel's death, Luisa formed a personal relationship with Luisa and her new infatuation, Javier. In this way, Miguel's death brought a symbolic life to Maria. She was no longer a mere observer, but an active participant in her own life.

When we get caught in the spider's web, we fantasize endlessly and, at the same time, make do with the tiniest crumb, with hearing him, smelling him, glimpsing him, sensing his presence, knowing that he is still on our horizon, from which he has not yet entirely vanished, and that we cannot yet see, in the distance, the dust from his fleeing feet."

-- Maria (Part 2 - Section 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: In this quote, Maria summarized the nature of infatuation. Although she knew that the joy Javier brought her was entirely fleeting and unreciprocated, she could not help but live for it. In his infatuation with Luisa, Javier possessed similar feelings. Although both characters' feelings were unreturned, they could not help but obsess over the objects of their affection. In this way, the lack of sense and logic that comes with infatuation was described in Maria's feelings.

What responsibility do I bear for that cluster of coincidences, any plans one draws up are only ever attempts and experiments, cards to be turned over one by one, and, more often than not, the card you want doesn't appear doesn't match. The only thing you can be found guilty of is picking up a weapon and actually using it yourself. Everything else is pure contingency, things that one imagines." 2,2, 179, 1

-- Maria (Part 2 - Section 2 paragraph 1)

Importance: In this quote, Maria attempted to explain and understand the twisted logic of Javier in planning Miguel's murder. As Javier was not directly perpetrating the murder of his friend, he attempted to be seen as less responsible. Instead, he chose to share responsibility with chance and coincidence.

And when I left his apartment a few minutes later, I wondered, as I always did, if I would ever go back there. Except this time, I did not think this only with mingled hope and desire, but with a mixture of feelings, perhaps repugnance or fear, or was it, rather, desolation?"

-- Maria (Part 2 - Section 2 paragraph 2)

Importance: This quote depicted Maria's thoughts as she left Javier's home after hearing him and Ruiberriz discuss Miguel's murder. Each time she had left Javier's



apartment in the past, she had left with the hope she would return again. After hearing the conversation, however, Maria was left in a state of desolation. She was still infatuated by Javier, as her infatuation was too great to simply dissolve. However, she was now simultaneously disgusted by him and in love with him. She knew that whether she returned or not, the relationship was over. As she had filled her empty life with the fleeting joy of their relationship, she felt empty in his impending absence from her life.

It sounds strange and even wrong, and yet it can happen: those of us who feel that aversion would sometimes prefer to act unjustly and for someone to go unpunished than to see ourselves as betrayers, we can't bear – when all's said and done, justice simply isn't our thing, it's not our job; and that role is still more odious when it's a matter of unmasking someone we have loved, or even worse, someone who, however inexplicable this might seem, we have not entirely ceased to love - despite the horror and the nausea afflicting our consciousness, which, nonetheless, grows less troubled with each day that passes and is gone.”

-- Maria (Part 3 - Section 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: In this quote, Maria explained her rationale in not telling anyone about Javier's misdeeds. She discussed the topic of justice and whether or not it was truly her job to turn in Javier. Her infatuation with Javier made the issue ever more difficult. Although she did not want to love him, she did, despite the murder he had committed. She could not simply end the deep infatuation she had formed throughout their affair. This quote raised an interesting question about justice and our need to adhere to it, adding to the theme of metaphysical questioning. It also foreshadowed Maria's eventual decision not to tell anyone about Javier even after years' removal from the affair.

Yes, a murder, nothing more.

-- Athos (Part 3 - Section 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote was said by Athos when recounting the killing of his wife to a friend. Athos had killed his young wife after revealing a fleur-de-lys on her body, marking her a criminal. In calling the act a murder, he did attempt to diminish the severity of the action. Yet, in adding “nothing more,” he diminished the value of the action and thus the value of the life he had ended. This mirrored Javier's rationalization of his murder of Miguel. When speaking, he never denied that the act was a murder. He did, however, attempt to present a case in which murder seemed the favorable outcome for Miguel, diminishing the act he had committed.

You've realized that my desires override all other considerations, all restraints and all scruples. And all loyalties too. I have been absolutely clear for some time now that I want to spend what remains of my life with Luisa. There is only one woman for me and that woman is Luisa and I know that you can't just trust to luck, to things happening of their own accord, you can't assume that all obstacles and barriers will suddenly fall away as if by magic. You have to set to work.

-- Javier (Part 3 - Section 2 paragraph 1)

Importance: In his quote, Javier described his infatuation with Luisa. In mentioning that



his desire overrode all boundaries and loyalties, he implied that his desire for Luisa had been the motive behind his killing Miguel. In saying this, he greatly decreased the validity of the story he later told Maria about Miguel's illness.

Anything anyone tells you becomes absorbed into you, becomes part of your consciousness, even if you don't believe it or know that it never happened and that it's pure invention, like novels and films, like the remote story of Colonel Chabert.

-- Maria (Part 4 paragraph 1)

Importance: In this quote, Maria described the way that her relationship with Javier shaped her life. After having spent her entire life on the outside of controversy, Maria found herself in this relationship to be in the middle of a murder mystery. Although she tried to distance herself from the things she had learned from Javier, it was impossible. In their relationship, he and the thing he had done had become a part of her that she would never be able to remove.