Lust Study Guide

Lust by Susan Minot

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Lust and Other Stories is a collection of 12 short stories with the common theme of male-female relationships. The characters in all of the stories contend with the problems caused by a failing or failed relationship where one partner, always the narrator or a primary character, is more heavily invested in the relationship than the other partner. While the other partner usually is not prominently featured in the story, his or her lack of interest in the relationship is always presented as a point of focus and contention in the narratives.

The stories have an intimate, personal feel. The characters are usually sympathetic, and the narrators are usually reliable. The characters and situations are always credible, and the language is precise and well crafted. The style of the collection fits the minimalist tradition, though the author eschews the term for the works. Most of the pieces in the collection lack many elements of traditional fiction, including, in some cases, character development, location description, and even plot development. Indeed, many of the pieces are best read as sketches or vignettes that convey a mood or tone rather than plot or character development. Some of the pieces are related in the panoramic method, some use a stream-of-consciousness presentation, and some are traditional narratives. The first- and third-person points of view are used.

Many of the stories lack plot closure in the traditional sense, but all of them include an adequate thematic closure. The 12 pieces are divided into three sections of four stories each. The first four pieces deal with relationships in the early stages, the second four stories focus on existing relationships in crisis, and the final four stories focus on the end or the aftermath of a failed relationship. The age progression of the characters is somewhat organized, also, in that the youngest character is presented in the first story, and the characters generally grow older throughout the remaining stories in the collection. The final piece in the collection serves as a comprehensive coda by re-enumerating many of the elements presented in earlier stories.

Lust

Lust Summary

"Lust" is narrated from a first-person point of view by a reliable, unnamed narrator. The narrator is a teenaged girl. The primary timeline covers approximately 3 years of her life as she attends the coeducational religious Casey Academy, away from home. The narrator is 15 to 17 years old during the primary period of the story. She lives in a dormitory-style room, smokes tobacco and marijuana, drinks alcohol, uses birth-control pills from the age of 15 on, and has sex with boys.

The narrator relates having sexual relations with Leo, Roger, Bruce, Tim, Willie, Philip, Oliver, Johnny, Eben, Jamie, Andrew, Simon, Mack, Paul, and Eddie. The narrator also relates having a sexual encounter with a sixteenth boy whose name she does not know. The structure of the narrative strongly suggests there are other unnamed and unnoted lovers.

The narrator takes her first lover, Leo, within the first month of attending the academy, at age 15, and the story ends with the narrator apparently still not a graduate but attending a probable third and final year of school. Most of the sexual partners are placed in the context of an event, such as a concert, or a place, such as a particular empty swimming pool. Several of them are also associated with a particular song title or lyric.

Three partners are given more detail than the others. Tim uses a pickup line that is related and later uses the same line on another girl. The narrator and Tim typically walk into the woods around the campus for sexual activity. The narrator also indicates that one lover frightens her by his intensity and actions in bed, and this is probably Tim. His penis is shaped like a banana.

The narrator and Willie typically have sex in the dorm room, with sexual play starting during housekeeping chores and continuing through bathing together. It is unclear whether they are cohabitating. They are officially reprimanded for indecent public displays - the school official suggests that wandering into the woods surrounding the school would be a suitable future practice. His penis and scrotum remind the narrator of a bunch of walnuts.

One summer, the narrator lives in a house with numerous other friends, male and female. Her primary lover during this period is Mack, who lives at the house. A subsequent lover, Eddie, also lives at the house during the summer. The house is located on a nude beach, and most of the house residents spend most of the time naked. Apparently, switching sexual partners is commonplace, though the narrator indicates she is usually monogamous.

The narrator does not return home frequently; instead she spends holidays, weekends, summers, and other breaks in school or at friends' or lovers' houses. The narrator

apparently has little to no parental oversight, and the academy appears to be extremely tolerant of sexual behavior - the academy's medical doctor provides birth-control pills and promotes IUDs during school meetings.

The narrator's parents seem deliberately unaware of her sexual behavior. Her mother is indecisive and makes only offhand and uncommitted comments. Her father is both shy and uninterested. Her mother uses birth-control pills, also. The narrator has two named girl friends, Jill and Giddy, although no information is provided about them.

Lust Analysis

"Lust," 15 pages long, is the first of four short stories included in Part One of the book and is the second-longest story in the collection. The narrator is unnamed, apparently at least somewhat attractive, and very sexually active, having at least 16 sexual partners in fewer than 3 years.

The narrator has a single one-night stand, but otherwise appears to have sex within a somewhat traditional, if ephemeral, heterosexual relationship. The narrator apparently requires her lovers to make the initial advances, both socially and sexually, but will subsequently engage in a relationship with them without much, if any, courtship period. In fact, the narrative suggests that sex on the first date is not only common, but practically expected.

The story's basic premise is that sex for girls is different than sex for boys. The narrator states that when a boy has sex with multiple partners, it increases his ego and social standing. Whenever a girl has sex with a new partner, however, it is like a flower losing another petal. The narrator apparently agrees to date boys because she can't think of a way to tell them she is not interested. The narrator also feels that dating a boy obligates her to have sex with him.

The narrator compares having sex to falling into muck, and equates herself after sex to a pounded veal. The narrator says that sex ruins something deep inside of her, and explains that she and her friends are depressed. The narrator also notes that her lovers ignore her under most circumstances, particularly when they are playing sports or right after sex. However, the narrator also notes that the feeling of being with a new boyfriend makes her unable to concentrate or perform well at sports, and apparently she takes at least some pleasure in the physical aspects of sex.

The narrator's ambivalent attitude toward sex and relationships is balanced against the traditional long-term relationship example provided by the dormitory's housemother Mrs. Gunther, who married her high school sweetheart.

The story is extremely minimal, the narrator being the only character of note. The story has no well-developed sense of place. The timeline is sketchy, and the narrative is limited to essentially a collection of observations about a series of nearly indistinguishable lovers and a few introspective comments on the nature of lust and sex. The story works best when read as a catalogue of lovers with scattered observations.

Sparks

Sparks Summary

"Sparks" is narrated from a first-person point of view by a somewhat unreliable narrator named Lil. The narrator is a woman probably in her mid-twenties. Lil narrates a story about an evening party she attended a few nights earlier. Throughout the narration, she remembers prior events she experienced with Duer, a former lover. The events of the evening party are narrated in chronological order, but the recollections are presented in a complex and out-of-sequence manner. The time span of related events is indeterminate, but covers at least 4 and probably 9 or 10 years. In the following summary the timeline is presented entirely in chronological order.

When Lil was 15, she had her first sexual intercourse with Duer. At that time Duer was also approximately 15 years old. They were discovered by Lil's mother, but her mother simply ignored the situation and never spoke about it to anyone. Over the next several years Lil and Duer maintained an apparent sexual and social relationship, which culminated in their living together for some period of time. Lil notes that Duer meets women easily and always has a variety of women available to him, though the exact nature of his behavior is not fully described. Presumably, Lil and Duer's relationship was either on-again-off-again, or else he frequently had other sexual partners throughout their relationship.

Lil enters a prolonged period of clinical depression. Although the causes of her depression are not directly noted, vague references to sexual issues are made. Lil spends 3 months in bed and finally suffers a complete mental collapse. She is subsequently placed in custody of a mental facility. While Lil is incarcerated, she is visited by friends and family, though she does not receive a visit from Duer or her father.

While she is incarcerated, Duer moves out of state to attend law school, which effectively ends their relationship. Lil notes that she has never seen Duer since he moved, though they do occasionally speak on the telephone. Lil was aware that Duer was going to move away, and this may have contributed to her mental instability although this is not stated in the text. Lil completes a regimen of psychotherapy and is eventually discharged.

An indeterminate period of time then elapses after Lil's discharge from the mental hospital. Lil is then invited to a party by Stacey, her sister. The party is attended by Lex and Nita, two friends who are probably a couple, and a few other people whom Lil has not previously met. The party is held at Jenny's large apartment. Jenny has known Lil and Stacey for a long period of time. Jenny's apartment doubles as an art studio where she does public displays.

At the party Lil meets a male actor who is not named. He is apparently somewhat known and has just finished filming a movie. She finds him very physically attractive but

somewhat ridiculous in behavior. Lil deliberately sits next to the actor but then largely ignores him. She also observes him closely and manages to be alone with him but then resists his very tentative advances. She apparently finds him similar to Duer both in looks and some behaviors.

As the evening progresses, Lil overhears portions of conversation that remind her of various events involving Duer, and she reminisces about her previous life. She does not participate directly in very much conversation. From time to time she is spoken to by her sister Stacey or the actor and she responds, but for he most part she only listens and reminisces. Sometimes the memory is related to the topic being discussed but sometimes they appear unrelated.

At the end of the evening Jenny prepares an elaborate dessert of flaming baked apples.

While Jenny is readying the dessert, the actor tries to convince Lil to give her his telephone number, but she ignores him. He then suggests that he take her dancing, but instead of answering, she makes deliberate scene by criticizing his behavior. She then blushes and becomes confused and tries to stand up just as Jenny is bringing out the dessert. Flaming apples drop onto Lil and several hands grab at her to pat out the sparks. Lil cries out "Duer - " (p. 37).

Lil's clothing is somewhat burned but she is not physically harmed. As she sits in confusion, the other guests make polite small talk for a few moments, and then the actor stands up and announces he must leave. He looks at Lil, and the look on her face convinces him that he really should leave. After he is gone, Lil searches for her cigarette lighter, and then discovers that everyone at the party is holding out a light for her to use.

Sparks Analysis

"Sparks," 19 pages long, is the second of four short stories included in Part One of the book and the longest story in the collection. The title refers directly to the physical sparks from an accident involving fire - however, it is also symbolic of the "spark" of interest Lil feels for the attractive actor she meets at the party.

The story is narrated from a first-person limited point of view by Lil, a 20-something woman who is recovering from a mental breakdown. The first-person perspective is particularly effective in this story, allowing an intimate feel with minimal character development and engaging the reader in the somewhat complex chronological construction of the narrative. The character Lil is sympathetic because of the first-person perspective.

Character development is limited to Lil, the narrator, and is severely restricted. In essence, the story presents a character profile as is typical of many stories in the collection. The narrative does not present many physical, or other, characteristics, and the reader is left free to imagine the characters. The plot development, such as it is, logically follows from the character and is a well-crafted element of the story.

The story's setting is in an apartment complex, and the main timeline of events covers a single evening. The story is narrated 1 or 2 days after the events transpired. Additional settings are referred to but not detailed. As with most aspects of the story, setting is a largely unimportant detail, and descriptions of place are kept deliberately to a minimum. In this respect, the setting complements the story's tone.

The narrative contains numerous ambiguities, but few if any direct contradictions. The image of Lil standing on the apartment's roof near the edge where there is no safety barrier or retaining wall is symbolic of Lil's entire life - standing in a dangerous place without a demarcation of safe boundaries. It is worth noting that Lil's sister voices concern at Lil's proximity to the edge. Contrast this sibling concern with the notable lack of parental concern exhibited when Lil's mother discovered her engaged in sexual activity at age 15 - an event apparently believed by a psychoanalyst to be fundamental to Lil's mental breakdown.

Blow

Blow Summary

"Blow" is narrated from a first-person point of view by a reliable, unnamed narrator. The narrator's age is indeterminate, but she is female, probably in her mid to late twenties. The primary timeline covers a single afternoon and is narrated several weeks or months after the events transpire.

Bill, a long-time friend of the narrator, calls and receives permission to visit. He arrives at the narrator's apartment within minutes. The narrator shares the apartment with a roommate, who is at work for the day and does not appear in the story. The narrator is a writer, apparently writing children's books, who works out of her apartment. Bill, agitated, twitchy, and nervous, discloses that he has broken up with Helen and that he has not slept for several days, instead relying on regular doses of cocaine to remain awake. Bill wants to kill time before an appointment with his therapist.

Bill gives the narrator several strange gifts that he has apparently purchased at a second-hand store. The gifts include some French books because Bill mistakenly thought the narrator read French and some oversized-clothing items. The narrator and Bill briefly discuss the narrator's new significant other, a cinematographer. Bill claims the new boyfriend is shifty, rude, and unreliable, and that the relationship is doomed to failure. The narrator recalls that she and Bill almost became a couple on several occasions, but instead have simply remained friends over the years.

Bill and the narrator then go to an art museum where they spend time in the Islamic art section. Bill spends some time relating sensationalist stories to the narrator about murder and sexual orgies, relating them to social practices in ancient Persia. Bill again vituperates the narrator's boyfriend, claiming to have special insight into the working of the male mind. The narrator finds Bill's drug-induced frenzy a nuisance, but she is able to put up with him for the afternoon because she is newly in love. The narrator concludes by noting that Bill's predictions about her burgeoning relationship eventually came true.

Blow Analysis

"Blow," five pages long, is the third of four short stories included in Part One of the book. It is an extremely concise story, does not feature character development or even much characterization, and is the shortest story in the collection. The sense of place is supplied by implying that the events transpire in New York City. The story best functions as a simple scene or sketch of events between two generic people and is a minimalist piece in all aspects. Although extremely short, the story is well crafted and effective.

Very little action actually occurs in the story - instead, the primary events are related as having already occurred. In this way, the entire timeline of the story, which spans

multiple years, is compressed into a single narrated conversation. The first-person point of view gives the story an intimate and accessible tone, though the characters involved are not particularly sympathetic or even likable.

The title of the story is taken from the cocaine that gives Bill his frenetic behavior, but the narrator also refers to her own apparently overly optimistic feelings and behavior as a form of a high caused by the feeling of being newly in love. She concludes by noting that when the new-love high was over, all of Bill's observations and predictions turned out to be valid. In this way, the title of the story can also be seen as an allegorical reference to the drug-use-like quality of the process of falling in and out love.

City Night

City Night Summary

"City Night" is narrated from a third-person limited point of view. The story focuses on the introduction of Ellen Greenough to Nicholas Dickson and their subsequent sexual encounter. Ellen is 27; Nicholas' age is not specified, but he is probably in his mid-thirties. The primary timeline covers a single evening and is narrated after the events transpire.

Ellen has spent the previous 3 years caring for her ailing mother. After her mother dies, Ellen moves to the city, begins to study art history, wants to become an art restorer, and begins to engage in social activities. Ellen is invited to a dinner party by her friend, Tina. Tina warns Ellen that the host, Nicholas, must be guarded against but Ellen does not really understand the implication.

Nicholas deliberately seats Ellen on his side at the dinner party although there are numerous other guests whom Nicholas knows better. Ellen notices that Nicholas is extremely self-assured, fairly well built, attractive, and has a small pony tail. Ellen muses that he is somehow unlike other men she has known in her life. Nicholas and Ellen make small talk, and Nicholas plays the role of attentive and professional party host.

While Nicholas is attending to the needs of other guests, Ellen talks with one of his friends, Theo. Theo is drunk and talkative and expresses both admiration and disgust at Nicholas' apparent ability to bed so many women. Ellen expresses surprise and doubt that Nicholas is so sexually successful, but Theo assures her this is indeed the case. Theo refers to Ellen as "just a baby" (p. 54), implying that Theo and Nicholas are older - probably in their mid-thirties.

As the dinner concludes, most of the guests and Nicholas decide to go downtown to a club. Ellen plans to return home, instead, because she has a morning college course to attend. At the curbside, however, Nicholas insists that she go to the club and wraps a scarf around her neck, tucking it in under her chin. At his touch, Ellen's resistance crumbles and she accompanies the group to the club. At the club Nicholas demonstrates his social connections by quickly ushering the group inside, paying for everyone, and greeting numerous other club patrons.

Ellen and Nicholas spend a few hours moving around the club from area to area and making small talk with each other. Ellen feels out of place and disoriented. Although it is apparent that Nicholas is familiar to many and comfortable in the club atmosphere, he eventually senses that Ellen is not. He then claims that he doesn't feel particularly comfortable in the club and came to the club only to be with Ellen. Although this is clearly not the case, Ellen feels that she has somehow made a deeper-than-superficial

connection to Nicholas and that they are sharing an intimate moment of truth. They decide to leave the club.

Ellen puts up the pretense of an argument but quickly succumbs to Nicholas' insistence that she return to his apartment. They take a taxi to his apartment and go inside and have sex. In the morning, he takes her to the street and puts her in a taxi to go home. Although he is courteous and professional, he is already distracted, and Ellen sees him turn away before the cab has left the curb. As the cab takes her home, Ellen sees a mother and child on the sidewalk. She considers the family relationship to be a world she once knew, her school studies a world she currently knows, and Nicholas' world, where "one did not need to care" (p. 60) as a new, interesting, and appealing world.

City Night Analysis

"City Night," 10 pages long, is the last of four short stories included in Part One of the book. It is written using a third-person limited point of view and focuses on a single evening in the life of Ellen Greenough. It is well crafted, concise, and one of the strongest stories in the collection. The characters' names are notable - Greenough is relatively inexperienced and new to the social world, while Dickson is sexually active and primarily interested in sexual intercourse. The characters are particularly well developed considering the brevity of the story.

Ellen's apparent napve approach to engaging with Nicholas is foreshadowed by three events. Her friend Tina warns her to be careful, and Nicholas' friend, Theo, tells her that Nicholas has sex with numerous partners. Subsequently, Ellen listens to a brief conversation where Nicholas recalls a previous lover's name.

Ellen does not find Nicholas particularly attractive, but does seem to be flattered by the considerable attention he gives her. In a risible and ironic scene, Nicholas wraps a scarf around Ellen's neck, almost like a father wrapping up a child, and as he lightly touches her face, her will crumbles. The throat-wrapping by Nicholas also contrasts well with other passages in other stories in the collection where women in uncertain situations feel out of breath.

When Ellen and Nicholas leave the club, she mechanically objects to returning home with him, but their sexual encounter is a foregone conclusion. Her rote objection is simply ignored by Nicholas who insists she accompany him home, correctly assuming his seduction is complete and successful. At some level Ellen realizes she is simply playing a role - her subsequent behavior and reaction makes it clear that she does not feel poorly treated or manipulated.

The concluding scene is extremely well written. Nicholas' proper but distracted escorting of Ellen to the taxi and his perfunctory behavior are perfectly captured. Ellen's comparison of the three worlds she is familiar with is interesting, engaging, and very believable.

Lunch with Harry

Lunch with Harry Summary

"Lunch with Harry" is narrated from a third-person limited point of view. The story focuses on a lunch shared by three characters. Harry Loder is met for lunch by his lover, Jane, and his friend, Emma. Harry is broad-shouldered, probably overweight, and has collar-length hair and a British accent. He considers himself to be European in attitudes. Jane is American, has a new short haircut and is thin. Emma has a European accent, is tall, and has pale hair. The characters' ages are not specified, but they are probably in their mid to late thirties. The primary timeline covers the few minutes the trio spends having lunch.

The story opens with Emma and Jane walking on the street where they are caught in a rain shower and then enter a restaurant to meet Harry, who is already seated. They sit together, look at the menu, order, and make small talk. During their brief conversation, they discuss a party they had a day or two earlier. Emma mentions that she had seen Rachel at the party. Harry seems uninterested, but Jane recalls that Rachel is Harry's previous lover.

The three characters then discuss the couple who hosted the party, and note that the host's daily job causes him to work in an office full of young and attractive women. Jane and Emma feel this situation would be hard for the wife, but Harry disagrees. Harry states that women shouldn't ask for things they know they can't get - referring to infidelity. Harry orders a dessert; Emma and Jane do not. Harry then excuses himself to make a telephone call.

While Harry is away, Jane asks Emma's advice on how to relate to Harry. Jane notes that Emma has known Harry for a long time. Emma carefully avoids the topic until Harry returns. The three characters then leave the restaurant, and Emma gets into a taxi and rides away. Harry and Jane have some trouble hailing another taxi.

Eventually, a taxi approaches, and Jane is nearly hit by another car as she runs to the taxi. When she gets into the taxi Harry is already seated and looking out the window. Jane exclaims that she was nearly hit by a car and accidentally drops some belongings onto the street. Harry tells her to hurry up and calls her Rachel, apparently unaware of his mistake. The story concludes with Jane realizing that perhaps now she has something to worry about.

Lunch with Harry Analysis

"Lunch with Harry," eight pages long, is the first of four short stories included in Part Two of the book. Characterization and sense of place are limited, resulting in fairly unsympathetic characters. Harry Loder is portrayed as a self-absorbed and unlikable man who treats Jane poorly and holds her outlook on life to be provincial and simple-

minded. Harry states directly that he finds extra-relationship sexual liaisons insignificant and simply part of life. Harry is probably overweight - he is noted as being very large, having a tight collar, and having a hard time turning around at the table. He orders dessert.

Emma is probably aware of Harry's wandering eye, having known him for a long time. She is portrayed as too sophisticated to mention, simply by accident, having seen Rachel. Although she is willing to broach the topic in front of Harry, when Jane turns to her for discreet and direct advice, Emma declines. Perhaps Emma shares Harry's "European" attitude toward covert sexual liaisons, or else she is simply protecting Harry as a personal favor to a friend. In any event, Jane appears to have missed Emma's insinuation.

The discussion that the characters have about the host couple's situation is an allegory for Harry and Jane's relationship. The implication is made that the man has had multiple sexual partners while the woman, unaware, is faithful. As with many of the stories in the collection, this story works best as a simple scene with a foreshadowed and unsurprising epiphany as the conclusion. Jane has a common name and is described only as a thin American woman, and the character can be considered as a placeholder for any woman.

The Break-up

The Break-up Summary

"The Break-up" is narrated from a third-person omniscient point of view. The story focuses on a brief evening meeting of three friends who discuss a recent relationship breakup. The story begins with Owen and Liz in bed for the evening with lights out. Although it is too hot to sleep, when the telephone rings Owen wants to ignore it but Liz answers it to discover it is Owen's friend, Tim, who tells her he is coming over to visit. Owen and Liz are already aware that Tim's relationship with Sonia has just come to an end. Owen quickly dresses and leaves the apartment to go and buy some beer, and there is a break in the narrative.

The narrative resumes with Owen's returning to the apartment to discover Tim is already there. Tim is drunk and disheveled and sits at the kitchen table. He has walked a long distance to the apartment, stopping in bars along the way. The three characters discuss Tim's recent breakup with Sonia. Tim claims that he was completely surprised when Sonia announced she was leaving him. Liz hints that it was not really a complete surprise, and they briefly discuss Tim and Sonia's relationship. Tim tells Liz that Sonia has taken a lot of his belongings and sends bills and notices to him but will not talk with him. Tim conveys the impression that the break-up is, from Sonia's point of view, final.

The characters then discuss Sonia's past relationships and Owen discovers that one of Sonia's previous sexual partners also was a sexual partner of Liz - a photographer who took glamour pictures of both Liz and Sonia. After discussing these previous relationships, Tim notices that Liz is lightly dressed in what he calls a "slinky little bathrobe" (p. 78) and he ogles her body. Owen finds this amusing and Liz does not seem to mind. The characters discuss the relative merits of the slinky bathrobe and Owen privately muses that Liz is normally completely naked in the apartment.

A car passes outside the apartment with a very loud stereo and the momentary blast of music stops the conversation. After the caesura, Tim hides his face and weeps, nearly collapsing with grief. This sudden emotional shift catches Owen and Liz off balance. Tim explains that he was about to propose marriage to Sonia. Tim recovers his composure and announces he is leaving. On the way to the door, he sees some photographs of a past fishing trip and asks Owen to go fishing with him. Owen declines to make firm plans, and Owen then accompanies Tim into the hallway.

The narrative resumes with Owen's returning to the apartment alone. Owen tells Liz that Tim plans to try to recover the affection of Sonia, which surprises both Owen and Liz. Owen also says that Tim advised him to watch out for Liz. Liz is surprised by this, and as Owen and Liz return to bed, she wonders aloud what Tim could have meant.

The Break-up Analysis

"The Break-up," nine pages long, is the second of four short stories included in Part Two of the book. It is one of the best-crafted stories in the collection. The story is narrated from a third-person omniscient point of view, but it focuses primarily on Owen. In this respect it is unusual in the collection, which includes stories primarily focused on female characters. The narrative is primarily exposed through dialogue, and the characters use convincing and telling language. This use of dialogue is particularly effective in creating the intimate but stressful tone of the story.

The characterization of the three characters is cursory, but effective. For example, Tim takes solace in the way Owen hands him a beer, implying they have enjoyed a long friendship. Later, Tim cautions Owen in a private moment implying that they discuss intimate problems freely. Owen's apparent dismissive attitude toward Tim's emotions is countered by his attention to Tim. The narrative effectively captures this male-to-male relationship with insight.

Liz is surprised that Owen did not realize she had a common prior lover with Sonia. Liz apparently feels that Owen would have already known this if he were more observant. This story element is very effective in projecting Tim's emotional stress into Owen and Liz's relationship. It simultaneously establishes Liz and Sonia as physically very attractive women and allows the narrative to progress naturally into Tim's visual survey of Liz's scantily clad body, which then leads to his private discussion with Owen where he cautions Owen about Liz.

The Swan in the Garden

The Swan in the Garden Summary

"The Swan in the Garden" is narrated from a third-person omniscient point of view, but it is focused on the experience of Evelyn, the primary female character. The story describes the relationship between two characters, Evelyn and Albert Nastro, but begins with a scene in which they are not present. In the opening scene, Mrs. Godwin sits with her husband and son, both named Bob, in their mansion. The three characters discuss Evelyn ("Evie") and Albert's relationship. Mrs. Godwin is Evelyn's aunt and has helped raise Evelyn since Evelyn's mother abandoned her family. Bob, the son attending law school, has just driven from school to his home with Evelyn and Albert. He tells Mrs. Godwin, his mother, that Evelyn and Albert have been a couple for about a year and that this is his first introduction to any of Evelyn's relatives. Then there is a break in the narrative.

The narrative resumes outside where Evelyn and Albert are walking in the rain on an overcast winter day. Evelyn is evidently a wealthy and well-bred young woman. Albert was raised as a poor city kid and is 27. The two primary characters are arguing about the nature of their relationship as they walk toward a local public garden area. Evelyn is familiar with the gardens and eager to show them to Albert, who is critical, moody, and argumentative. The gardens, wet with rain and untended through the winter season, are described in rich detail. The gardens are noted as a popular location during spring and summer months for newlyweds to be photographed. Albert displays disgust at the obvious wealth and privilege the gardens represent.

Evelyn and Albert walk past a pond and some swans. As Evelyn approaches, one swan it opens its beak and hisses at her. Evelyn is startled by the aggressive display from the beautiful swan, and Albert smirks at what he perceives as her ignorance.

Evelyn privately muses about her living situation. She must soon vacate her apartment, yet Albert has not asked her to move in with him. This confuses and upsets Evelyn. Even though she realizes they will never get married, she feels Albert's distance to be growing. As they wander through the garden, Evelyn quizzes Albert about his point of view of the nature of their relationship. Albert finds her persistence annoying, and they argue. Evelyn continues to demand decisions and statements about the couple's future while Albert refuses to answer her. Instead of reassuring her, he tells her not to wait for him, but to pursue her own goals, instead.

Albert continues to refuse to commit or comment on the future. It becomes apparent that his participation in the relationship is not of the same nature as Evelyn's participation. Evelyn persists in demanding some statement of commitment, but Albert cuts her off and harshly demands that she drop the line of inquiry.

The Swan in the Garden Analysis

"The Swan in the Garden," nine pages long, is the third of four short stories included in Part Two of the book. The narrative's structure is not particularly well balanced - the opening scene does serve to establish some sense of place and provides some character background for Evelyn. It is overly long, however, and contains a large amount of additional detail that does not contribute materially to the narrative. The remainder of the narrative is straightforward and largely unexceptional.

The garden area - so critical to the success of the story - is described well using some of the strongest imagery presented in the entire collection. The wet plants, soils, statues, and other aspects are all described in intimate and exact detail and serve to anchor the second scene of the story. While it is described well in physical terms, the garden is not clearly situated, leaving its relationship to the surrounding neighborhood uncertain. The garden could be public, or it could, perhaps, be a private area. In this way, the uncertain situation of the garden becomes an interesting allegorical parallel to Evelyn's personal situation.

The characterization is not particularly strong. Albert is portrayed simply as an argumentative, self-centered, and distant lawyer, uninterested in displaying love or even routine courtesy to Evelyn. Evelyn is described as confused and lacking insight. Though Evelyn clearly wants a solid and permanent relationship, Albert does not. Instead of being forthright with her, he urges her to remain, but he won't even allow her to define their relationship as possibly progressing. It is clear that they are at cross-purposes in the relationship, though Evelyn appears largely unaware that this is the case.

The Feather in the Toque

The Feather in the Toque Summary

The narrative is relayed from a third-person omniscient point of view and explores the relationship between two unnamed characters referred to simply as "the man" and "the woman." Their ages are not specified, but the woman is noted as being younger than the man; she is probably several years younger. The characters are not physically described and can be seen as generic people in the situation described. The narrative is extremely concise, lacks many elements of standard fiction, and functions best as a simple situation rather than as a more traditional story.

The two characters are cohabitating in a house on an island in the fall. During the summer, the island is busy with renters. At the time of the narrative, the renters have gone home for the winter leaving the island notably vacant. At numerous points in the narrative, the house is described as having many doors and large windows that are always left open, blinds up and curtains aside, allowing wind, light, and sometimes animals to freely move through the house. Both characters spend the entire time of the narrative - perhaps 1 hour - nude, although their nudity is not portrayed in a sexual manner.

The female character recalls a conversation the couple had with friends on a previous day. The man had mentioned, with evident disgust, that one of his former lovers named Sabine was having a second child. As she remembers the conversation, the woman draws a bath, and a sparrow flies into the house through an open window. The woman calls to the man. He appears and ignores the situation telling her the bird will leave when it wants to leave. The woman becomes agitated, but the man leaves the room.

The woman recalls that earlier in the summer, when their relationship was just starting out, she had accidentally discovered a photograph of one of the man's previous lovers. That woman was wearing leopard pants and a toque with a large feather. When she found the photograph she thought it was thrilling but now it bothers her that it is in the house. She doesn't like the photograph to be downstairs by the man, even though it is stuck behind a pile of books.

The woman finally ushers the bird into the bathroom and then out the window and watches it fly off. She then gets into the bath and relaxes. As she gets out of the bath, she notices a woman's tortoiseshell comb on the back of a high shelf and experiences a pang of jealousy before she realizes it is her own comb. She takes the comb and observes it. Realizing that the man will never see the comb and would not touch it even if he saw it, she puts it back on the shelf thinking that the next woman will find it like she found the photograph.

The Feather in the Toque Analysis

"The Feather in the Toque," five pages long, is the last of four short stories included in Part Two of the book. The extremely concise narrative lacks most traditional elements of fiction, but it functions well as an internal monologue of the main character, an unnamed woman. She realizes that her lover has had numerous prior lovers, and she also tacitly admits that her relationship with him is ephemeral and will probably end soon. He will move on to another woman.

The sense of place is very vague - simply an island that serves as a type of summer resort. The island is not located in any geographical sense or even described in physical terms. Similarly, the house they live in is simply a house. The narrative does note that the doors to the house are habitually left open, and that the windows in the house are also usually left open. Further, the blinds or drapes are never closed. Thus, the house appears to be a very porous structure, easily entered, easily vacated, and offers relatively little privacy. The characters spend the entire time of the brief narrative nude. While nude, they spend time in doorways and open windows suggesting their lives are open for casual observation. This nudism and exhibitionism are not presented in a sexual way - instead they suggest that the characters themselves are exposed and defenseless to the larger world around them.

The title comes from a detail in the photograph the woman finds. The photograph shows the man's previous lover wearing a toque with a feather. This informs the woman that she is neither the first, nor the last, lover of the man. In a parallel metaphor, the woman later leaves her own tortoiseshell comb hidden in the house so her successor will receive the same experience. The bird that temporarily enters the house, flaps blindly around in terror, and then leaves the house in erratic flight, is an allegory of the woman's transient situation. The man's indifferent reaction to the bird exactly mirrors his indifferent attitude to the woman. Her fascination with the bird's beating heart is a particularly strong element in the narrative.

The Knot

The Knot Summary

"The Knot," written from a third-person omniscient point of view, has a unique construction within the collection; it is divided into four discrete scenes, almost like a small play. The four sections, each about one page in length, happen in discrete locations at different points in a chronological timeline, but they do involve the same two characters.

In Part I, a man and a woman have a discussion. No location is specified, and no details beyond the basic conversation are provided. The man and woman are asking whether they will ever have fights. They decide they will not have fights because fighting is for other, normal, people. Theirs is not a normal relationship.

In Part II, the man and woman are in bed together. She wants to discuss something, though the topic is not specified. The man does not want to talk about it and, instead, wants to sleep. They argue about talking or not talking.

In Part III, the two have broken off their relationship but have met to talk over lunch. They are eating soup. The woman calls the man Pete; he calls her Cyn. Pete claims "...suddenly you ditched out on me" (p. 107). Cyn does not dispute his statement, but she explains that their relationship had not been working. They argue, and then she explains that she left because they wouldn't or couldn't talk to each other. Pete complains that the soup they are eating for lunch is horrible, and Cyn agrees.

In Part IV, the couple meets by accident on a hot summer day in the city. The woman now calls the man Peter; he calls her Cynthia. The make small talk, and Peter says he has sold a screenplay. Cynthia says she still works at her old job. Peter is seeing an old girlfriend again; Cynthia is seeing someone new. Peter notices something on Cynthia's face and brushes it off - the touch between them galvanizes them, and they stare into each other's eyes.

The Knot Analysis

"The Knot," six pages long, is the first of four short stories included in Part Three of the book. It is divided into four numbered sections, each roughly one page in length. Like many characters in the collection, Peter and Cynthia could be any man and any woman in a similar situation. Beyond their names, occupations, and gender, no substantive details are provided in the narrative. The extremely concise story, presented in four small elements, tells of a relationship going through the broadest of phases: initial euphoria, subsequent disillusionment, the after-breakup discussion, and a future chance meeting.

The physical organization of the story into four sections effectively separates the events into chronological points in time that are easily combined into a more complete narrative. However, no details are provided on how much time has elapsed or where the events took place. This indefinite chronology leaves the story essentially a minimal collection of significant events; a catalogue of failed relationship mileposts. The structure parallels a typical four-act play.

The narrative contains some interesting dialogue. The characters' word use and topics of conversation suggest they are in their mid to late twenties. Cynthia is apparently familiar with Peter's earlier girlfriend though the nature of her familiarity is not specified. The characters' use of each other's names is interesting. In the first two sections they are not named, just simply noted as "the man" or "the woman." In the third section, they address each other by nicknames, Pete and Cyn. In the fourth section, they address each other as Peter and Cynthia.

A Thrilling Life

A Thrilling Life Summary

"A Thrilling Life" is written in the panoramic method, and it is narrated from a first-person limited point of view as a stream of consciousness. Although a temporal chronology can be constructed from the narrative, the series of events is not presented in order.

Frank Manager likes to flirt with nearly every attractive woman he meets. He particularly likes to flirt when he is with his girlfriend. Frank has engaged in numerous previous ephemeral relationships.

The unnamed narrator had broken up with a previous boyfriend and had met Frank. The narrator had recognized Frank for what he is and decides to spend time with him. Frank successfully pursues the narrator, and they develop a type of non-serious relationship based around mutually pleasurable activities without any commitment past the moment. On occasion, the narrator seeks personal information, which angers and distances Frank.

The narrator works at a left-wing magazine and is primarily surrounded by earnest, politically serious, and socially incompetent men. Frank offers a refreshing alternative. Frank travels all over the world and leads a glamorous life; he is frequently overseas for extended periods. The narrator and Frank continue their casual no-questions-asked relationship for a period of time.

The narrator's friends and co-workers caution her about Frank. Most of them feel she is being used and damaged, and they develop a dislike for Frank. The narrator continues to spend time with Frank and finds him an accomplished lover. The narrator frequently meets old girlfriends of Frank who give her knowing looks or make telling comments. The narrator occasionally meets people who know Frank, and they warn her about Frank's behavior. Nevertheless, the narrator discovers she is falling in love with Frank.

As the narrator's feelings intensify, Frank responds by shutting her out of his life. This situation develops for some time. One night, Frank asks the narrator whether she has made the acquaintance of a certain woman. The narrator has not met the woman, and Frank talks about her and explains he has been having an affair with her for quite some time. The narrator reasons away her emotions and rationalizes her feelings.

A scene transition takes place in the narrative, moving the timeline forward by several months. The narrator now occasionally hears about Frank. She hears he is with someone else. The narrator feels sympathy for Frank's new girlfriend because she knows what will happen with the relationship.

A Thrilling Life Analysis

"A Thrilling Life," 11 pages long, is the second of four short stories included in Part Three of the book. The non-chronological narrative progression relies on an emotional plot development in which the events relate to each other through their impact on the narrator. The story is unusual within the collection because of its lack of substantive dialogue and vague location. It functions best, perhaps, as a vignette or sketch of the narrator's emotional state of mind. The structure is particularly interesting when contrasted against the structure of the next story in the collection, which features most of the traditional fictional elements not found in this piece.

The narration is an effective use of the panoramic method of providing exposition in summary. The complex chronology is well suited to the method of narration, and the story is particularly well crafted. The narrator is fairly unsympathetic, however. She received numerous warnings from friends, co-workers, casual acquaintances, and even relative strangers. Additionally, the narrator engaged in her relationship with Frank precisely because he was unavailable and emotionally detached. The end result of their failed relationship is thus projected from the first paragraphs of the narrative. While unsympathetic, the narrator is credible and presents an interesting character. The characterization of the narrator is perhaps the strongest characterization included in the collection.

The initial physical contact scene in Frank's automobile's front seat becomes an allegory for their entire relationship. They are prevented from fully coming together by something - in this case, the physical interposition of the stick shift. After the narrator leaves the car, Frank calls her to the driver's side window for another kiss, where they are still separated from each other - in this case by the physical interposition of the car door. Then Frank tells her to kiss him with a kiss that will make them fall in love. Frank, of course, is not speaking literally, but the narrator understands him on many levels. Although interesting, the scene does start with the unfortunate "Frank drove me home one night. We sat in the front seat of his car..." (p. 115); how could someone drive the car from the back seat?

Ole Siche

Ole Siche Summary

"*Ole Siche*" is the most traditional short story in the collection and is written from a third-person omniscient point of view with a strong focus on Meg Gillian, one of two main characters in the narrative. The story begins and ends in the port of Gustavia on the island of Saint-Barthylemy in Guadeloupe. Among the Caribbean's Leeward Islands, Saint-Barthylemy is referred to as St. Bart's by the narrator.

Meg Gillian is a young off-Broadway actor described by the narrator as an ingynue. One year before the narrative chronology begins, Meg was involved in a failed relationship. Meg wanted to marry her previous lover, but he declined, and they eventually broke up. Meg subsequently became notably successful in an off-Broadway production. When the narrative chronology begins, Meg is involved in a sexual relationship with Charles Howe, a tall gray-haired and older man who is described as eager and pleasant. Charles owns a sailboat, the *Vapeur*, which is crewed by a single hand, has a dinghy launch, and is described as similar to the typical boats of the area. Charles, an influential man in the theater business, initiated the relationship after Meg's successes. As Meg knows, Charles has another girlfriend who does not accompany them on the vacation.

Meg and Charles spend the morning walking around Gustavia. Charles urges Meg to rent a motorcycle and go for a ride while he makes some calls. Meg assumes he wants to call his other girlfriend and is indecisive for a few moments and then decides she does not want to ride a motorcycle although she is an experienced rider. Charles then suggests they get coffee together, but Meg instead decides to walk to the lighthouse by herself. Charles immediately leaves her, and Meg walks to the lighthouse and surveys the port from the vantage point. She sees Charles's boat, *Vapeur*, moored in the port and notes it looks like many of the other boats.

The narrative has breaks and resumes as *Vapeur* anchors on *Ole Siche*, a small island just a few hours' sail from St. Bart's. The boat hand rows Charles and Meg ashore in a dinghy. When Meg reaches shore, she begins to look around, and a pelican nearly defecates on her. The island is described in considerable detail as Meg experiences it from several locations. Charles and Meg climb a rise and look at the sea. They near a cliff and Meg teeters with unexpected vertigo. Charles grabs her and pulls her upright, steadying her. Throughout their visit Charles walks quickly and is unobservant and appears to be impatient. Charles is always ahead of Meg and often is far away from her. Meg spends time looking at animals, plants, and scenery, and finds some amazing places and things.

When Meg calls to Charles he simply walks away or ignores her, not sharing in her wonderment. She muses on the nature of their relationship and realizes that although she has feelings for Charles, he does not reciprocate those feelings. She realizes she is

not part of him and begins to feel ridiculous and worn down. They return to the beach and to the boat and sail back to Gustavia.

At Gustavia, Charles and the boat hand go to the grocery store. While they are gone Meg goes for an evening swim in the marina. Charles and the boat hand return quickly and explain that the grocery store is closed. Charles muses about the poor quality of the meal they will have to eat and then chastises Meg for swimming in the marina.

Charles says it was irresponsible and dangerous to swim in the marina because there is so much boat traffic. Meg responds that she was being very careful. "Charles Howe's face stiffened and his mouth twitched with an odd fury. 'You can't be careful if it's someone else who's running over you,' he said" (p. 137). Charles explains he has a reputation to protect and must ensure Meg's physical safety.

Ole Siche Analysis

"Ole Siche," 11 pages long, is the third of four short stories included in Part Three of the book. The French title translates to "Dry Island," but it is used in reference to an island visited by the characters in the story. Charles Howe's boat is named *Vapeur*, which translates to "Vapor." The island is the best-described and most interesting location presented in any of the stories in the collection. In many ways, the tone used in describing the island is reminiscent of the garden described in "The Swan in the Garden."

The juxtaposition of the characters' differing experiences during the island visit with their differing roles in their relationship makes an interesting metaphor. In fact, the "Dry Island" is an extended allegory for the characters' relationship. Meg's experience of wonderment on the island contrasts well with Charles's desire to return quickly to the safe, familiar, and circumscribed world of his yacht. Later, while Meg ponders the nature of their relationship, Charles complains about the food.

The narrative development is beautifully crafted, and the story is the strongest piece in the collection. The ending scene is particularly poignant and well written. While Meg realizes she is not well esteemed by Charles, he berates her for taking what he perceives as a chance with her safety. Not because he is concerned about her, but because if she suffered an injury, it would damage his own reputation. Meg is also a well-developed, sympathetic, and believable character. Even though she is warned and realizes that her relationship with Charles is an ephemeral relationship of convenience, she develops feelings for him. Without attempting to entangle him, she ponders the nature of her role in their relationship in personal, but objective terms.

The Man Who Would Not Go Away

The Man Who Would Not Go Away Summary

"The Man Who Would Not Go Away" is written in the panoramic method and is narrated from a first-person limited point of view as a stream of consciousness. The narrative is a sketch of a failed relationship. The relationship exists between an unnamed and undescribed man and the unnamed narrator. The man is a well-known reporter who is notorious for having a string of failed relationships. The man's reporting is of an international character and takes him across the sea for extended periods of time.

After their relationship ends, the man travels to South Africa to work on a story and remains there for a prolonged period of time. The woman remembers him often and spends a large amount of time at work trying to forget about him. The woman works at a film magazine and goes to numerous films to pass time. She likes the way a film draws her into its own world and makes her temporarily forget the man.

The woman goes to a club and accidentally meets a friend of the man. The woman remembers the man and remembers some of his quirks and behaviors. The woman sees physical aspects of the man in other men, and sees personality aspects of the man in other objects and people. The woman thinks about the man and muses on the nature of their failed relationship.

The narrative ends with a brief anecdote involving the man and the woman. They were driving in the country one day. The woman remembers how she suddenly realized that she loved the man even as she realized the man did not love her.

The Man Who Would Not Go Away Analysis

The coda of the collection, "The Man Who Would Not Go Away," at seven pages is the last of four short stories included in Part Three of the book. The narrative is constructed in the panoramic method and is very reminiscent of "A Thrilling Life." Although a temporal chronology can be partially constructed from the narrative, the series of events is not presented in order and, indeed, is not particularly more meaningful when a logical chronology is constructed. The piece functions best as a vignette of a failed relationship. The lack of characterization or character development, coupled with the lack of location or chronology, does not allow the piece to be understood in terms of traditional fiction.

Rather, the piece best serves as a summary of the tone and theme of the entire collection. The stories preceding this piece all deal with the emotional strains of failing relationships at various points in the development of the relationship. This piece focuses on the aftereffects, but the confused chronology allows a comprehensive view the problems of coming to terms with the failure at all stages of the relationship. The narrator's escape into film serves as a distraction from pain and is also a recurring theme in the collection.

Characters

The Narrator of "Lust"

The narrator of "Lust" is an unnamed young woman, probably 17 years of age, who attends a coeducational religious academy away from home. She is probably attractive and has shoulder-length or longer hair. She smokes tobacco and marijuana, drinks alcohol, and uses birth-control pills. She becomes sexually active at age 15 and subsequently is sexually promiscuous. The narrator speculates on the nature of lust and sex and observes that the social construction of sex is different for men than for women.

Lil, the Narrator of "Sparks"

Lil, a woman probably in her mid-twenties, is the narrator of "Sparks." Lil is probably very attractive because a fairly successful and notably eligible actor tries to get her number and take her dancing after meeting her. Lil smokes cigarettes. She becomes sexually active at age 15 with a boy named Duer. Over the next several years, she develops a relationship with Duer, and they eventually live together. Lil then suffers a collapse and is placed in a mental hospital. Duer moves out of state to attend law school, effectively ending the relationship. Lil does not see Duer again, though she does sometimes talk to him on the telephone. Sometime later, Lil is released from the mental hospital and attends a party where she meets the actor.

The Narrator of "Blow"

The narrator of "Blow" is an unnamed woman, probably in her mid to late twenties, who works out of her shared apartment as a writer. She presumably writes books for children, though this is not fully established. She is probably fairly petite because the clothes she receives as a gift from a close friend are noted as being much too large for her. She appears to be familiar with cocaine use and its effects, even though she does not use the drug herself through the narrative. The narrator spends a few hours in the company of Bill, a distraught friend, and is newly involved in a relationship with an unnamed boyfriend.

Ellen Greenough

Ellen is one of the two main characters in "City Night." She has shoulder-length hair and is 27 years old. She spends 3 years caring for her ailing mother, and after her mother dies, she moves to New York City, goes to school to study art history, and engages in social activities largely arranged by a friend. One evening, she attends a dinner party hosted by Nicholas Dickson. Throughout the night he attends to her, seduces her, and they have sex.

Nicholas Dickson

Nicholas is one of the two main characters in "City Night." His age is unspecified, but he is probably in his mid-thirties. He is described as confident, social, successful, and physically attractive. He appears to enjoy a wide range of social connections and functions as a gracious host and focal point of an extended group of friends and associates. Nicholas is able to function within a broad range of social circumstances and is reported to be very heterosexually active with numerous partners. In the story, he meets and seduces Ellen Greenough.

Jane

Jane is one of three characters in "Lunch with Harry." Her age is unspecified and she is not described except as being an American woman with a fashionable and short haircut. She is thin and presumably attractive. The deliberate limitation of physical details, coupled with her name, present her as any and every American woman. Jane is in a relationship with Harry, a British man who is cheating on her. During the story, she and Harry present very different views on relationships.

Owen

Owen is one of three characters in "The Break-up." His age is unspecified, but he is probably around 30. Owen is an unusual primary character in the collection in that he is male. He is not described physically, but he is probably typical in most ways. He has a close friend in Tim, and Owen appears to enjoy a strong and traditional monogamous relationship with Liz. Tim jealously notes that Owen has a trust fund, which Owen occasionally uses to support himself. Owen is a sympathetic and believable character.

Evelyn ("Evie")

Evelyn, the primary character in "The Swan in the Garden," is the niece of Mrs. Godwin and her husband, Bob. She is involved in a disintegrating relationship with Albert Nastro, a self-absorbed and standoffish attorney. Evelyn and Albert are visiting the Godwins, and shortly after their arrival, go for a walk through a garden area. Evelyn's mother abandoned her family when Evelyn was younger, and since then, Mrs. Godwin has tried to assist in raising Evelyn. Evelyn and the Godwins are wealthy and apparently upper-class suburbanites. The Godwins live in a mansion near other mansions surrounding a large common garden area. Evelyn's age is not specified, but she is probably in her early to mid-twenties.

"The Feather in the Toque" Woman

The primary character in "The Feather in the Toque" is an unnamed woman living with an unnamed man in a house on an island. The couple has been together for only a few months, and the woman realizes their relationship will be ephemeral. Earlier, she discovered a photograph of one of the man's prior lovers. At the time of its discovery, she was interested, but with the passing of time she is now irritated by the photograph. She leaves a tortoiseshell comb of hers deliberately hidden in the house and imagines the man's next lover will discover it.

Peter ("Pete") and Cynthia ("Cyn")

The only two characters in "The Knot," Peter and Cynthia develop a relationship that fails because of their inability to communicate. They later meet by accident and have a brief conversation on the street. Beyond their names and sexes, no personal details about either character are specified - like many characters in the collection, they could be any man and any woman.

The Narrator of "A Thrilling Life"

The narrator of "A Thrilling Life" is an unnamed woman of indeterminate age, probably in her late twenties, who works for a left-wing magazine. After a breakup, she becomes involved with Frank Manager in an extended, uncommitted affair. As the story is related, the narrator recalls how Frank continued to stay unattached and uninvolved while she began to fall in love.

Meg Gillian

One of two main characters in "*Ole Siche*," Meg is an actor who has recently had notable success in an off-Broadway production. One year before the narrative takes place, she was in a failed relationship. After her off-Broadway success, Meg is contacted by Charles Howe, a rich, older man who is important in the stage business. Meg and Charles take a vacation to the Caribbean and sail to a small island where Meg realizes she is falling for Charles even as he distances himself from their relationship.

The Narrator of "The Man Who Would Not Go Away"

The narrator of "The Man Who Would Not Go Away" is an unnamed woman of indeterminate age, probably in her late twenties, who works for a magazine writing about films. No physical details are provided in the brief narrative where the narrator recalls falling in love with a man who did not reciprocate her feelings about their relationship. The man leaves the country for an extended period of time, effectively

ending their relationship, but the woman continues to think about the man and imagines she sees him or hears his voice in various locations.

Objects/Places

Lust Casey Academy

The Casey Academy is the primary location and setting for the story "Lust." The academy is coeducational and teaches students aged 15 and older. The academy is probably religiously based because the narrator notes that each day begins with a visit to the on-campus chapel. The academy buildings are surrounded by several acres of woodland, and the school is apparently accessible only to affluent students.

Sparks' Flaming Baked Apples

In "Sparks," the narrator's friend, Jenny, prepares a surprise dessert of flaming baked apples. When Jenny brings the apples to the table, Lil, the narrator, tries to stand up and accidentally collides with Jenny, sending flaming apples to the floor. One or more of the apples momentarily sticks to Lil burning her clothes, but they do not burn her. The accident's resultant shower of sparks gives the story its title.

Blow Islamic Art Museum

In "Blow," the characters spend a few hours in a museum looking through the Islamic art section. One character relates sensationalist anecdotes about ancient Persia, including stories of sexual orgies. The setting conveys a feeling of otherworldly experiences and practices and complements the drug-addled tone of the story.

City Night Club

In "City Night," the characters spend several hours in a nightclub visiting with friends and acquaintances, drinking, and getting to know each other. The club is described in some detail and consists of several large areas with separate functions. One area is for music and dance, one for drinks, and one an area for socializing. The characters visit these areas through the night. The club is provided as a neutral location where the characters assess each other in a superficial way. The club also serves as a generic and common backdrop that successfully grounds the story in a familiar setting.

Lunch With Harry Restaurant

In "Lunch with Harry," the characters spend perhaps an hour eating lunch and talking in a city restaurant. The setting is not particularly well described, though the restaurant has the feel of an upscale establishment. The setting of lunch among friends at a restaurant is a successful use of a familiar-to-everyone situation to establish a sense of place for

the story. The story begins as the characters enter the restaurant and end as they exit the restaurant. The restaurant is decorated with murals worthy of note.

The Break-up Beer

In "The Break-up," Owen buys beer to share with Tim and Liz. The three characters discuss Tim's recent breakup while they sip beers. Tim takes comfort in the manner in which Owen hands him a beer, and the physical routine is established and habitual. This male-to-male intimacy that is described around drinking beers effectively establishes a traditional middle-class American context for the characters' relationship.

The Garden

The garden in "The Swan in the Garden" is the strongest single element in the narrative. The two primary characters spend time walking through the garden as they argue about the nature of their disintegrating relationship. The garden is probably a public garden area in an affluent suburban neighborhood. It contains statuary, play areas, bridges, ponds, fountains, and tunnels and is evidently quite large. The garden is noted as a popular place for weddings and photography during the spring and summer months. During the winter, when the narrative takes place, the garden is not particularly well maintained. As the characters walk through the garden, they note that it is wet and muddy, the fountains are full of fallen leaves, and the statues are covered in tarps. The garden is an allegory for their relationship - it could be beautiful and a home for marriage, except that through neglect, it has become dreary and drab.

The Tortoiseshell Comb

The unnamed female character in "The Woman in the Toque" finds a tortoiseshell comb in her bathroom and momentarily imagines that it belongs to someone else. She then realizes it is her own comb and likens the experience to seeing her own reflection at random in a window on a street and not immediately recognizing herself. The comb becomes symbolic of her relationship with her lover. The woman hides the comb in the bathroom and imagines that her lover's next partner will discover it.

Awful Soup

In "The Knot," Peter and Cynthia meet for lunch after their breakup. They have a brief discussion over bowls of soup. Cynthia won't touch her soup after first tasting it. Peter eats a little soup, but then pushes the remainder away in disgust. Both characters comment on how awful the soup is, which ends their conversation. The awful soup is symbolic of their relationship - unpalatable to both of them, though Peter persists longer than Cynthia.

Frank Manager's Car

In "A Thrilling Life" the two main characters engage in their first physical encounter in an automobile's front seat. After kissing and touching, the narrator gets out of the car and walks around to the driver's side where she again kisses Frank through the open driver's side window. Frank tells her to kiss him with a kiss that will make them fall in love. This is the first point in the narrative where the narrator shows signs of becoming involved in any permanent way with Frank. After the kiss, Frank drives away. This brief scene in and around the automobile is an allegory of their entire relationship.

The Vapeur

In "*Ole Siche*" the character Charles Howe owns a sailboat named the *Vapeur*, which translates to "Vapor." The *Vapeur*, which is crewed by a single hand, has a dinghy launch, and is described as similar to the typical boats of the area, presumably indicating it is a single-hulled, sloop-rigged keelboat 40 feet in length or larger. It has oval windows, at least one interior cabin, a typical pointed bow, and is said to be fitted with canvas sails, which is an unfortunate, but common, literary error - modern sails are not made from canvas. Obviously, Charles is a man of considerable means to be the sole owner of a Caribbean-based yacht while his theater business is back in the States. The boat also serves as a metaphor for Charles's diminished engagement with the larger world. While Meg experiences the flora and fauna of *Ole Siche*, Charles seems impatient to get back to the boat.

The Man Who Would Not Go Away

In "The Man Who Would Not Go Away," the unnamed narrator meets and falls in love with an unnamed and largely undescribed man. The narrative treats the man more as an object than a character, and he is presented as a two-dimensional and unobtainable object of desire. Even though the narrator realizes their relationship is over, and the man is not even in the same country, she believes she sees him or hears his voice. The man is presented as a metaphor of unrequited longing.

Social Sensitivity

"Lust" focuses primarily on the difficulty young people in modern society have in forming meaningful relationships. The protagonist in "Lust" is an unnamed upper-class teenage girl away at boarding school who engages in a series of brief and unsatisfying relationships.

Each time she begins a relationship, the protagonist hopes and believes that the initial physical engagement will lead to a greater emotional connection. At first, encounters with the opposite sex are pleasant.

She says, "their eyes [are] at a low burn and their hands no matter what starting off shy and with such a gentle touch." Yet, inevitably, these initially appealing encounters wither into a meaningless physicality. Each man with whom she engages leaves the protagonist feeling empty and unfulfilled.

Thus, after spending an entire day in bed with one man, she then went out to the local store and "got butterscotch sauce, craving something sweet." Another boyfriend, whose "hand leafed around in the hair at [her] neck at night. . . wasn't much of a talker in the daytime."

The protagonist understands that she is losing something of herself with each abortive relationship. She feels that the more girls a boy has, the better. He has a bright look, having reaped fruits, blooming. He stalks around, sure-shouldered, and you have the feeling he's got more in him, a fatter heart, more stories to tell. For a girl, with each boy, it's like a petal gets plucked each time. . . Then you start to get tired, you begin to feel diluted, like watered-down stew.

The other girls at boarding school also have an understanding that something is lacking in their relationships with men.

"They always want something from you," they complain. Yet even Mrs. Gunther, the housemother who supposedly has a good relationship with her husband, cannot offer any real advice. When one of the girls complains that she feels that she is always being forced to deliver something, Mrs. Gunther states rather naively that she is supposed to deliver babies. Thus, it appears that even among an older and supposedly stabilized generation, there is little or no true intimacy between men and women.

At one point, the protagonist does attempt to create a meaningful relationship, and asks a boy she is dating who he is and what he is thinking. The boy, himself unaccustomed to such interaction, asks her what she is talking about.

Finally, fed up with what seems to be an endless line of unsatisfying relationships, the protagonist asks herself: "you wonder how long you can keep it up. You begin to feel like you're showing through, like a bathroom window that only lets in grey light, the kind you can't see out of."

Techniques

Minot's writing has been described as minimalist, and has to some degree become a common stylistic pattern in modern American short fiction. Minot's style tends to bring the reader closer to the story while simultaneously making the reader feel extremely disconnected to its characters. Important acts are described as generalities, and even the most important events of life— such as death—are related in a detached manner. Thus Minot may in some manner be relating an initial sexual detachment to a subsequent detachment from all potentially emotional events.

Themes

Themes

One of Minot's major themes is the gradual disintegration and devaluation of women's souls as they progress from childhood into puberty. As a child, the protagonist had non-sexual characteristics on which to base her self-esteem. Yet this sense of selfconfidence erodes as the protagonist reaches puberty. She explains later that I could do some things well . . . But the second a boy put his arm around me, I forget about wanting to do anything else, which felt like a relief at first until it became like sinking into a muck.

Sex, even more than a vehicle for debasing women, also becomes a sort of ritualized defeat. The protagonist explains that "certain nights you'd feel a certain surrender." After sex she comments, "you curl up like a shrimp, something deep inside you ruined . . . you open your legs, but you can't or don't dare anymore, to open your heart."

For Minor, this kind of dysfunctional male-female relationship becomes a method for gradually destroying the female. While the male may grow stronger through a sort of repeated conquest, the female goes through a process of continual emotional rejection that literally makes her feel that she is disappearing.

Women Suffer, Men Forget

Nearly all the women in the collection are suffering from the long-term effects of a failed or failing relationship. Many are carrying the emotional baggage and intellectual pain of the rejection experienced at the end of a previous relationship even as they realize their current relationship is also failing. Indeed, several of the stories focus exclusively on these feelings and the resultant disarray they cause in the life of the suffering character. Even many of the female characters who are relatively minor are noted to have been in similar situations or to be cast-off lovers.

In contrast, most of the men in the collection are depicted as being in the process of deliberately moving from one woman to the next. The men generally do not seem to suffer many ill effects from the failures in their relationship, although there are notable exceptions. In many of the stories the men seemingly benefit from their participation in relationships that they deliberately prevent from progressing beyond a primarily physical level. This, in fact, is the primary theme of the stories "Lust," which opens the collection, and the ironically named "The Man Who Would Not Go Away," which closes the collection. For example, the narrator of "Lust" says, "The more girls a boy has, the better. He has a bright look, having reaped fruits, blooming. He stalks around, sure-shouldered, and you have the feeling he's got more in him, a fatter heart, more stories to tell. For a girl, with each boy it's as though a petal gets plucked each time" ("Lust," pp. 10-11).

This somewhat gender-lopsided theme is partially offset by the characters of Tim in "The Break-up" and Peter in "The Knot," but these two men are notable because they are exceptions. The other dozens of men portrayed in the collection are calculatingly uncaring and marked by an apparent desire to possess physically and then discard an attractive woman; for example, Charles's treatment of Meg in "*Ole Siche*." It is also noteworthy that both Tim and Peter are portrayed during the period immediately following their respective relationship failures when presumably the disorientation and disappointment are at their greatest. Contrast this with the female characters who are often still suffering years later.

Relationships Fail

Nearly every relationship presented in the collection has failed or is clearly failing. The primary characters in the stories often relate a catalogue of previous relationships that have failed and just as often relate a series of relationships through which their ex-lovers have subsequently proceeded. Many of the narrative's closure scenes are based around a character's musing about "the next" relationship they or their last partner will experience. The essential plot development of the other narratives is based on a character's sudden realization that a relationship is in the process of failing.

Although some characters in the narratives do not seem particularly aware that their relationships are failing, the narrative structure conveys the information clearly. In most cases, their partners and friends are aware of the impending failure. For example, "Lunch with Harry" is about Jane's moment of realization that her relationship is failing - and certainly Harry and Emma are both already aware of this situation.

Beyond the simple mechanics of breaking up and the narration of the history of a failed relationship, the collection examines the immediate and long-term effects of failing relationships, and this aspect of the collection is what makes the writing so accessible and compelling.

It is interesting to contrast this theme with the rare relationships in the collection that are not in obvious crisis. For example, in "The Break-up," Owen and Liz's relationship appears to be on a solid footing without notable complications. However, even in this case Owen's friend, Tim, furtively warns Owen that things may not be as they appear. Whether this is some special insight that Tim has or just drunken rambling is not immediately clear. In any event, Owen does not dismiss Tim's comments out of hand.

Some Wounds Don't Heal

A common colloquialism is that "time heals all wounds." This does not appear to be the case with many of the characters portrayed in the stories in the collection. For example, the narrator of "Lust" says "After sex, you curl up like a shrimp, something deep inside you ruined, slammed in a place that sickens at slamming, and slowly you fill up with an overwhelming sadness, an elusive gaping worry. You don't try to explain it, filled with the knowledge that it's nothing after all, everything filling up finally and absolutely with

death. After the briskness of loving, loving stops ... You open your legs but can't, or don't dare anymore, to open your heart" ("Lust," pp. 16-17). This conclusion, near the end of the opening story in the collection, sets a tone that resonates throughout the remainder of the collection.

There are some characters that appear to be fairly undamaged. However, these characters are nearly universally male characters who have somehow managed entirely to seal away their emotions from the physical act of sex such that once their, to them, purely sexual relationship has concluded, there is no relationship remaining at all. Of course, this splitting of the physical from the emotional is simply another aspect of wounding. The female characters are not able to compartmentalize the various aspects of their relationships so neatly, although many of them try.

The collection concludes with the unnamed narrator of "The Man Who Would Not Go Away" musing on a distant event in a failed relationship that ended quite some time previously "We were sealed off, traveling through a darkened world ... his eyes met mine and in that instant I realized something had come over me and that I was and had been for a while I guess in a new and different state and that it had to do with him. I did not think of it as terror at the time ... because the first feeling of love is always serene, and happy ... I kept it to myself ... But for a while it made me very glad. Then it stopped. And after, it did not go away" ("The Man Who Would Not Go Away," pp. 146-147).

Style

Point of View

The stories in the collection are narrated from both the first-person and third-person points of view. The narrators are both omniscient and limited. The collection, therefore, presents a rich variety of narrative points of view. The point of view of each story adds materially to the success of the story and, in general, is clearly the most appropriate and effective method of construction.

Stories related in the first person generally have a large amount of interior monologue and musing appropriate to the character. Often, the essential narrative elements are the internal thoughts and feelings of the primary character.

Stories related in the third person often expose the thoughts of more than a single character, but all the pieces in the collection, whether third-person limited or third-person omniscient, focus closely on the thoughts and feelings of a single character.

All but one of the stories focus on a primary character who is a female, and most of the stories focus on a female of indeterminate age. The single exception to this is the character of Owen in "The Break-up," who is male. Even in this story, however, a strong female character is presented who is arguably as important to the narrative as is Owen. In all cases, the point of view is successfully matched in tone and voice to the primary character's age, gender, and outlook - when such characteristics are specified.

Setting

Every story in the collection has a different setting. Many are pedestrian settings familiar to urban life, but some are exotic locales on, for example, uninhabited islands in the Caribbean. Nearly all of the urban city settings are strongly reminiscent of New York City, New York, though explicit locations are rarely mentioned. Most of the suburban settings are reminiscent of an East Coast setting, though again, explicit locations are rarely mentioned.

Some stories do not include a traditionally defined setting and can instead be understood in terms of an emotional or character-based setting. The stories lacking a defined chronology work best as a vignette or sketch rather than a traditional short story. Indeed, many of the stories do not require a setting and, therefore, do not suffer when one is not presented.

Other stories in the collection include a defined setting, and in some cases the actual geographical location is specified. In these cases, the setting is crafted in such as way as to strengthen the narrative and, in fact, often serves as an allegory for the theme of the story. For example, the garden in "The Swan in the Garden" serves as a highly effective allegory for the relationship of Evelyn and Albert. When a setting is specified it

is useful, adds materially to the story, and is described in precise language appropriate to the setting.

Language and Meaning

Minot uses simple language, making *Lust and Other Stories* accessible to a wide audience. Most descriptions of the physical world are straightforward and simple, though some stories, such as "*Ole Siche*," contain very poetic descriptions of some aspects of the physical world.

Language in the collection is either precise or absent; there is not a great deal of ambiguous writing. When character motivation is discussed, the language is sometimes deliberately vague. This is often necessitated by the nearly complete lack of characterization. In some stories, characters simply do things without any apparent motivation. This allows a reader to empathize with sympathetic characters.

Several scenes of sexual activity are somewhat explicit, though the content of the collection is notably tamer than the somewhat fierce title would suggest. The emotional toll caused by sexual activity is treated at some length, as is the nature of various male-female relationships. As is typical of minimalist writing, much of the meaning is implied and constructed only through careful reading. The collection is, in general, beautifully crafted and carefully written.

Structure

Susan Minot's *Lust and Other Stories* is a collection of 12 short stories. The book is 147 pages in length and is divided into three sections, entitled One, Two, and Three. The author has indicated the three sections were intended to represent the three stages of relationships - the beginnings, middles, and ends.

Each section includes four short stories, which average about 9 pages in length. The brevity of the stories necessarily requires them to be stripped of many of the traditional elements of fiction, including most setting description, character development, and even plot development. Generally, the stories work best as scenes or anecdotes rather than as more traditional short stories or short-short stories. This writing style is frequently referred to as "minimalist" though the author resists that classification.

Perhaps the most successful method of reading the collection is to regard the very short pieces as sketches or vignettes and regard the longer pieces, such as "*Ole Siche*," as more traditional short-short stories. A variety of literary techniques are used to structure the various pieces in the collection.

Quotes

"You'd go on walks to get off campus. It was raining like hell, my sweater as sopped as a wet sheep. Tim pinned me to a tree, the woods light brown and dark brown, a white house half hidden with the lights already on. The water was as loud as a crowd hissing. He made certain comments about my forehead, about my cheeks." ("Lust," p. 4)

"I wake out of nightmares and Duer puts himself around me, holding my arms down, *Ssshhh*, he says as if he can hear the engine between my ears. Other times there are other sounds: wings flapping, as if a bird were trapped in my skull, or a distant throbbing, someone *else's* heart beating far off." ("Sparks," p. 32)

"He was beside her, kissing her gently. She felt as if she were somewhere else. 'Let's get this off,' he said breathlessly and pulled back her coat in a gesture so smooth it nearly knocked the wind out of her. He pressed close. She felt as if she were setting off for a place she'd only vaguely heard about. Her heart was going madly, knowing nothing, feeling no pain.

"He was taking all her air. She fell back, drowning, then she slipped into that unconsciousness when the struggle is let go of and death becomes a welcome thing." ("City Night," p. 59)

"'Anyway.' Harry took an expansive breath. 'I think Stephanie is smart. Let him have his little flirtations. Then he'll always come back to her.'

"'Unless of course he doesn't,' Emma said.

"'What about the humiliation?' Jane said.

"'Women shouldn't ask for what they know they can't get,' Harry said matter-of-factly. 'That's the mistake they make.'" ("Lunch With Harry," p. 67)

"The bedroom was crisscrossed with grey light. Owen lay himself carefully down on the bed as if his bones were sore. With the windows shut it was quieter. 'He also told me to watch out with you.'

"'He did?' Liz got into bed and gathered the sheet up around them, laying herself alongside him. 'What do you think he meant by that?'" ("The Break-up," p. 81)

"...Her mind was racing. She'd been too certain. One could never know another person's mind. She'd been so wrong ... and with Albert. The possibilities for misunderstanding seemed to multiply before her eyes, a hundred hills overlapping in the distance, chaotic and out of control.

"Albert went bounding up the terrace steps, two at a time, away from her. She called to him, 'It's only because I - ' She began to say *love* but the word didn't come. It had been frightened off. 'I care,' she said.

"'Care a little less,' he said over his shoulder." ("The Swan in the Garden," p. 92)

"The woman stood on her tiptoes to look at the bird. It was a sparrow. The soft breast was panting, its tiny heart as hard as a peppercorn inside. It was disconcerting for her, but exhilarating too, this wild beating thing. Behind her the man walked out." ("The Feather in the Toque," p. 99)

"'It was nice seeing you, Cynthia,' he said. He reached up to her face and she drew back, startled. 'You have something...' he said.

"She understood and moved forward. 'What?' she said, smiling nervously.

"He brushed her chin. 'Just a - I don't know - little...'

"The touch was like a charge. Something rose up between them and bound them there. The awkwardness was not gone, but for a moment, they could not move. They stared into each other's eyes, fascinated by what they saw there." ("The Knot," p. 110)

"Frank was not a candidate for the long run. He might just as well have been wearing a banner which said frivolity. He had supreme confidence and an inviolate manner. It was just what I was looking for.

"I had just gotten out of a bad thing and the guy I'd left was in pretty miserable shape. I was tired of being with people in miserable shape and of feeling that I was part of the reason for it. Frank, I could see, was not your vulnerable type. I suppose things didn't matter enough to hurt him. And Frank couldn't hurt me. My heart was already broken." ("A Thrilling Life," p. 114)

"Still she refused to see it. She took in the sun. The air was fresh and balmy, and across the flat ocean stretched a bright carpet to the sun, which was lower now and from this height made everything expansive and wide. She picked up a small stone and threw it near him, thinking it was what a playful, spirited girl would do. She was determined not to be defeated by him. And yet, something tightened in her chest.

"They wandered apart, he drifting down, she staying higher along the ridge. There was no water on the island, only rain pooled in marshy valleys. No one could live on Ole Siche. It was barren and beautiful. The next bluff cast a dark blue shadow on the next hill. The goats hobbled over the volcanic rock, the cactus bristled. They too might skitter across the hillside, coming alive at night, growling in a low eerie way." ("*Ole Siche*," pp. 132-133)

"Midday, midtown. A man dashing through the bright crowd bears a remarkable resemblance. This was happening a lot. Men across subway platforms. Dark figures sidling in late to movies. A lone soul at the end of a block, rocking on his heels, waiting for a cab. But this fellow, his hair slicked back, was carrying a shopping bag from a lingerie shop, one I knew. Through the curling holes in the bag's design, I could see black lacy things. The man had certain tastes, certain things he liked. His face would

become serious and harsh when I tried those things on." ("The Man Who Would Not Go Away," p. 144)

Key Questions

Susan Minot's work remains popular in part because it speaks to the emotional denigration women often still suffer despite advances in other areas of life. Her disconnected style strikes a chord with many women who feel isolated or lost in their interpersonal relationships.

1. To what degree do you feel that the lack of intimacy portrayed in the story is reflective of society in general?

2. When the protagonist in the story states that her problems had to do with something else entirely, what did she mean?

What are her problems?

3. What role does the protagonist's family play in the story? Do you think the protagonist has an intimate relationship with her family?

4. Why do you think that Susan Minot chose the title "Lust" for her story?

Do you feel that lust is the primary emotional expression in the story? If not, what is?

Irene M. Reed, Esq.

Topics for Discussion

Contrast a story written from a first-person point of view to a story written from a third-person point of view. How is the point of view used in the narrative appropriate? What changes would occur in the narrative if a different point of view had been used?

Many of the primary characters in the collection are not named. Many of these unnamed characters are not well developed. How does this lack of personal details function within the narrative?

Contrast the elements of plot in "*Ole Siche*" to those in "The Feather in the Toque." How does the lack of traditional plot elements contribute to the success of "The Feather in the Toque?" Could "*Ole Siche*" function without traditional plot elements?

Contrast the setting of "The Swan in the Garden" with the setting of "The Man Who Would Not Go Away." How does the garden parallel the narrative in "The Swan in the Garden?" How does the lack of a traditional setting alter the narrative of "The Man Who Would Not Go Away?"

Do the stories in the collection have a consistent tone? Compare the tone of the three sections of the collection.

The pieces in the collection are notably spare in language. The concise language eliminates many of the types of ambiguities that sometimes arise through the use of more complicated or less precise language. Are other types of ambiguities deliberately introduced into the construction of the narratives?

Does the same set of moral values form the basis of every narrative? What differences in morality are exhibited by different characters in the stories?

The characters in "Blow" spend an afternoon perusing the Islamic art section of a museum. The story was published prior to the events of September 11, 2001. Does the story have a different meaning today than it did in 1990?

The elements of tone, setting, plot, and characterization in "Sparks" create a distinct tone within the narrative. What tone is created? How is it appropriate for the narrative?

Literary Precedents

Susan Minot's work has been compared to that of David Leavitt. Like Minot, Leavitt came of age as a writer in the 1980's. Leavitt's work also focuses on issues such as divorce, familial dysfunction, and homosexuality.

Readers may also be interested in reading Brett Easton Ellis' Less Than Zero, and American Psycho. While Ellis' style is different from Minot's work, his stories do touch on many of the same social concerns.

Related Titles

"Lust" can be found in Lust and Other Stories (1989), Minot's second novel. Her first novel, Monkeys (1986), chronicled the disintegration of a family. Monkeys won the French Prix Femina Etranga and was translated into numerous languages. Her third novel, Folly (1994), is the story of a woman in the early twentieth century who is forced to choose between a conventional marriage and her own desires. Her novel, Evening (1998), chronicles the life of a woman as it slowly ends in cancer.

Copyright Information

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults
Includes bibliographical references.
Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.
Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.
1. Young adults□Books and reading. 2.Young adult literature□History and criticism. 3. Young adult literature□Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography□Bio-bibliography.
[1. Literature□History and criticism. 2. Literature□Bio-bibliography]
I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952
Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994