

La Invención de Morel Study Guide

La Invención de Morel by Adolfo Bioy Casares

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Plot Summary

The story of the novella, "The Invention of Morel" begins with an unnamed man on a rugged island in the middle of the ocean. Throughout the story, the man remains unidentified. However, the reader learns that he is a fugitive from justice. The man writes a diary of his experiences that he will use it as a basis for book if he is able to return to civilization. Since there are so many intrinsic dangers on the island, the purpose of his daily log has another purpose: it may be his will.

It is never revealed what the man is accused of but he claims in his diary that he is innocent. The country that is pursuing him is Venezuela, the place of his birth. When the man runs into an Italian rug merchant in Calcutta, he learns of Villings Island. The merchant tells him that the island was mysteriously abandoned by its inhabitants after they constructed several large buildings on the land. The merchant warns the man that the island has many dangers including a dreadful disease that if contracted promises certain death. It is so deadly that not even pirates will come ashore. The man so fears prosecution and false imprisonment that he decides to take the risk. He travels over rough seas in a row boat to Villings Island.

The man feels safe from capture and is surviving on the rugged island in solitude. Stuningly, his sanctuary is intruded upon one day when he hears music and sees people dancing near the main building called the Museum. The same two songs play over and over again. Fearing that the people are part of a scheme to capture him, the man stays hidden from them. The man notices a young woman who sits on the rocks on the beach everyday at sunset. He is drawn to her and begins to have feelings for her. The man becomes brave and comes out of hiding, sitting near her on the beach. However, she seems not to see him. The woman is seen several times with an odd-looking man wearing tennis garb. He overhears their conversation—the man calls the woman Faustine and the odd-looking man is named Morel. The protagonist is resentful of Faustine spending time with the man. He notices that they seem to repeat interactions on occasions—having the same movements and conversations. None of the people he encounters can see or hear him. The man begins to believe that the people do not exist and that he is having hallucinations or that the people are aliens or ghosts.

The man overhears a meeting that Morel, a scientist, is having with all the people. He tells them that they were unknowing participants in an experiment he conducted. The people are all images created by his invention. The invention is based on the technology of photography, television, movies, the radio, the phonograph and the telephone. His invention at first would only provide one element of a person; for example, the aroma of a person's scent or the feel of a person's skin. However, after synchronizing all his dials and controls he was able to produce the complete image of the person along with his soul. The images are captured in scenes containing actions and conversations that will be projected over and over again throughout eternity. Each time scenes are repeated the images will see them as new since they will have no memory of the other times.



The protagonist now knows why the images cannot see or hear him. He decides to try to understand how the mechanism of the invention works. The motor that powers the projection of the images depends on the high tides of the island. When the images disappear the man steals himself to the basement where he observed the motors once before. He enters through a hole in the wall he made on his first visit. The tides rise and the motors start up. He examines the motors but cannot figure out how they operate. When he tries to leave, the hole is gone and the wall is solid. The image of the solid wall is being projected and he cannot break a hole through it. He fears he is trapped and will die in the motor room.

The man is able to escape and finds the receivers and projectors that are part of Morel's invention. He cannot bear the thought of living without Faustine's image. If the machines break down, he will lose her. He decides to photograph himself for seven days and superimpose his image side by side with Faustine in the scenes containing her image. He knows he will die when the process is complete but he will be with her for eternity. He pleads that anyone finding his diary who can invent a machine capable of assembling disjointed presences try to locate Faustine and him and allow him to enter her consciousness.



Introduction

Introduction Summary

Argentine Adolfo Bioy Casares as a young writer was thrown into the sophisticated world of literature by virtue of his association with Sur Magazine. The magazine utilized the services of famed writers from around the world. Casares was thus indoctrinated into a cosmopolitan world that had lasting influence upon the twenty-nine year old writer. Casares most famous book "The Invention of Morel" was given equal rank in the literary magazine with Henry James' "The Turn of the Screw" and Franz Kafka's "The Trial."

Casares' works were considered a blend of reality and fantasy. While considered a pure fantasist by some, Nobel Prize winning poet Octavio Paz more succinctly viewed Casares works as metaphysical. In many of his works including "The Invention of Morel" Casares' focused on making reader and character alike acutely aware of lost love and human solitude and the impossibility of controlling one's life.

Casares, only child of a wealthy family, enjoyed a life-long friendship with seasoned writer Jorge Luis Borges who viewed Casares simultaneously as protegee and "secret master." Of great influence on Casares' writing was H. G. Wells' "The Island of Dr. Moreau." Casares used elements of this tale in many of his novels. The "Morel" in the "Invention of Morel" is an obvious allusion to "Dr. Moreau." Casares also admired such writers as Joyce and Poe and was attracted to the eerie and supernatural.

Casares' first novel of recognition was "The Invention of Morel" followed by a life-time of acclaimed writing. He received the Buenos Aires literature award for "The Invention of Morel."

Introduction Analysis

The introduction is a history of the life and career of Argentine writer Adolfo Bioy Casares. Casares began his career as a young man who was thrown into an environment of famed, cosmopolitan writers through his friendship with writer Jorge Luis Borges. Casares enjoyed a life-long friendship with Borges who considered Casares to be both his protegee and master. The introduction explains Casares' interest in the supernatural and his attraction to writers such as H. G. Wells, Edgar Allan Poe and James Joyce among others. Casares held up Wells' "The Island of Dr. Moreau" as a model for many of his novels. Casares had a life-long fascination with the eerie and supernatural which is evidenced in many of his works.



Prologue

Prologue Summary

The prologue is written by writer Jorge Luis Borges, a colleague and life-long friend of Adolfo Bioy Casares. Borges explains how the fantasy novel can be viewed as a realistic account. Borges discusses the works of famed authors from Kafka to Shakespeare and their uses of fantasy and imagery. Borges boasts that "The Invention of Morel" is in the same league as "Journey to the Center of the Earth" and "The Trial" among other modern writers of the time. While careful not to reveal the plot, Borges lauds this work as a breakthrough in Spanish literature due its focus on fantasy and the supernatural.

Prologue Analysis

The Prologue was written by writer and friend Jorge Luis Borges. He lauds the literary abilities of Adolfo Bioy Casares whose first book, "The Invention of Morel." Borges applauds Casares for this groundbreaking work. Fantasy novels and those about the supernatural were rare in Spanish literature. Casares opened the door with this novel, the first of many successful works.



Pages 9 through 25

Pages 9 through 25 Summary

The protagonist is a fugitive from justice but claims his innocence. An Italian rug merchant he meets in Calcutta tells him about the island of Villings. It was a land settled by white men in 1924 but abandoned soon after several large buildings had been constructed. Pirates refuse to go ashore on the island. There is a dreadful disease that enters the body on the outside and works its way inward. Those who come down with this malady lose their toenails, fingernails and hair. Their skin and eyes "die." The rest of the body only lasts a few weeks more.

The protagonist is so desperate to escape unjust imprisonment, however, that he takes a row boat to the island. On the island, he finds no one but there is a museum, tower and swimming pool. He explores the huge museum, which he feels is misnamed, where there are many rooms and several basement levels that contain hidden and secret rooms. There are motors in the basement which he is able to start but has no idea what they are for. The pool is often full of snakes. The surrounding area is treacherous with snakes and high tides. The marshlands surrounding the buildings are supposedly the breeding ground for the mysterious disease. When he arrives, he is able to find some food to sustain himself. After it is depleted, he makes traps to catch fowl.

One day his pleasant solitude is disturbed. He sees people dancing to music—"Tea for Two" and "Valencia" play and play. He is terrified of being discovered and hides on the dangerous outskirts of the island. Even though his existence in the museum was far from perfect, he resents the presence of these people. He is forced to make a bed of twigs in the outer areas and fears drowning from a high tide. He spots a beautiful woman who wears a scarf. Every day she sits on the beach and watches the sundown. When she is not there he is worried that he will not see her again. He resents it when he sees other men with her.

The escapee is writing a diary covering his island experience. He feels that it may actually be a will rather for he fears he will not survive. He is a writer and if he makes it back to civilization, he has plans to write several books.

Pages 9 through 25 Analysis

It is helpful that the reader learns in the introduction of this book that the author Adolfo Bioy Casares focuses upon the solitude of the individual and is drawn to the supernatural. Elements of both these themes begin to emerge in the first 25 pages. The protagonist, who not coincidentally is a writer, is a fugitive and escapes to an island. The island represents the separation or escape from his past. However, the island that is uninhabited is full of risks and dangers. This scenario is symbolic of the impossibility of avoiding risk or danger in one's life.



The protagonist is jolted when suddenly there are people on his island, playing music and dancing. Although he hides from them, he sometimes wonders if they are hallucinations. He sees a beautiful woman who watches the sunset everyday. He begins to feel possessive of her and is resentful when he sees her with other men. Perhaps if approaches her, his life will be better. She represents his salvation—his return to normalcy. She may be his miracle.



Page 25 through 43

Page 25 through 43 Summary

The protagonist is afraid. He has done something that he fears will expose him and send him on his way to prison. He decides to approach the woman on the beach. When he sits near her, she pretends not to see him. He decides to bring her flowers. The first flowers he picks fade and wilt. Fresh flowers grow near the museum where the people are. He is able to sneak some flowers away but they are so small that he will need thousands to make the garden he plans. He begins digging and planting his garden. He makes the flowers in the image of the woman who waits for the sunset. He makes another image of grass of himself which is three times smaller than the floral woman.

When the woman appears, again she pretends she doesn't see the man or his flowers. Another man joins the woman on the beach. They are speaking French and he calls her Faustine. The man finally knows her name but has become disenchanted with her as he sees her playing the man, who is named Morel, and himself for fools. The man tramples all over his garden and the woman fails to stop him. The protagonist is furious with the woman. She allowed the man to ruin his flower garden and she continues to pretend not to see him. He has thoughts of killing her.

The man spies on Morel and Faustine again. They seem to be repeating the same words as the last time. Is this a comic act they are putting on for his benefit? He needs Faustine to understand that they should be together. He decides to humiliate Morel. He shouts out "the woman has a beard." Neither Faustine nor Morel react. The man is ashamed of his actions and runs after Faustine to apologize.

As he reaches the top of the hill, he finds that no one is there. He searches the museum but finds no one. From the condition of the museum it looks as though the 15 people and their 15 servants had never been there at all. Not one piece of furniture or item is moved from the positions they had three weeks ago when he was there. He calls out for Faustine but there is no response. He briefly considers that the roots he has been experimenting with could have caused delirium causing him to imagine the people in the first place. He quickly dismisses that scenario. He feels the need to confer with a third party—but alas, he is alone on an island. There is no electricity and the museum is dark. The man stands in the basement by the motors and contemplates suicide. However, since Faustine would not be there to mourn him, there would be no satisfaction to ending his life.

Page 25 through 43 Analysis

The woman on the beach, Faustine, does not see the protagonist nor does she hear him. He begins to hate her when she ignores the flower garden he made for her. The flowers are in the shape of Faustine. Since the man fears the flowers will all blow away



before she sees them, it tells the reader that he feels she is temporary and fragile. The man makes a grass image of himself. It is three-times smaller than the floral image of the woman. Perhaps he feels small or insignificant next to this woman—or perhaps all women. Since his image is made of grass, he is alive and rooted in the ground. He will not wilt and blow away like the woman—an indication that he knows at least subliminally that she is an image.

He hears Faustine talk to man who she calls Morel. At times, the man refers to these people as ghosts. Is Faustine part of a supernatural phenomenon? His thoughts of killing the woman represent his dissatisfaction with women in general and his anger at his inability to control not only his life but even his own fantasies. By perceiving himself as the loser in his own fantasies, it is obvious that he has anemic sense of self. Faustine and Morel continue to ignore the man. He wants to strike out at the man instead he insults Faustine—indicating where his real anger lies. When he finds that Faustine and all the people are gone, he considers suicide. He reasons that since Faustine is not present to mourn, his suicide would be fruitless.



Pages 44 through 62

Pages 44 through 62 Summary

The man fails to get the motors turning but when he comes upstairs, he hears the hum of the motor and suddenly there is light everywhere. Suddenly, two men speaking Spanish appear. Like the others, they do not react to the man. He wonders if they might be ghosts. They are servants and are speaking about the dinner they prepared. A gong sounds and the dinner guests arrive. Among them is Faustine and Morel. Faustine is not sitting by Morel. There are other guests at the table. The man continues to hide and watch the invaders. He wonders how the people returned since there is such a terrible storm. The man walks over a floor aquarium where live fish replace the dead ones he last saw there.

The man still lusts for Faustine. That night he sleeps in a room where he cannot turn off the light. Faustine comes to him in a dream but when he awakens she is gone. He fears that the invaders might be part of a plot by the police to capture him. He tries to escape the museum but he cannot open any of the latches on the doors. Finally, however, he is able to escape through an open window to the lowlands.

There he contemplates the reality of the invaders while noticing an unusual celestial condition of two moons and two suns. The heat during the day with two suns is oppressive. He arrives at five possibilities about the people. Perhaps he has contracted the horrible disease of the island and he imagined the people. The polluted air of the lowlands could have made him hallucinate. The people could be from another planet. Perhaps he was in an insane asylum and the invaders were the caretakers, with Morel as director. Lastly, perhaps the people are dead or he is dead. He felt euphoric because all the possibilities prove his theory that he and the people are existing on two separate planes. He found the concept that he might be dead as delightful.

If he were the dead one, the man realizes that he was only dead after the invaders arrived. Therefore, if he eliminates the people he will come back to life. Since he does not exist to them, it will be easy to destroy them. He abandons his thoughts of murder as he wilts under the intensity of the two suns. He sees a white freighter in the bay and fears that Faustine will soon sail away. He determines that he can either abduct her, sneak on the boat himself or let her sail away. The man is still hiding and watching Faustine and the others from afar. Strangely he sees Faustine and the others happily swimming in the pool full of green slime, frogs and snakes.

He overhears Morel plotting with a young man about some plans that evening that he didn't want the women to find out about prematurely. Faustine sits on the rocks by the beach. The man decides to tell her of his love for her. He shouts out, "Faustine, I love you." He is then driven away by approaching footsteps and hides again. Morel appears and walks away with Faustine in the same exact movements as before.



Pages 44 through 62 Analysis

Even though no one can see him or hear him he continues to hide. Live fish are in an aquarium that formerly had only dead fish. Life is replacing death. How did this happen? He is afraid that the whole scenario is a fraud orchestrated by the police to trap him. He has a difficult time leaving the museum—all the latches are unmovable, symbolic of his inability to escape the island/nightmare.

He finally gets away and determines that all the possibilities that exist about the people—they might be aliens, or hallucinations, or he is in an asylum or even dead—gratifies him in that his basic theory is correct. He and the people are operating on different planes. Perhaps he is dead. However, he was not dead until they came. If he eliminates them, he would return to life. His fantasies are not making him happy. To be able to return to happiness, he must eliminate this fantasy.

He caves once again to his fantasies when the people to return after a brief departure. He fears he will lose Faustine, his only chance for love and happiness, if she sails away. Faustine and some of the others are swimming in a pool that he sees as full of snakes and slime. They are happy there—they must see the pool in a different condition than he does; but how? The two suns with their oppressive heat continue to prey on the man; however do not seem to bother Faustine. Does she somehow only see one sun?



Pages 62 through 78

Pages 62 through 78 Summary

The man sneaks in the museum to find food. He is starving and is tired of eating the roots and bulbs he finds outside. He enters in the dark but soon sees movement about the museum. The large hall is set up with tables and chairs as though planning for a lecture or meeting. Morel is giving the servants and the others orders on how to set up the room. It is obvious that he is running the meeting. Even though it is quite late when the room is finally ready, Morel insists that everyone is present before he begins. Jane Gray is absent and he orders the others to find her. Even though she is old and already asleep, they bring Jane to the room groggy and unsteady.

Morel then tells the others to "find him." Immediately, the main character believes they are talking about him and he begins to panic. He wonders if the meeting is just a ruse and why they people are going to such complicated lengths to arrest him. He finally realizes that Morel has his men hunting for a man by the name of Haynes. Morel excuses this one person—he is asleep and weighs too much to carry in. Morel begins the meeting and tells those gathered that he took their photograph without their permission. However, the photograph is no ordinary picture; rather, it is a vehicle, a scene in which they will live for eternity. He has given them eternity but in the confines of a photograph. He mentions that several of their dear friends were excluded—one was out of town, one was sick. A friend named Charlie had died and was not included. Charlie, though, was one of Morel's first experiments and Morel can show them Charlie's "photograph."

Morel refers to a woman he loves but apparently had no luck in convincing her to come with him to the island alone. He adds that it was good that they did not come alone for they would have been alone for eternity—literally. Morel goes on to explain his invention in great detail. He compares his device to the radio, phonograph and television. There are elements of each in his invention. He can set a dial and bring in the aroma of Madeline who is thousands of miles away in Quebec. Another dial will allow those present to feel her soft skin. However, if all dials are synchronized, Madeline will appear as a complete image. Anyone seeing her would not know that she is an image. The second part of the machine records scenes and the third part is the projector. Projections are sent through space and can be sent day or night. He at first thought the images would lack consciousness. However, he soon found he was wrong. When all the elements are synchronized, the soul emerges with the image. Morel emphasizes that he cannot create life—he needs a live transmitter to create his images.

Morel indicated he did some experiments with employees of the Schwachter Company. Several in the audience ask to see those first images. Morel warns them that some are quite monstrous. Someone mentions that he heard of some people missing from the Schwachter company, Morel is insulted and outraged and leaves the room. The people wonder if Morel killed their friend Charlie and the employees in experiments. Advancing



that idea, they wonder if they indeed are dead—killed in an experiment they did not know they were part of.

When the assembly room empties, the man grabs Morel's notes and escapes back to the lowlands. At first the man does not believe what Morel said could be true. He holds fast to the idea that it is a scheme to capture him. Then, recalling how the people constantly repeat their activities, he begins to believe Morel. He ponders whether Morel gave his speech for the first time several hours ago or perhaps the first time was several years ago—what he had been witnessing on the island was an episode of the repetitious, eternal presentation. The man feels worse that being in love with a ghost is to be in love with an image.

The man reads Morel's notes starting where the scientist had stopped. Morel chose Villings Island for the tides, the reefs and the light. The tides would provide adequate power for the projectors and receivers, the reefs would ward off visitors and the light was perfect for preserving the images. The man reads that Morel named the main building the Museum since he did not know at first if the images would be free to roam. He thought they may have to be presented in a museum. The notes reveal further that the images he created will repeat the activities recorded by his device forever but they will not know. They will be able to live a life that is always new. Each time the activities of the images are recreated they will have no memory of the other times.

Morel notes also reveal that the radio, television and telephone are methods used to capture images where motion pictures, photography and the phonograph are ways to capture and retain the images. The man begins to see other uses for Morel's invention. Perhaps all dead people could be somehow resurrected. He contemplates exposing the machine to the entire world. By doing so, his pursuers may pardon him from his crimes.

Pages 62 through 78 Analysis

When the man sneaks back in the museum to get food, he stumbles upon a large meeting being held by Morel. Morel is a scientist who tells those gathered that they are images created by a device he invented. They were unsuspecting participants in one of Morel's experiments. The man is hiding nearby and hears this revelation. It thus explains why the images can never see or hear him. They are not real and he is in love with an image—much like a fan being in love with a movie actress. It also explains why the people seem to be repeating activities from one time to another. Their images are projected and repeat the scene that has been recorded and captured by the device.

There is outrage when the people at the meeting realize that they must be dead. The man reasons that this meeting is just one of many repetitions of a meeting that occurred years ago. He realizes that he is in love with an image and feels disturbed and fooled. Although he kept avoiding the images, he had dreamed of one day being with Faustine. Now, the man once again knows how truly alone he is. The hope of love with Faustine has been destroyed. He has no hope of a future for she is but an allusion. Morel's cruel machine gave him the false possibility of love then swiftly took it away.



The man also learns that Villings Island was selected by Morel because its high tides would provide the necessary power to create the images while its reef would ward off visitors. From this it is obvious that Morel meant to keep his invention a secret from the world. Since Morel is one of the projected images, he himself is dead and would therefore have no control over the machine. By selecting the island for the eternal repetition of the images of him and his friends, no one else would be likely to discover the existence of the images due to the locale's remoteness and treacherous terrain. Perhaps the deadly disease was a lie invented by Morel to further repel any visitors. Morel did not plan on a fugitive escaping to the island and discovering his invention and the images.



Pages 79 through 103

Pages 79 through 103 Summary

The man has returned to a "normal" life on the island. He is now aware that the people are only images and that he is truly alone but has evaded those pursuing him. Although he knows that Faustine is but an image, he is still drawn to her. He follows her and even sleeps on the floor next to her bed at night. He still has hopes of learning how the machine works. The man contemplates creating another invention that would determine if the images can experience thoughts and feelings. Perhaps a finer scientific mind could take Morel's invention to another level that would enable a man to select a lovely place to take his loved ones and live there forever in happiness and peace. Many groups of people could inhabit this place but since they would only be images they would never be aware of each other. Each group would feel alone in their own paradise.

The man still loves Faustine. It occurs to him that perhaps she is not dead—that she might exist somewhere else in the world. He fantasizes about one day finding the real Faustine. He fears she may resent that he saw pieces of her life without her knowledge or consent. She will be disturbed to learn that he is a fugitive from justice. When the images have once again disappeared, the man takes the opportunity to observe the operations of the motors. As the high tides begin to rise, he descends to the sub-basement. He enters the machine room through a hole he had made on a previous visit. He waits and waits and finally the machine begins to rumble awake. He watches the machine but cannot figure out how it operates. He knows however, that the running motor will cause the images to reappear. When he turns to leave, to his dismay he sees that the hole he made in the wall is gone. He thinks at first that it is an optical illusion.

Apparently, the solid wall is not an illusion. He cannot find the opening in the wall. He finds a discarded latch on the floor and uses it to pound and beat on the wall. However, his efforts are all to no avail. Although he is able to knock a few tiles off the wall, the next time he looks the tiles are restored and the wall is solid once again.

Understandably he panics. Will he be trapped there and die? The wall must be an image projected by Morel's invention. The wall was solid when Morel captured the image of the wall. The man was able to gain entry through the hole he made when the machine was off; but once the tides gave the power back to the motors, the machine projected the image of a solid wall. Morel no doubt designed the machine to project the image of the solid wall in order to protect his invention.

The man determines that if he is able to stop the machines, he should be able to escape. Fearing that he will run out of air and die, he manages to disconnect the motors and go outside where he finds a myriad of receivers, records and projectors. He turns on some of the projectors so that he can find food in the dark. He accidentally places his hand in front of the receiver and it is captured by the machine. The projectors are continuing to run and he is confused by what insects are real and which ones are images. Some skin begins to fall off his hand. Although the man tries to hold on to the



possibility of a future with Faustine, he concludes that the transmitters (the original live people) die when the image is complete. Therefore, Faustine must be dead. He lives only for an image for which he does not exist.

The man theorizes that Morel was madly in love with the inaccessible Faustine. Faustine did not return his feelings. Morel invented immortality and sacrificed the life of Faustine and all the others so he could in some manner be with her forever. The man finally comes to terms with his existence. He lives for the image of Faustine. However, he fears that he will lose the image of Faustine, the last visage of her that he has. If the machines break down, he can't fix them. If he spots some signs of affection between Morel and Faustine that he failed to notice before, it will sink his heart. Or if he should die, he will no longer be able to see her image. To be with Faustine forever, the man devises a plan that leads to his own end. He learns the movements of Faustine in the projected images. He knows where she will walk and learns to walk just a little ahead of her. His deterioration is slow but steady. He catches sight of himself in a mirror—his skin is falling off, he has no hair and no nails. Ultimately, he superimposes his image on the scenes that contain Faustine. If anyone were to look at the images, it would seem as though the man and Faustine were together and in love.

The man has a final plea before he dies. He asks that anyone who reads his diary and invents a machine that can assemble disjointed presences tries to find Faustine and him and allow him to enter the heaven of her consciousness.

Pages 79 through 103 Analysis

The man returns to his own normalcy on the island, accepting that the images are just that—images. He still admires and follows Faustine around. He has the hope that the real Faustine is alive somewhere and he might be able to find her. Obviously, he has not let go of the love he feels for the idea of a woman to love. His loneliness keeps him from completely letting go. He thinks that the invention could one day be improved upon to allow the images to experience real feelings and thoughts. When the images disappear again, he ventures down to the room that houses the motors of the device. He enters through a hole he made in the wall some time before. The motors are silent at first but when the tides rise, the motors start up. The motors project a solid wall where there had been an opening which he just used to access the room. Now he cannot escape and faces true solitude—unable to see even the images of people—and certain death.

Finally, he is able to disconnect the machine parts and escapes outside. He finds the projectors and receivers and turns them on. He sticks his hand in front of the receiver and sees that it has been made a permanent record in the machine. Later the skin begins to fall off his hand. He pines for Faustine and finally admits to himself that she is dead. He photographs himself and superimposes himself on the scenes with her images. Even though he could not be with her in real life, he has devised a way to be with her forever—although she never knew him or even saw him. As he is dying, he pleads that if anyone invents a machine that could reassemble disjointed presences, he

asks that he be allowed to become part of Faustine's conscious mind. By doing so, the woman he loves will at last be aware of him.



Characters

The Main Character

The protagonist of "The Invention of Morel" remains unnamed throughout the story. The reader quickly learns that the man is a fugitive from justice. In the diary he keeps he maintains his innocence although he does not specify what crimes he is accused of. The man is being pursued by Venezuelan authorities, his own countrymen. The man was born in Caracas, Venezuela. He learns from a rug merchant in Calcutta that there is an island—Villings Island—that was left abandoned by people long ago and that it would be a perfect place in which to hide from the law. The merchant warns him that the island has many dangers including a deadly disease that breeds there. However, the man is so fearful of capture and imprisonment that he decides to take the risk. He travels by row boat across the rough sea and lands on the island.

For several months, the man is alone and is living a rather rough existence due to the dangers of the island and its rugged terrain. One day he hears music playing—the same songs over and over again. Next he sees people—who he calls invaders—dancing to the music. He fears that the people are part of a scheme to capture him and return him to the authorities. However, the few times he runs into the people, they look right through him as if he is not there. He also notices that the people seem to repeat the same activities over and over. He hears their conversations which also seem to be repetitious. One woman sits on the rocks on the beach to watch the sunset every night. He learns that her name is Faustine. He is drawn to her and soon feels that he has fallen in love with her, but she, like the others, neither sees nor hears him.

He begins to wonder if the people are ghosts or aliens or if he is hallucinating. He is positive however that he and the people are operating on two separate planes. He later learns that one of the people, a scientist named Morel, had invented a machine that captures the images and the souls of people and keeps them in an eternal photograph where they will repeat their captured activities and conversations for eternity. He thus learns that his is in love with the image of a dead person.

In the end, the man is able to work the projectors and receivers and photograph himself which he superimposes on the scenes with the image of Faustine. To anyone looking at the film, it would look as though Faustine and he were together and in love.

Morel

Morel is not the main character of "The Invention of Morel" rather he is an image that the protagonist sees. The protagonist who is never named flees to the island of Villings. He is wanted in Venezuela for a crime for which he claims his innocence. One of the main things that draws the man to Villings Island is that it is abandoned and he will be alone there. He does spend several months alone, however, one day he hears music



and sees people dancing near the main building of the island. The man hides from these people fearing they are laying a trap for his capture.

The man begins seeing a woman sitting on the rocks by the beach everyday watching the sunset. He is drawn to her and begins to feel a strong passion for her. He resents seeing her with other men from the group which he calls "the invaders." One day an odd-looking man with a beard wearing tennis clothing is with this woman. He calls the woman "Faustine" and she refers to him as "Morel." The protagonist grows bolder and tries to get the attention of Faustine but she never seems to see or hear him. The man greatly resents Morel for spending so much time with Faustine and for trampling over a flower garden that the man made for Faustine.

Morel calls together all the members of his group. The protagonist as usual is hiding so that he is not seen even though the people never seem to notice him. At the meeting, Morel who is a scientist, informs the group that he had invented a device that is able to record movements and conversations and capture it in a photograph. Without their knowledge, he had thus recorded a week in their lives. He tells them that they are all images but that they would live for all of eternity. His invention is based on radios, phonographs, television and other devices of modern technology. Morel is able to dial his invention to capture the scent of a woman thousands of miles away. Another dial will allow one to feel her soft skin. However, if all the dials are synchronized the entire image of the woman will appear. He at first thought that the image would have no consciousness. However, he learned after many experiments that if all the controls are perfectly synchronized, the soul would emerge along with the complete image. Morel stresses to the group that he does not create life—he needs a live source to create the image.

Dalmacio Ombrellieri

Dalmacio Ombrellieri is the Italian rug merchant who tells the protagonist about Villings Island, an ideal place to which the fugitive could escape.

Faustine

Faustine is the woman the man sees on the island. She watches the sunset every evening. He tries to approach her but she never seems to see or hear him. She is probably an hallucination.

Jane Gray

Jane Gray is an old woman with the group of invaders. She is sound asleep when Morel is holding a meeting. He insists that she be dragged in anyway.



Mr. Haynes

When Morel has his assembly, he orders the others to find Haynes since he wants everyone to be present for the meeting. However, Morel finally excuses Haynes since he is asleep and too heavy to carry.

Madeline

Morel apparently experimented with a friend named Madeline. Even though Madeline was thousands of miles away in Quebec he was able to recreate the aroma of her perfume and then the softness of her skin with his invention.

Irene and Dora

Irene and Dora two women in the group who suspect Morel of evil deeds with respect to his invention.

Charlie

Charlie is a friend of the group who is dead. When Morel tells the group that he used Charlie for testing his invention, some begin to believe that Morel killed Charlie.

Elisa

Elisa is a girl from his home country of Venezuela. As the man is near death, he thinks of Elisa who in his fading consciousness looks like Faustine.



Objects/Places

Calcutta

The main character encounters an Italian rug merchant in Calcutta who suggests he flee to the island of Villings.

Rabaul

The main character leaves from Rabaul in a borrowed row boat to flee to the island of Villings to avoid prosecution.

Villings Island

Villings Island is the island where the protagonist in the beginning story of "The Invention of Morel" has escaped to. The island was said to be home to a deadly disease, so deadly that not even pirates would visit the island.

Caracas, Venezuela

Caracas, Venezuela is the birthplace and childhood of the protagonist. Venezuelan authorities are after him for crimes he allegedly committed.

The Invention

Morel, who is a scientist, invented a device that captures the images of people—their conversations and activities—for eternity. Unlike a video of a person, the invention captures the complete image of the person including his soul. This completed image is stored in the machine for eternity and projected continuously. Once the soul of the real person emerges, he dies.

France and Switzerland

Morel had research labs in both France and Switzerland where he conducted the first experiments using his invention.

Schwachter Company

Morel tells his friends that he experimented with several employees of the Schwachter Company. This disturbs some in the group since some of the employees are officially missing.



The Tides

Morel chose Villings Island for his experiment in part due to its high tides which could provide adequate power for his invention to operate.

The White Freighter

The protagonist is frightened when he sees a white freighter off the coast of Villings Island. He feared that either the ship would take Faustine away or that those pursuing him had arrived to take him away.

Quebec

Morel apparently conducted early experiments using his invention with a woman named Madeline who lived in Quebec.

Themes

Solitude

The reader learns in the book's introduction and prologue that its author Adolfo Bioy Casares focused upon man's solitude for the main theme of many of his books including his first and most successful novella, "The Invention of Morel." The book begins with the protagonist who is never named alone on the Island of Villings. The man is a fugitive from justice and fled there at the suggestion of a rug merchant he met in Calcutta. The merchant told the man that the Island of Villings was abandoned by its inhabitants years before after they had constructed some large buildings. There is a dreadful disease connected with the island, so deadly that not even pirates will venture ashore. However, since the main character is so desperate to escape imprisonment, he opts to take his chances on the dangerous island.

Although the reader never learns what crime the man is allegedly guilty of, he claims in the diary he writes to be innocent of the charges. Although the man ostensibly wanted to escape prosecution, his fleeing symbolizes an attempt to abandon life and its problems. The man faces a new set of problems on the island not the least of which is loneliness. After living on the island several months, he begins seeing people who he calls the invaders—people who are invading his solitude. He resents them disturbing his sanctuary, however, his loneliness draws him to a woman he sees sitting at the beach everyday watching the sunset. As it turns out, the people including the woman on the beach, are just images created by Morel a scientist who is a member of the invaders. Morel invented a device that can recreate a person's image within a recorded scene then replay that scene continuously. This explains why the man witnesses the people doing and saying the same things over and over again. Although the man hides from the people, they never see or hear him because they are just images. The title of the book refers to Morel's diabolical invention. However, on another level it could refer to the invention of Morel and the others by the protagonist who is driven by his solitude and loneliness.

Fantasy

The reader learns from the introduction and prologue portions of the "Invention of Morel" that its author, Adolfo Bioy Casares, was a huge fan of both fantasy and the supernatural and the writings of authors like Poe and Wells. He especially admired Wells' book "The Island of Dr. Moreau." There is an obvious connection, perhaps a tribute, to Wells' book as "The Invention of Morel" takes place on an island and the title character's surname, "Morel" is similar to "Moreau." The main character who is never named is a fugitive from justice and has fled to the abandoned island of Villings. Villings is a dangerous place that breeds a deadly disease that keeps even pirates from coming ashore. The fantastical disease causes its victims' toenails and fingernails to fall off and kills the skin and eyes before the person dies.



After several months alone on the island, the man begins seeing people—however, they never seem to hear or see him. He concludes that either he is hallucinating or that the people are either aliens, ghosts, or caretakers at an asylum where he is a patient. However, whatever the scenario he is sure that he and they are operating on separate planes. He later discovers that Morel, a scientist and one of the visitors, has invented a device that creates images of living people. The images he creates have emerge with their souls. The upside is that these images will "live" forever; however, they will live only within the confines of the scenes he's recorded them in.

Technology

The story of "The Invention of Morel" would not be possible without the advent of modern technology. The novella was written in 1940, at the dawn of the modern age of technology and electronics. Morel based his image recording invention on the technology of the radio, television and telephone. With these devices Morel discovered how to capture the images of live people. With the advanced technology of motion pictures, photography and the phonograph, Morel learned how to capture and retain those images.

Morel captures moving images in activities and conversations they experience in real-time. This description sounds very similar to images seen on videos or motion pictures. However, there is a distinct difference—the invention contains an element that has never been invented in real life and probably (hopefully) never will. Once Morel is able to perfectly synchronize all his controls, he is able to bring in the image of the person as well as his soul. Therefore, while preserving the image for eternity, he has stripped the human being of his soul. The invention creates images who move about in a three-dimensional world. They are projected images who repeat the same conversations and behaviors continuously, in fact probably for eternity. Although he gives life to the images, he brings death to the original subject.

The story conveys the reality that technology, while providing entertainment to people, does not provide happiness. At another level, the tale of "The Invention of Morel" presents technology has a medium that offers false happiness while stripping man of his soul, i.e., his identity.



Style

Point of View

The story of "The Invention of Morel" is told by the protagonist who remains nameless throughout the tale. He is a fugitive from justice. The reader does not know what crime he allegedly committed but he is wanted by Venezuelan authorities. When in Calcutta, an Italian rug merchant suggests he flee to the abandoned island of Villings. When the man arrives there, he finds several large buildings but no people. The protagonist seems to be well-educated from his vocabulary and thought processes. The reader learns the man is a writer—he is writing about his experiences in a diary. At one point, because of the intrinsic risks in the island, he wonders if the diary he is writing is actually a will. He also comments that he plans to write two books.

When people suddenly appear on the island, the author's presentation leaves the reader wondering if the people are real or imaginary. Although he apparently sought solitude, he is attracted to one of the women. The man seems to be disturbed and depressed. He apparently has hallucinations and he contemplates killing one of the invading people—the woman to whom he is drawn. When the people disappear he is distraught that the woman is gone. He considers suicide but since she is no longer present to mourn his passing, taking his life would be meaningless.

In the end when he learns that the people were just images projected from Morel's invention, the man realizes he will never be with the woman, Faustine, because the real woman is dead. He manages to operate the invention and photograph himself. He superimposes his image on the scenes containing the image of Faustine. The man is dying but gratified that when people see these images, they will think that he and Faustine were together and in love.

Setting

The story begins on the island of Villings. The protagonist is a fugitive from justice and is seeking a place to hide. He is told about the island by a rug merchant he meets in Calcutta. It is a desolate, abandoned island the location of which is not revealed. White people had been there in 1924 and constructed several large buildings. However, they abandoned the island due to the dangers that exist there. It is a vile place that is home to a virulent disease that enters the body on the outside and works its way inward. The condition causes its victims to lose their toe nails, fingernails and hair. The eyes and skin die. Soon after the person dies. The disease is so horrendous that not even pirates will come ashore.

However, the protagonist who claims he is innocent of the charges against him, is so desperate to escape prosecution that he travels across the sea by row boat and lands on the island. The rug merchant had referred to a "Museum" on the island. However,



when the man explores the building, he finds that it is not a museum at all. Rather, it is a large building with dozens of rooms and two basements where there are strange motors and secret rooms. There is a swimming pool but it is often filled with snakes.

The marshlands surrounding the buildings is apparently where the deadly disease breeds. There are dozens of flowers but they wilt and die as soon as they are picked. There are large rocks on the beach and the tides are rough and rise unpredictably causing severe flooding.

Language and Meaning

The story is a fantasy and is rife with symbolic meanings. The protagonist of the story who is unnamed is a fugitive from justice and is seeking a place to safely flee. He arrives at the island of Villings, an island abandoned years ago by its inhabitants. The reader does not know what crime the protagonist allegedly committed but he claims that he is innocent. Since the reader learns from the book's introduction that solitude is one of Casares' recurring themes in his works, it is not difficult to conclude that his fleeing the law symbolizes man's need to be alone and to flee the stresses of life. The man claims to be innocent of his accused crimes. Since he is thus a victim of society he has an excuse to abandon it and escape to a fantastical sanctuary.

However, the island is filled with dangers and risks. There is a deadly disease that exists in the marshlands surrounding the buildings. There is a swimming pool but it is often filled with snakes. This underscores the fact that one cannot escape to a life without problems. While he escaped from prosecution, he traded his old problems for a whole new set. The message is clear—one cannot escape life and its problems. The title itself has a double-meaning. The "Invention of Morel" refers to the device Morel invents that saves images of people and their activities into a record that repeats the scenes for eternity. Compelled by his loneliness, the protagonist possibly "invented" Morel and the others which is a more subtle meaning of the title. In other words, did Morel invent the device that created the images or did the man invent Morel who invited the images?

Structure

The "Invention of Morel" by Adolfo Bioy Casares is a novella that has no chapter separations. There are line breaks to control the momentum of the story throughout the book. The story is a fantasy and is rife with symbolic meanings and messages. The tale of the main character who is never named is told basically in a straight-forward manner with limited use of flashback sequences.

The protagonist who has fled to an abandoned island to escape prosecution from the law is an educated person who is recording his experiences in a diary. Although alone at first, people invade his sanctuary and dance and play music all day. The introduction of these people who disturb the man's solitude and threaten his future, brings in the conflict necessary to move the story along.



The man is drawn to one of the women in the group of visitors. The man at first hides from the woman but later decides to approach her. However, she is not able to see or hear him. He learns that the woman's name is Faustine. He watches Faustine several times when she is in the company of a man who the woman calls Morel. Neither person can see the man leading the reader to wonder if they are in his imagination. Since he may be imagining these people, the title of the book, "The Invention of Morel," is fitting. Although it turns out that character/image Morel invented an image creating device, the reader can ponder whether the lonely protagonist imagined everything.



Quotes

"I understand that something is wrong with my way of writing and I tell myself it's time to do something about it. For reasons of caution, in writing the new novel, I don't strive to make a big hit, just to avoid errors." (xi)

"I suppose someone might attribute their mysterious appearance to the effect of last night's heat on my brain. But there are no hallucinations or imaginings here: I know these people are real—at least as real as I am." (11)

"I believe we lose immortality because we have not conquered our opposition to death; we keep insisting on the primary, rudimentary idea: that the whole body should be kept alive. We should seek to preserve only the part that has to do with consciousness." (14)

"Perhaps my 'no hope' therapy is a little ridiculous; never hope, to avoid disappointment; consider myself dead, to keep from dying. Suddenly I see this feeling as a frightening, disconcerting apathy. I must overcome it. After my escape, I managed to live with a kind of indifference to the deadly tedium, and as a result I attained peace of mind." (24)

"Oh, it has been such a long time now since she has seen me. I think I shall kill her, or go mad, if this continues any longer. I find myself wondering whether the disease-ridden marshes I have been living in have made me invisible. And, if that were the case, it would be an advantage: then I could seduce Faustine without any danger." (37)

"I felt elated. I thought I had made this discovery: that there are unexpected, constant repetitions in our behavior. The right combination of circumstances had enabled me to observe them. One seldom has the chance to be a clandestine witness of several talks between the same people. But scenes are repeated in life, just as they are in the theater." (41)

"And I had another idea, an incredible plan for a very private seduction, which, like a dream, would exist only for me. These vain and unjustifiable explanations came to me during moments of extreme anxiety. But men and love-making cannot endure prolonged intensity." (54)

"When a man awakens, or dies, he is slow to free himself from the terrors of the dream, from the worries and manias of life." (65)

"To be on an island inhabited by artificial ghosts was the most unbearable of nightmares; to be in love with one of those images was worse than being in love with a ghost—perhaps we always want the person we love to have the existence of a ghost." (75)

"I approve of the direction he gave, no doubt unconsciously, to his efforts to perpetuate man: but he has preserved nothing but sensations; and, although his invention was incomplete, he at least foreshadowed the truth: man will one day create human life. His



work seems to confirm my old axiom: it is useless to try to keep the whole body alive."
(82)

"The final moment must be rapid, confused; we are always so far removed from death that we cannot imagine the shadows that must becloud it." (90)

"I can still see my image moving about with Faustine. I have almost forgotten that it was added later; anyone would surely believe we were in love and completely dependent on each other." (103)



Topics for Discussion

Why did the protagonist flee to the Island of Villings?

Villings Island was home to what dangers and risks? Were all these dangers real?

What were the five possibilities that the protagonist determined about the existence of the people who came to the island?

What three things did the main character feel he could do when he thought Faustine was going to sail away?

How did the invention of Morel work? What powered the invention and why did it fail to project the images at times?

How did the protagonist get trapped in the room where the invention's motors were housed? How did he escape?

What plan did the man ultimately devise that would keep him and Faustine together forever?