

# **The Little Red Chairs Study Guide**

## **The Little Red Chairs by Edna O'Brien**

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# Plot Summary

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The novel opens with an older bearded healer and sex therapist, Vlad, arriving in the small Irish town of Cloonoila. Eventually, Vlad sets up a clinic in the town while drawing the eye of many of the town's women. Soon after, a woman named Fidelma, who has always wanted a child (but miscarried twice), makes an appointment with Vlad and ends up falling in love with him. After Vlad turns up at one of Fidelma's book club's meetings, they begin an affair which they keep secret from most of the town, including Fidelma's husband, Jack.

Later, Fidelma finds that she is pregnant with Vlad's child, but cannot get in touch with Vlad because he asserted that it is too dangerous for them to keep in contact. While on a bus trip to Dublin with Fidelma's book club, Vlad is arrested and revealed to be a war criminal and former supreme leader of the Bosnian faction that initiated the Siege of Sarajevo. The town, including Fidelma, is shocked and horrified. After the arrest, three men appear in the town asking for Vlad. They learn about Fidelma and Vlad's affair and persuades Fidelma to come with them. They bring her to a house where they perform a brutal makeshift abortion on her with a crowbar. Humiliated, Fidelma self-exiles herself to London.

In London, she makes friends with a woman named Jasmeen, whom she lives with, as well as many other immigrants. She begins working as a cleaning-woman at a bank, until she is framed by a racist co-worker and fired. While in London, she also makes friends with a peculiar little girl named Mistletoe, who seems to have a psychotic-break when she is barred from communicating with Fidelma. After being confronted by a female survivor of the Bosnian War, Fidelma is convinced to go to Vlad's trial at The Hague and confront Vlad.

At The Hague, Fidelma watches Vlad's trial and eventually visits him in jail. At the jail, she tells Vlad of all the bad things that have happened to her since his arrest, including the makeshift abortion. After another visit in the conjugal room, Fidelma calls him a monster and leaves. Fidelma then decides to visit Cloonoila, when Jack texts her asking her to baptize herself in the river. She does and decides to go to her old home, where Jack is waiting. He forgives her and immediately dies. At the end of the book, Fidelma moves back to London to help homeless immigrants.



# Cloonoila - On the Veranda

## Summary

After a page stating that Little Red Chairs symbolize the Bosnian war, the novel opens on the small Irish town known as Cloonoila, which is located by a river.

On a particular day, a man stood by the river (according to later reports, dogs barked unusually often that night). He entered the local bar/hotel which was tended by a man named Dara. Dara noticed that the man was old, had a white beard along with white gloves. Dara began making small talk with him, which the mysterious man did not seem particularly receptive to. The man asked Dara to help him find somewhere to stay while he drank brandy. He called around, and at the end of the conversation, the man handed Dara his card which stated that his name was Dr. Vlad Dragan, a healer and sex therapist. After he left, other customers entered, and Dara told them about Vlad. The local schoolmaster stated that he was worried about the man, as he reminded him of Rasputin. Mona, a local woman, wondered if Vlad would bring romance into their lives.

A woman named FiFi woke up after hearing the voice of her dead husband, John. Her doorbell rang, and Vlad stood at her door. He explained that Dara sent him. He was initially rebuffed, as FiFi explained that the guest room was being renovated. Suddenly, BaBi, FiFi's dog, escaped into the woods. FiFi and Vlad eventually found her and released her from a burrow. After this, FiFi agreed to rent him the room.

Later, Father Damien, a local priest walked with Vlad in the woods (because he said that the walls have ears). Damien was concerned that Vlad was a sex therapist, as it may cause trouble in their mostly Catholic town. Vlad assured him that he took the Hippocratic Oath, and intends to do no harm. Damien replied that many of his methods sound like Darwinism. Vlad then explained that he is of the Eastern Orthodox Church, which furthered concerned Damien. To ease his mind, Vlad informed Damien that both the Eastern Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church came from the same place. In order to further assure him, Vlad also agreed to remove "sex therapist" from his title.

Soon after, Vlad's clinic finally opened. Before its opening, Vlad thought about how Ovid was exiled from his homeland. According to the narrator, FiFi also noticed that Vlad had two cell-phones, one for calls during the day and one for calls during the night. According to FiFi, during the night calls, Vlad would often yell to whomever was on the other side of the call. One of Vlad's first patients was Sister Bonaventure, a local nun. During their session, Vlad massaged her both through physical touch and using some sort of rocks. After the appointment, Bonaventure went back to her book-club, which was organized by a woman named Fidelma, and told them all about it.

The narrative then begins to center around Fidelma, who enjoyed walking in the woods. She held many secrets from her husband, Jack, (whom is 20 years her senior), such as the imminent failure of her clothing shop (which was failing due to the recent



construction of a motorway). Her only confidant was Father Eamonn, who was defrocked for loving a woman. They bonded through similar tastes in books, conversations about how Fidelma yearned for a child (the couple had difficulties conceiving), and how she was pregnant twice in her life. The narrator then informs the reader that weeks before, Dara asked Fidelma if Vlad could stay in the building that housed her shop (which would also eventually house Vlad's clinic), who agreed. That night, everyone, including Vlad and Fidelma were at The Castle. While Vlad was speaking to a manager, Fidelma and Vlad exchanged glances. Fidelma then felt that the glances had left "sudden and sourceless promise" (48).

That night, at a hotel restaurant, a group of diverse immigrant employees began to tell stories about their life. Tommy tells a story, followed by Andrew a Polish man, then Hedda, a Lithuanian, and finally Ivan, a Czechoslovakian. When it came to be Mujo, a mute Serb's, turn, he went into the fetal position, saying the word "no" in his mother tongue.

## Analysis

This set of chapters is rife with subtle foreshadowing. The first of these examples is the schoolmaster's remark regarding Vlad's similarities to Rasputin. Rasputin was a Russian mystic who ended up in the court of Tsar Nicolas II of Russia. Today, he is considered a trickster who used deception in order to gain influence in the Russian government. This comparison is important, as not only does the description of Vlad somewhat resemble Rasputin, who was also bearded, their methods are similar as well. Essentially, Rasputin worked his way up the ladder by tricking people with mysticism, and Vlad seems to be doing something similar in Cloonoila. Rasputin was known to be rather free sexually, which is implied about Vlad later in the novel. This coupled with the foreshadowing of Fidelma speaking to a priest about her pregnancy troubles, as well as Mona's remark about Vlad possibly bringing romance into their lives, hints that some sort of sexual plot line may happen later.

Two other very important examples of foreshadowing in this set of chapters are Fidelma's comment about the "sudden and sourceless promise" (48) and Mujo's reaction when he is questioned about his past. Fidelma's comment is rather blatant in implying that there is some sort of future between Vlad and herself. What Fidelma does not know is that not all promise is good, as she will learn later in the novel. It must also be noted that she is just one woman who seems to be attracted to Vlad, as it seems like he has some sort of power over women. Mujo's reaction to his past also foreshadows the importance of the Bosnian War within the narrative. While it is stated that Mujo is from somewhere around the area of Bosnia, it is not stated explicitly. With that said, he would have still been involved in the Bosnian War. So, if this is true, Mujo may be reacting to what he experienced during the war.

Other moments of foreshadowing are when the reader is informed about Vlad's two cell-phones and the types of calls that he makes at night and a reference that Vlad makes. Firstly, one would not expect a sex therapist to have cell phones, implying that Vlad is



clearly involved in something outside of his practice, something that greatly angers him. While the reader does not learn what Vlad is involved in until later in the novel, this is the biggest example of foreshadowing regarding the evil of Vlad. Vlad also makes a reference to Ovid and his exile. Ovid was a Roman poet who wrote works such as “Ars amatorial” and “Metamorphoses.” Later in his life Ovid was exiled by the Roman emperor for an unclear reason. Vlad makes this reference, as he too was exiled, but for a very clear reason (which the reader becomes privy to later).

This set of chapters also comments on the mixture of religion with science and mysticism. While Vlad is speaking with Father Damien, two of the things that Damien expresses concerns about are his sex therapy and his supposed Darwinism. Even after the conversation is over, Damien is still wary about Darwinism, but not Vlad’s Orthodox religion. This is telling as the priest’s religion. With this in mind, it seems that religion can tolerate concepts that are essentially similar organized religions, regardless of the possible opposing principles that the religions may have. However, when the concept is secular, it troubles the priest, as it is not religious while also going against particular religious teachings.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Based on this chapter, in what time period is the novel set?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What are the possible reasons why women are attracted to Vlad?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Are there any allusions regarding the name Vlad?

## **Vocabulary**

unashamedly, prodigal, inscrutable, marten, throwback



# Into the Woods- Jack

## Summary

“Into the Woods” opens from the perspective of a schoolchild recalling events to the reader in the past tense. One day, Vlad took a class full of children to the woods to teach them about edible and medicinal flora. For some reason, almost every student wanted to walk next to him. They then had a picnic, where Vlad told them that all wrongs are avenged through the cosmos. Suddenly, a guard intervened and questioned Vlad, asking him if the teacher knew that he had her children (Vlad did not know). The perspective then shifts back to the 3rd-person narrator. Vlad recalled his wife and how he had to stop writing to her, as it was getting too dangerous. The guard asked if Vlad was related to Dracula and asked for his identification. Vlad handed over the false documents, hoping that the guard did not take him in, as he was certain that if they ran his documents, they would determine his true identity. The guard eventually let him go. Later, after swimming in the cover, Vlad had a dream where he was surrounded by the townsfolk. His friend K was also there, speaking about the 1359 days that they besieged a city (with Vlad as the supreme leader) and killed over 11,000 people, many by rounding men up onto buses and opening fire. K also spoke about loving Shakespeare and how he later got drunk and shot himself.

Later, Vlad helped a woman with seizures using medicinal plants and gave her bogus medical advice. Fidelma then dreamt that Vlad came into her house and stole Jack’s mug. Later, in the dream, Vlad delivers her baby, with Jack in the bed next to her. Soon after, Fidelma visited the clinic and asked Vlad to help with her nerves. They spoke about her miscarriages, and Vlad gave her medicines both for fertility and anxiety. She left the clinic happy. Later, Vlad showed up at her book club, where the members, along with Vlad, argued whether Dido from the Aeneid was a role model. Vlad argued that she was because she was able to become a leader and raise armies. They got onto the conversation of love; when asked, Fidelma defined love as a concept where “every nerve comes to life” (82). After the meeting, Fidelma told Vlad that literature is not enough for her. Vlad suggested to Fidelma that she needed a lover. She agreed and left the meeting.

A day or so later, Fidelma watched some surfers at the beach. She spoke to one, who happened to be an American, and he explained that the sea brings all types of people to the area. Vlad then appeared. Fidelma told him that she was not complete without a child. Vlad replied that he could not help her, as he was a monk now. Soon afterwards, on Ash Wednesday, after being asked, Fidelma ran into Vlad. Vlad pulled the women aside and told her that he would help her with her lack of child.

At some point in the future, Fidelma arrived at a hotel and went to her suite. Vlad eventually met up with her. They sat in the room, where they drank wine while Vlad told her that he used to sneak food from his grandmother and how his father taught him to kill wolves. They then went to a restaurant where they ate and drank things that Vlad



claimed would help the libido. When they finally went to the bedroom, Vlad first took out an instrument and tried to align Fidelma's chakras. This irritated Fidelma, causing her to ask whether he is afraid of love and stormed out. Eventually, they reconciled, and Vlad claimed that he was trying to be "the scientist but not the man" (100). After they had sex, Vlad left soon after. When Fidelma went back home, Jack showed her the remains of a bat (which had flown into the house) that he killed. After talking about money for a bit, Fidelma convinced Jack to go to their anniversary dinner. During the night, Fidelma dreamt of three dogs and how she had to deceive said dogs. Hours later, Jack, drunk, reminisced on their past.

The narrative then shifts to the backroom of a hotel's kitchen. Mujo refused to take trays near Vlad, because he said that he was evil, regardless of the fact that the TV said that he was innocent. Eventually he relented, and retrieved trays. A woman then asked Mujo if he could take a photo of the guests with her phone's camera. Vlad, having realized that he was in the photo, attempted to take the phone, causing a fight between him and Mujo. Vlad stormed out and Mujo was chastised. The next day, Mujo was called to the manager's office, who pulled up photos of the war criminal, the "Butcher of Bosnia." The boss stated that there was no resemblance and made Mujo sign an apology.

The perspective then shifts to Jack's first-person perspective. An envelope arrived at his home, addressed to him, including his mother's maiden name in the mailing address. It said that Fidelma was hiding a secret from him. This caused Jack to recollect their past. He remembers first meeting Fidelma at an orchard, and that on their honeymoon, Fidelma asked him not to violate her, which he did anyway. The next morning, she insisted on washing the sheets. The recollection ends with the saying "If you buy a canary, you have got to let it sing" (116).

## Analysis

This set of chapters all but confirms Vlad's identity as "The Butcher of Bosnia." The first part of the reveal that the reader receives is Vlad's dream sequence. During this dream sequence, the character, who is only referred to by the letter "K" retells some of the atrocities that took place during the Siege of Sarajevo during the Bosnian War. While it does not seem that Vlad did the actual shooting himself, through K's reveal that Vlad was the supreme leader and head of the siege, the reader is guided to the assumption that the killing was done on Vlad's orders. It is also implied that K was not a soldier, but some sort of administrator as well. However, it is very clear that Vlad and K dealt with their guilt from the conflict in very different ways, and it is rather telling. The guilt overwhelmed K, causing him to first fall to drink and later to suicide. Vlad did neither of these things which raises the possibility that Vlad actually feels no remorse for his past actions. It must also be noted that, in this dream, he is surrounded by the people of the town. This foreshadows that the townsfolk may someday come to realize Vlad's true identity and the atrocities that he is responsible for. Mujo's exclamations that Vlad is an evil man only makes Vlad's identity more clear. Prior chapters implied that Mujo is from an area that was involved in the Bosnian War, which means that he would be familiar with the main perpetrator of the bloody conflict. When Mujo's manager brings up the





picture of “The Butcher of Bosnia,” he claims that the man in the picture and Vlad are not the same person. This is easily explainable, as years have passed since the war, allowing for Vlad to change his appearance.

Fidelma’s dreams also utilize some important symbolism. During her first dream, she first dreams of Vlad coming into her house and stealing Jack’s mug. As Jack is not in the room at the time of the theft, it can be assumed that Jack would eventually realize that the mug is gone and be very confused. His ownership of the mug symbolizes his possession of Fidelma. Vlad secretly taking his mug symbolizes Vlad’s future covert taking of Fidelma, which happens not too long after Fidelma has this dream. During the same dream, Fidelma’s child is delivered by Vlad, with Jack by her side in her birthing bed. In this scene, Vlad and Fidelma are the ones taking active roles in the birthing of the baby. While Jack is present, he is simply laying there, not doing anything particularly productive. This symbolizes who is taking an actual role in making the fetus that is relevant later in the novel. While Vlad does not actually participate in birthing the baby in reality, he is the father. Like in the dream, Jack has no active role in producing the fetus.

Fidelma’s second dream contains the symbolism of the dog, which has come up earlier in the novel. Like in many works, dogs and other animals seem to react oddly when evil is afoot. In Fidelma’s dream, dogs are present, and she has to somehow deceive these dogs. These particular dogs, due to their number, most likely symbolize the three men who attack Fidelma later in the novel. During the attack, Fidelma attempts to deceive the men by saying that she has nothing to do with Vlad. It is unknown whether Fidelma’s dream deception is successful, but it later becomes certain that her real deception is not.

Two other animal symbols appear in this group of chapters. The first is the bat that Jack kills after Fidelma returns from her sexual experience with Vlad. Fidelma notices that Jack seems to feel nothing about the bat that he has viciously squashed. In a way, this bat symbolizes Fidelma, as like the bat, Jack does not seem to feel the proper emotions towards her, leaving her unhappy. The canary in the saying “If you buy a canary, you have got to let it sing” (116) also symbolizes Fidelma. Canaries are usually portrayed as delicate animals as is Fidelma. Jack also sees her as delicate because she is so much younger than he is. With this metaphor, Jack seems to realize that Fidelma is going to commit some sort of transgressions, but it sort of comes with the territory.

## Discussion Question 1

Are there any other hints that imply Vlad's identity?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does the guard think of Vlad as suspicious?



## Discussion Question 3

Are there any other possible meanings for the dreams in these chapters?

## Vocabulary

forsynthia, dappled, topography, effusively, muslin



# Where Wolves Fuck - Capture

## Summary

Ten weeks later, Fidelma discovered that someone had painted “Where Wolves Fuck” on the outside wall of Vlad’s clinic. Fidelma also heard that Vlad’s car’s tires had burst while he was driving. After these events, near a lake, Vlad told Fidelma that they could not meet again, as it was getting too dangerous. While he told her this, Fidelma noticed a man in black watching them from across the way. Around this time, Fidelma also began to regularly vomit, confirming her pregnancy. Vlad told her to deny everything. When the cops asked Fidelma about the graffiti, she told them that she had no enemies.

Sometime later, Fidelma’s book club boarded a bus to visit Dublin, in honor of Yeats. When Vlad boarded, an old senile woman asked if he was the devil. Vlad was very quiet while on the bus, but Fidelma wanted a word with him. During the middle of the trip, the driver of the bus slammed on the breaks, as police had blocked the road. The police boarded the bus, approached Vlad, and asked for his identification. They then asked him to come with them to the station. Vlad replied that this was impossible because they were in transit to a poetry reading. In response, the police told him that he was under arrest. After Vlad was led away, the bus driver turned back and everyone departed. FiFi had an inkling of an idea of what this was about, as when he was staying with her, she found a key, opened his safe, and found large amounts of firearms, ammunition, and fake passports.

The town was abuzz with gossip, and TV cameras eventually moved in. The townspeople heard on the television that Vlad was actually a Bosnian war criminal who had hid in monasteries in Italy, Malta, and Spain, before arriving in Ireland. The townspeople then apologized to Mujo, and he told them that he was going home. After Vlad’s arrest, three foreign men arrived at Mona’s place of business and asked about Vlad. Eventually, Mona had let slip that Fidelma was his lover (the narrator then reveals that Fidelma told her this in confidence). The leader of the group began to cry because he wanted to capture Vlad before the police brought him to the Hauge for trial. The men then arrived at Fidelma’s home and asked her to come with them, as they did not want to discuss certain topics around Jack. The men put Fidelma in a taxi and drove into the countryside, all while Fidelma had inner-conflict about carrying an evil man’s child. After the taxi hit a sheep, the group piled out and Fidelma was led to a house. The narrative then briefly shifts to the summary of a letter that Mujo sent to Mujo, about how during the Bosnian War, bad men forced his uncle to bite a pigeon to death, and later murdered him

At the house, the men explained that they were blood brothers, or men that guarded Vlad during the war. They were angry with Vlad as they left them with nothing while saving himself. They explained that they killed everything that belonged to him, which caused Fidelma to ask them not to kill “it” (144). This revealed her pregnancy to them, and they decided to abort the fetus. The men took a large crowbar and performed an



incredibly gruesome makeshift abortion on Fidelma. The taxi driver eventually ran into Dara who told her that Fidelma may be dead. Dara found her bleeding and almost dead. They got her to the hospital, and when she awoke, Fidelma was upset that no one mentioned the fetus. A nurse told her that the police wanted oral evidence. Jack eventually visited, and Fidelma told him that she would not return to the house. Dara then drove her to Cloonoila, so she could walk the streets as an act of atonement.

## Analysis

The start of this group of chapters start with the implication that someone has already discovered Vlad's true identity, which is apparent through the graffiti on the shop's wall. However, the reader is never told who it is. It is clear that whoever the man in black is, has some sort of idea who Vlad is. However, this man is not a likely candidate for the graffiti or the destruction of Vlad's tires, as it is hinted that the man is some sort of law enforcement. It may also seem like the three men who harassed Mona and attacked Fidelma could have done the deeds. This is not likely either, as the men's dialogue suggests that they had just arrived in the town around the time that the book club's bus had left. Therefore, the only likely candidate is Mujo, as he seems to be the only person who explicitly exclaimed that knows that Vlad is a war criminal. This is never confirmed and it seems out of character based on the previous descriptions of Mujo's character.

The words "Where Wolves Fuck" also continue the use of wolf-based symbolism. Throughout the novel, wolves have been portrayed in a negative light. For example, Vlad tells Fidelma that his father taught him to hunt wolves because they were dangerous to people and animals. Also, in one of Fidelma's dreams, she is surrounded by three wolves that she must deceive (possibly because if she does not, they will attack her). In this chapter's instance, the wolves are Vlad and whomever Vlad has a sexual relationship with. Here, Vlad is described as a wolf because he is dangerous, like the wolves in Vlad's own village. The reason that Fidelma is described as a wolf is much less clear, but it is possible that she is included in this type of description because she is simply romantically associated with Vlad and possibly harboring the information regarding his identity (even though Fidelma does not actually have this information).

Through the three men who attack Fidelma, we also learn some interesting character information regarding Vlad. Through their recollections, the reader is told that he is selfish and only cares about himself. Their reasoning for this is that before the end of the war, the three men were his loyal guards and would have done anything for their supreme leader, Vlad. However, this loyalty was not repaid, as after the war, Vlad left, leaving the men with a decimated home, dead family members, and nothing to show for their service to both their country and their leader. In a way, this characterization holds true for Vlad and his relationship with Fidelma. For a while, Vlad acted like he cared for Fidelma, until he decided that it was too dangerous to continue, completely ignoring the woman that he impregnated. This reveals that Vlad was probably just using Fidelma and later ignored her because she was not longer useful to him.



FiFi's discovery for Vlad's weapons and ammo also brings up an interesting idea of what would have happened if Vlad's arrest had gone differently. Clearly, Vlad owned the weapons and ammo for some reason. It is possible that, if Vlad was approached by law enforcement while at home, he may have used this firepower to resist arrest. However, it is also possible that Vlad was planning something nefarious with these firearms, but the reader is not privy to this information.

## **Discussion Question 1**

Where else has the number "3" appeared in the novel?

## **Discussion Question 2**

What do the men mean when they state that they are blood brothers?

## **Discussion Question 3**

Why did the men abort Fidelma's fetus?

## **Vocabulary**

creche, wreathed, bristling, extradition, gaunt



# South London – Kennels

## Summary

After leaving her home and leaving for London, Fidelma went to some charity organizations, including one run by her future landlady Jasmine. Initially, Jasmine's organization could not help Fidelma because she was single (the organization helped homeless families). However, after her interview with the organization Jasmine let her live at her home. According to Jasmine, she helped Fidelma because she had to seek help as well, after her husband left her and her children. Jasmine also helped because she had a soft-spot for the Irish because an Irish woman named Maureen helped her after someone broke her window for being black.

The narrative then moves to slightly before Fidelma meeting Jasmine. According to the narrator, Fidelma was able to raise money to leave her home by allowing Sister Bonaventure to sell her car. After arriving in London, she asked for work at a boutique and a wine shop to no avail. During this time, she would also dream about blood coming from the water spouts in Cloonoila, leading her to believe that she cursed the town. Eventually, she got a job at a bank, run by an immigrant named Bluey. During the interview, Bluey told her about his family and how he was once kicked out of a restaurant in Barcelona for being an immigrant. She was told that she would be on the night-time cleaning crew and would report to a woman named Medusa. During her first day, Medusa was very hard on Fidelma, accusing her of being racist (Medusa was Black) and telling her that she has 6 weeks to prove herself. Her coworker, Maria, gave her a prayer booklet and told her that everything would be okay.

In the garden, outside of Jasmine's flat, Fidelma met a little girl who refused to reveal her name. However, after a few days of talking, she left a note for Fidelma containing a story that she wrote to improve her English. One night, at a work outing, Fidelma seemed to make friends with Medusa, giving her hope about her employment future. Later, the little girl finally informed Fidelma that her name was Mistletoe and that she lived with her father (she also stated that she could not say whether she missed her mother). One night soon after, Fidelma was given a complaint saying that certain coworkers were complaining about her said that she stole things. On Maria's advice, Fidelma made an appointment with the bank superintendent and tried to explain to him that Medusa was framing her, but he did not believe her. He also implied that Fidelma was racist.

Five and a half weeks into her employment at the bank, her keycard stopped working. She went to the front-desk and asked for some help. After about an hour of waiting, the receptionist told her that no one was available to help her. She then left, went to the chapel and prayed. When she arrived home, she noticed that Jasmine's daughter, Jade, was home. Apparently, she was in a commercial in Africa. Both Jade and Fidelma went up to Jade's room, where Jade told her that she was never going to speak to her



boyfriend, Ronnie, again because he went with his friends to a play and did not buy her a ticket. She then took off her wig and cried “I am a child of Africa” (197).

Days later, there was a knocking at Jasmeen’s door. It was Mistletoe's father, who accused Fidelma of brainwashing Mistletoe. To prove this, he opened up a briefcase full of trip essentials and a picture of Fidelma and Mistletoe on an adventure. Fidelma tried to explain that it was a game, but the father left and claimed that there would be consequences. Some night later, Maria brought Fidelma to a meeting where people told stories about their broken lives. Many stories were told, including Nahir’s, which included the death camps in Bosnia and Oghowen’s, which revealed that she was forced into a female circumcision. Fidelma also told an over-flowery and slightly inaccurate version of her story including her affair with Vlad (not revealing that Vlad was actually the “Butcher of Bosnia”). After the meeting, Fidelma met with the coordinator of the meeting, Varya. Varya told her that she was from Bosnia. Fidelma told her that she knew the man in charge of the killings and informed her about her forced abortion. According to Fidelma, it still felt like they never took the crowbar out.

After being fired, Fidelma found a job working at a rescue kennel for ex-rescue greyhounds. According to the narrator, Fidelma actually got the job by running into Bluey at a café. During this meeting, he told Fidelma that Medusa framed her at the bank in order to make sure that her niece got a job there. At the kennel, Fidelma struggled with picking up feces and was surprised that if the dogs did not go to a kennel, their owners would kill them, as they had outlived their use. After work, Fidelma went to the bar and touched a flower. The tenderness of the flower scared her.

## Analysis

The meeting that Maria brings Fidelma to is a very revealing sequence regarding Fidelma’s recovery. Up until this point, the only trauma that Fidelma seems to focus on is her own. Even though Vlad has hurt significantly more people than just her (and in more brutal ways), Fidelma does not seem to take this into consideration. This does not simply mean that Fidelma is selfish and only cares about herself, a more logical explanation for this is that she has not had to contend with the results of anyone else’s trauma. This meeting changes that. Fidelma hears not only the personal trauma that the meeting’s attendees have gone through, but she is also further informed about the results of what Vlad had done during the Bosnian war. She begins to feel for these people and makes the realization that her trauma is not paramount. This is why Fidelma seems to fail at telling her story in an effective way. She is overwhelmed by the aspects of the other attendee’s trauma, making her feel like her trauma is nothing compared to hers. While Fidelma’s trauma is certainly not to be minimized, her worldview is opened up in this scene. After this, she seems to begin recovering from her past. She begins to feel again, which is made evident by her interaction with the plant in the bar after she begins working at the dog kennel. Up until this point, Fidelma has not been able to feel anything, as she is traumatized by Vlad and her attackers. However, she touches the plant and feels the tenderness of it, revealing that she can, in fact, feel again.



A major symbol in this set of chapters is that of the greyhounds. For Fidelma, the thing that sticks out the most to her about the dogs are the ways that they would have been treated if they had not been rescued by the shelter. She is told that if they had not been rescued, they would have been killed for money. This creates a clear parallel between the ways that both the greyhound owners and Vlad treat people. The dog owners kill the animal because they are no longer useful to them. Vlad does a similar thing to both Fidelma and his three former guards. Instead of helping them after he is done with them, he simply puts them aside, to be alone and helpless (the guards are helpless due to the new state of their lives, and Fidelma is helpless with her newly impregnated state).

This chapter also fully explores the theme of immigration (which has appeared prior in the novel, but not in as great detail as it is in this section). One of the most notable things about the individuals at the meeting is that they are all immigrants. The novel takes great care to make it clear that immigrants are not just people that immigrate from other continents, but simply for anywhere other than their current home. So, with this in mind, people like Mujo and Varya are not the only types of immigrants in the novel, in fact, at this point in the novel, Fidelma is an immigrant as well, having immigrated from Ireland to London. With that said, Vlad is technically an immigrant as well, as he has traveled across the world and settled in different places in order to avoid capture. A large aspect of this theme is that not everyone has the same immigrant experience; this is made evident by the variety of experiences that the immigrants at the meeting have had. Also, in a way, this section makes the claim that the cards are almost never in the immigrants' favor. They have all been scarred by things that have either happened at the places that they came from or their current situation at home (note that many of the people at Jasmeen's organization are not just homeless, but immigrants as well). However, all of these immigrants have made a new life in London and seem to be succeeding, showing that it is very possible for people to get over their past trauma (something that helps Fidelma a great deal).

## **Discussion Question 1**

What does Fidelma's reaction towards kennel work tell you about her character?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Is the novel trying to make another statement about immigration and immigrants?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What does the vandalism of Jasmeen's window tell you about London?



## Vocabulary

circumcision, calico, terracota, tableau, avail



# A Letter – Home

## Summary

Fidelma received a letter from Sister Bonaventure stating that she had a stroke and that she was wondering how Fidelma was doing. Shortly after the note arrived, an older man, while picking up his dog from the kennel, named James offered a room to her for a while, and Fidelma promptly accepted. When she arrived at the house, she noticed a womanly touched, but the absence of a woman; this made her assume that James' wife was somehow absent. One morning, while walking the dog, James told her that his wife had a large mental break after she delivered a stillborn child. James often visited her at the asylum and sometimes took her out to dinner. They never discussed bringing his wife back home because it seemed like she could not come back to her old room. James stated that she saw something within her that reminded her of his wife. He believed there was something enduring about her. Fidelma believed that he said this in order to give her courage. Afterwards, Fidelma would read poetry to James while he laid in bed.

Fidelma eventually left James' home and went back to Jasmeen's. On her way in, she noticed Mistletoe just standing in her flat's window. Jasmeen informed her that a letter had come for her, it was from Jack's lawyer, informing her that she would receive about 2600 pounds a week. Later, someone knocked on the door. It was Mistletoe's father; he asked them to follow him to his flat. In Mistletoe's bedroom sat, Mistletoe, crying and quivering. Mistletoe began rambling and started to come to her senses after she saw Fidelma. The next morning, Fidelma found a new letter from Mistletoe in the garden.

Afterwards, Varya put together a meeting of immigrant and refugee women. A woman named Zelmic pulled Fidelma aside and told her about living in Sarajevo during the siege and how she had to burn shoes and books for warmth. She began telling Fidelma about her dream, where she and other women were in a hanger, when suddenly Fidelma came up behind her and stabbed her. She revealed to Fidelma that she knew that she had a sexual relationship with Vlad and began berating her. Zelmic pulled out two cell phones, one white and one black, and showed her photos of Vlad and graves on the black phone. Zelmic told her that she should not be here, but Fidelma rebuffed her, saying that Zelmic brought poison and that all women are united.

The narrative then moves forward in time. Fidelma arrived at The Hague, as Varya had convinced her to confront Vlad. She sat in the courtroom with 4 other women who stared at Vlad as he entered, who denied all allegations. The court was told three cases of violence in Sarajevo and told about the camp killings. On the 3rd morning, Vlad defended himself, arguing that he never broke the law and that if a multiethnic society cannot live together, it must be forced apart. He also made a case that it is impossible to know who actually did the killings. On the 4th day, Vlad said that if he is insane, patriotism is insane. After that day, Fidelma visited Vlad in prison. Vlad complained that



the court was painting him as a monster. She then told him the story of her abortion and called him a monster, causing him to tell her to leave the room.

Fidelma went out and bought a fur jacket and visited Vlad in his conjugal room. She asked to comb Vlad's hair. The comb broke and Fidelma stated that if a comb breaks, the person being combed is evil. After ranting for a while, Vlad danced with Fidelma. He asked what organization she was here for, and she stated that she was just there for herself. She asked him if he has nightmares, and he explained that he just has pleasant dreams.

Every night after the hearings, Fidelma would go to the bar. There, she met a Bosnian man who told her about the atrocities of Sarajevo and how if men are able to be evil, they will be. He explained that during the siege, he told his mother that he was going to get food, but he instead rode in a tank for Vlad's army. The man asked why she was there, and she explained that she was looking for a sign of remorse.

After the trial, Fidelma visited Cloonoila to visit Sister Bonaventure. Suddenly, she received a text message from Jack, telling her to baptize herself in the river. She did, and then walked to her old home. Jack was there, and he told her that she was home and died. Sometime in the future, Fidelma worked for Jasmeen's charity, being satisfied that she came home to herself. The novel ends with the homeless guests of the charity performing a version of "Midsummer Night's dream," which ended with the performers saying the word "home" in many languages.

## Analysis

The final group of chapters has Fidelma complete her character arc by confronting the source of her trauma, Vlad, and finding her way "home." In a way, Fidelma recovers from her trauma in a more effective way than any other character in the book. This is because she is actually able to confront the source of her trauma. She is capable of doing this because the source of her trauma is just one person, Vlad. Many other characters in the novel do not have this type of luxury. Individuals like Nahir and Oghowen are not able to do this because the source of their trauma is not just one person. For Nahir, the entire institution of Vlad's military is the source of her trauma. In addition, for Oghowen, the source of her trauma is her entire culture and their attitudes towards femininity and sex. These characters cannot simply confront these things in the way that Fidelma confronts Vlad.

During the confrontation between Vlad and Fidelma, it seems like Vlad assumed that Fidelma was there to support him. This implies that Vlad is so used to having people blindly follow him that it made him believe that Fidelma still cared for him. Of course, he has no idea of the events that happened to Fidelma after his arrest. Fidelma seems to catch onto this and makes sure that he knows that she thinks he is a monster. He is seemingly surprised by this because he can find no reason why Fidelma would not believe him. While the narrator does not tell the reader about the final outcome of the



trial, it can be assumed that, like his real-life counterpart Radovan, he is found guilty and sent to prison for a long time.

Home is a concept that appears through this section of the novel. Here, it has a dual meaning. It is not just a place that someone lays their head at night, but it is also the mental place where they belong. In this section, Fidelma finds both of these places. As far as her physical home goes, it is not Cloonoila like Jack suggests during his final moments. It is instead London, where she can help homeless refugees and immigrants, just as she was helped directly after the events during and after Vlad's arrest. The mental home that Fidelma reaches is one of guiltlessness, redemption, and acceptance. After Fidelma confronts Vlad and informs him what she actually thinks of him and of the events that occurred after his arrest, she seems to accept the events that have transpired. She also feels redeemed after Jack basically states that he forgives her. This is a major step forward for Fidelma, as it seems like much of her guilt comes from what she put her husband through. With all of these falling into place, Fidelma is able to move on and help people.

This set of chapters also confirms prior suspicions that Vlad has no remorse regarding what he did during the war. This becomes apparent when Fidelma asks Vlad whether or not he has nightmares. Vlad responds stating that he does not have nightmares, but he does have some pleasant dreams. Even with the blood of thousands of people on his hands he still feels like he did nothing wrong and feels nothing for those who perished in the events that he helped orchestrate. This makes it very explicit that he is just as bad as the global community and those involved in the war says he is. Vlad is a monster.

However, Vlad does not think this is so because he believes that he is a patriot and that he did the things that he had to do for the sake of his country. This calls into question the mere concept of patriotism. People often do extreme things for their country, but are these things excused due to loyalty? The novel clearly argues that atrocities done in the name of patriotism are wrong and are inexcusable. However, many do not hold this to be the truth. Even today, many people commit heinous acts for their country and are, often times, celebrated for it. The novel forces the reader to question whether or not loyalty to one's country should be put above or below loyalty to one's fellow man.

## Discussion Question 1

What does the demeanor of the women in the courtroom say about their attitudes towards Vlad?

## Discussion Question 2

Does the novel imply the court's decision? Does it even matter?



## Discussion Question 3

What is the purpose of Fidelma's conversation with the man in the bar?

## Vocabulary

irrealities, decrying, alacrity, tribunal, dwelling



# Characters

## Vlad

Vlad, who is initially Fidelma's love interest, is actually a Bosnian President who committed countless atrocities during the Bosnian War. Essentially, Vlad is an allegory for Radovan Karadzic, the former President of Republika Srpska during the Bosnian War. Srpska, like Vlad, evaded capture for years before being captured, tried for war crimes, and convicted for said war crimes. Also like Vlad, Srpska was somewhat of a supposed mental healer due to his degree in psychiatry. Finally, both Vlad and Srpska are accused of crimes against humanity, participating in a type of genocide regarding the Bosniaks, and violating the Geneva Convention.

While Vlad is not the main character of the novel (and he has little character development), he is essentially the centerpiece of it. Vlad, fleeing from arrest, moves to Ireland where he meets Fidelma, who falls in love with his hypnotic personality and wisdom. Through the two characters' romance, Vlad gives off no revealing evidence that he is, in fact, the "Butcher of Bosnia." It is only after Vlad is arrested on a bus, that Fidelma and the town's other citizens realize the immense evil within him.

Vlad is also an allegory for evil and human's attractions to it. As stated before, the citizens of the town have no idea that Vlad is a horrific war criminal. For some reason, many of the town's women are attracted to Vlad. The book implies that this is because of Vlad's evil and human's tendencies to be attracted to evil.

## Fidelma

Fidelma is the protagonist and point-of-view character for the majority of the book. At the beginning of the story, Fidelma is a naïve seemingly upper-middle class shop-owner who is unable to get pregnant through her husband, Jack. After a mystic healer, Vlad, arrives in town, she falls in love with him, eventually starting a covert romance. Soon after, the romance is disbanded and Fidelma finds that she is pregnant. She decides to tell her husband about the pregnancy, but before she can do this, she is attacked by some of Vlad's enemies who perform a brutal forced abortion on her. After this, she is shunned by her husband and she moves to London. In London, she begins to make friends and learns about suffering. Eventually, she works up the courage to confront Vlad at the Hauge.

Fidelma is an allegory for humanity. Like humanity, Fidelma begins as naïve and unintentionally falls in love with something evil. This mirrors an interpretation of how humans sometimes go along with evil things without realizing the atrocities happening around them. Like Fidelma, humanity simply does not realize that they have become involved with evil until it is forcibly revealed.



## Jack

Jack is Fidelma's husband, who plays a small part in the overall narrative of the story. He becomes outraged when he learns that Fidelma is having an affair with Vlad and becomes even more irate when it is implied that Vlad impregnated Fidelma. At the end of the novel, Jack decides to forgive Fidelma.

## Mujo

Mujo, living in Ireland, is the sole individual that recognizes Vlad as the "Butcher of Bosnia." Being semi-mute, he does not inform the other workers of this very well and simply attacks him in the hotel (where Mujo works). It is implied that Mujo is semi-mute due to the atrocities that he witnessed during the Bosnian War.

## Father Damien

Father Damien is the Catholic Priest of Cloonoila. He is one of the first people to have a conflict with Vlad, due to his odd beliefs.

## Bluey

Bluey is Fidelma's boss when she goes to work as a cleaner in a bank. Like many of the novel's characters, Bluey is an immigrant, which is made explicit by his less-than-perfect English. He tells Fidelma about how he was discriminated against when eating dinner in Barcelona.

## Medusa

Medusa, a Black woman, is the assistant supervisor at the bank where Fidelma, at one point, works as a cleaner. Medusa is very hard on Fidelma calling her a "Paddy" (176), either referring to her whiteness or her Irish origin. She also seems to be racist towards White individuals. She eventually uses her position to get Fidelma fired.

## Maria

Maria, a Hispanic woman, is one of Fidelma's coworkers at the bank. She attempts to help Fidelma through her issues with Medusa by giving her religious pamphlets.

## James

James is a rich older man who allows Fidelma to live in his house after she is fired from the bank. James explains that, after a miscarriage, his wife slowly went insane until she



died. It is possible that James helps Fidelma because she reminds him of his wife prior to her illness.

## **Mistletoe**

Mistletoe is the young girl whom Fidelma befriends while living in London. Later, Mistletoe's father accuses Fidelma of attempting to brainwash the girl. However, during an illness, Mistletoe seems to recover after seeing Fidelma. In a way, Mistletoe acts as the daughter figure for Fidelma.





# Symbols and Symbolism

## Little Red Chairs

The titular little red chairs are brought up very seldom in the novel. According to the first page of the novel, when the Siege of Sarajevo is memorialized, every red chair (there are over 11,000 of them) symbolizes an innocent person killed in the siege.

## Dogs

Like in many works of literature, dogs are used as a literary device to foreshadow danger. Dogs serve this purpose in "Cloonola," as reports state that dogs barked unusually often during the night that Vlad arrived.

## Jack's Mug

Jack's mug, that appears in Fidelma's dream sequence, symbolizes a sense of ownership over Fidelma. Prior to the sequence, the mug belonged to Jack, but it is later stolen by Vlad.

## Bat

When Jack kills a bat in his house, the bat is used to symbolize his lack of emotion. According to the narrator Jack seemed to feel no emotion about killing the small creature. It is implied that Jack's lack of emotion is also a reason why his marriage fails.

## Canary

The canary is used to symbolize Fidelma's sexual freedom. Jack acknowledges this when he recalls the phrase "If you buy a canary, you have got to let it sing" (116). In a way, Jack knew that Fidelma had to be free and seemed to expect that she would be unfaithful.

## Wolves

The novel uses the symbol of wolves to represent danger. When Vlad tells Fidelma about his childhood, he tells her that his father taught him to shoot wolves because they were dangerous to his village. Vlad is also compared to a wolf by whomever spray painted his clinic's wall. The anonymous painter does this because, like a wolf, Vlad is dangerous.



## **Brick**

The brick that breaks Jasmeen's window prior to the events of the novel represents race relations in lower-class English society. Jasmeen implies that this took place because she was Black and that many neighborhoods did not socially accept Black citizens.

## **Greyhounds**

The author uses the greyhounds in the kennel as a symbol for the types of relationships that Vlad has. It is explained to Fidelma that if the greyhounds did not come to the shelter, they would have been killed because they could no longer race. Vlad reacts similarly to relationships that no longer benefit him. For example, he abandons his guards once the war was over, and he abandons Fidelma when it becomes too dangerous to continue seeing her.

## **Bayonet**

Zelmic uses the symbol of the bayonet to symbolize the destruction that Vlad causes. She compares Vlad to a bayonet in Fidelma's vagina, assuming the damage that is has caused.

## **River**

At the end of the novel, the river is used as a symbol of redemption. After receiving the text from Jack, Fidelma baptizes herself in the river, therefore atoning for her sins.



# Settings

## Cloonoila

Cloonoila is a small Irish town where the first half of the novel takes place. The town is home of many of the book's characters like Fidelma, Jack, Mujo, and others. The town is popular due to its river and its beach (which is popular with surfers). Vlad seems to move into Cloonoila due to its isolated location and distance from his country of origin. However, what Vlad does not realize, is that word moves quite quickly throughout the town, which becomes especially relevant after his identity is revealed.

## London

London, United Kingdom is the setting that Fidelma self-exiles herself after her infidelity and attack by the Bosnian men. Here, Fidelma learns her life was far easier in Cloonoila, as it contains many obstacles including living costs and employment. Fidelma becomes rather comfortable in London until Jack takes her back.

## Sarajevo

Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia is the setting of many of Vlad's recollections. While Vlad was a supreme military leader, he besieged the city of Sarajevo, leading to the killings of many innocent citizens. His actions in the city are the reasons why Vlad is labeled as a war criminal and the "Butcher of Bosnia."

## Dublin

Dublin is the intended destination of the book club's bus until it is stopped by the police who arrest Vlad. The book club decide to go to Dublin in honor of Yeats.

## The Hague

The Hague is a governmental building in the Netherlands. The Hague is especially relevant to the novel because it is the location of the United Nations' International Court of Justice. This is where Vlad is transported to after his arrest, and where he is later tried for war crimes.



# Themes and Motifs

## Evil

The novel uses the character of Vlad and his interactions with others in order to portray the theme of evil and human's seemingly natural attraction to it. In the novel, Vlad is essentially pure evil; he has the blood of thousands of innocent people on his hands and does not seem to care about anyone other than himself. He also does not seem to feel any remorse, as when he does think back to the Bosnian conflict, he thinks about himself and his friend K instead of the thousands of people who perished in the Siege of Sarajevo. Regardless of the evil that is within Vlad, people still followed him during the war. This is because humans are naturally attracted to evil, whether they know it is evil or not. The soldiers under Vlad's command seemed to know exactly what they were doing when they were shooting buses full of Bosnian men or dragging people to death camps. However, their attraction to the evil Vlad swayed them to follow his heinous orders. This can partially be explained through Nahir's story at the meeting that Maria takes Fidelma to. During his story, Nahir makes a very brief comment about how he wondered whether the people that were torturing Bosnian civilians always had the capacity to torture. Nahir implies that we are willed to follow evil because humans have inherent evil within themselves. In a way, the inherent evil coupled with the natural attraction to evil led to the massive amount of violence that took place in the war.

The most apparent instance of people being attracted to evil is Fidelma's attraction to Vlad. Of course, Fidelma does not realize that Vlad had done horrific things until much later in the novel, she still seems somewhat hypnotized by him. It must be noted that Fidelma is not the only woman that has fallen into a sort of hypnotic attraction to Vlad, as it is mentioned that many of the women of Cloonoila found Vlad quite attractive for some unknown reason. Fidelma's intense attraction towards Vlad leads to the main conflict of the novel, her marriage falling apart (for a time anyway), her pregnancy and forced abortion, and her struggles while living in London. Even with the idea that humans are attracted to evil, Fidelma is not completely blameless. Fidelma does have agency and much of the novel's issues could have been avoided if she did not blind herself with the need for a child. Regardless of this, there is no way that Fidelma could have known about the evil within Vlad when the affair started.

## Immigration

The novel uses the theme of immigration to make a comment regarding the definition of what an immigrant is and the struggles that many immigrants face. Many characters in the novel are immigrants in some form or another. The first immigrants that the reader experiences are Mujo and Vlad, both from Bosnia. The dichotomy between these two men is quite interesting, as Mujo fled Bosnia after the war, and so did Vlad, except for the fact that he was one of the main perpetrators of the war. Mujo is haunted by the things that he witnessed during the conflict, making him somewhat mute due to trauma.



However, the majority of the immigrants in the novel come into play after Fidelma self-exiles herself to London. Here, she discovers that many of the homeless people in London are immigrants and that some face discrimination, like in the case of Jasmeen's window being broken due to her status as a Black immigrant. When Maria takes Fidelma to the meeting, she meets even more immigrants, all with their own stories and trauma. Fidelma learns that many of the immigrants in the room immigrated to London to escape something in their home country that traumatized them, whether it is war or gender issues. These traumas have followed these people to London, haunting them as they try to forge their own path in their country. It is also implied that many of these people have faced some sort of discrimination, not unlike Bluey or Jasmeen did.

Fidelma begins to become aware of the struggles of immigrants when she herself becomes one. When she moves from Ireland to London, she essentially immigrates to a new city. While in the city, she faces discrimination, like the racial discrimination from Medusa and the bank superintendent. She learns that she, too, has immigrated and brought her trauma with her. Through discrimination and the type of trauma that the immigrants have obtained, it becomes clear that, often times, immigrants seem to have the cards stacked against them. They simply came to London to escape negative situations in their home country, but when they arrive, they learn that things are not easy for them in London either. However, their determination drives them further, helping them make a better life in London. By learning about the struggles of other immigrants, Fidelma learns to work through her trauma and heal.

## The Bosnian War

While most of the novel is about Fidelma and her experiences before and after she self-exiles herself to London, the main center-piece of the novel is the Bosnian War. No matter where Fidelma goes, to results of the Bosnian War follow her. Many of the characters including Vlad, Mujo, and Nahir were somehow involved in the conflict and are still dealing with it. However, much of the novel's audience may be unfamiliar with the conflict, as there was little Western involvement.

The Bosnian War was an armed conflict in country of Bosnia that was somewhat caused by the breakup of Yugoslavia and the following Yugoslav Wars. Eventually this led to The Republic of Bosnia declaring independence. However, this caused a secondary faction to arise, entitled the Republika Srpska, led by Radovan Karadžić, Vlad's real-life counterpart. During the conflict between the two Bosnian factions, the Repblika Srpska participated in ethnic cleansing of the non-Serbian population in many areas of the country. On April 5th 1992, the Repblika Srpska initiated the Siege of Sarajevo, the longest city siege in modern warfare history. According to reports, 13,952 individuals died in the siege, many of them civilians. The war ended in December 1995.

While the exact time period in which the novel takes place is not clear, based on the technology within the narrative it is safe to assume that it takes place in the mid-2000s. This means that at the point in which the novel begins, the war had been over for half a decade. Regardless of this, the effects of the war have not yet disappeared. Many of the



novel's characters are still dealing with the trauma and loss that occurred in the war, and for many, the horrors of the war still haunt them.

Vlad, the partially-fictional supreme leader of the faction responsible for much of the violence in the Bosnian War, also represents the fact that the damage that the war caused did not go away when the war ended. Many years passed before Vlad, or Radovan Karadžić, was caught, arrested and tried (Radovan was captured on July 21 2008 but tried by the ICTY, not The Hague). In the end, just like in reality, justice was not served until long after the war ended (Radovan was not convicted until 2016). In the novel, the damage did not even end once Vlad was captured and put on trial. According to the narrator, some individuals who were involved in the war were in the court gallery and still seemed traumatized. The aspects of this theme can also be applied to the theme of war in general, as the aftereffects of war are similar in many instances.

## Deception

This novel uses the theme of deception to portray that every character has different motivations, and that many use deception for their own (and sometimes others') benefit. The most explicit example of this is Vlad's deception of almost everyone around him. Once Vlad is captured, the characters learn that they were not the only people who were deceived and that Vlad had been laying low in different locations for a long time. Vlad deceived those around him for his own benefit and safety. It makes much sense that Vlad was so concerned about his identity, as if someone at the town were to figure out who he really was, he would have been captured sooner than he actually was. Vlad deceived almost everyone for selfish reasons that benefitted no one but himself.

Fidelma, however, is a different story. Once Fidelma began her affair with Vlad, she kept it a secret. Much of the reasoning for this is selfish, like Vlad's motivations. Fidelma did not want her husband, Jack to find out about the affair, as it would ruin both her marriage and her reputation. One of the biggest reasons that she began the affair in the first place was in order to possibly have a child. This benefits only her, as it is unknown whether Jack would have believed that the baby was his if Vlad was not suddenly arrested on the bus, leading to Fidelma's assault. Part of her deception was also to benefit Vlad. Once the affair began, Vlad told her that she could not tell anyone about the affair or the father of the baby. His only reasoning was that it would be dangerous and it would ruin Fidelma's marriage. Fidelma did not want any danger to come to Vlad, so she kept it a secret (except for telling Mona).

Medusa also commits a certain type of deception while Fidelma is working with her at the bank. When Fidelma gets a notice that complaints have been filed against her due to her behavior and her loss of tools and materials, she immediately suspects like Medusa was framing her. Fidelma's first guesses about why Medusa would do this are that she is racist or she simply does not like her. It is not until Fidelma runs into Bluey that she learns that Medusa framed her so her niece could replace her as a bank cleaner. There is evidence that her possible dislike of Fidelma did not factor into this deception.



because when they were at the bar, Medusa acted rather friendly towards Fidelma. Therefore, Medusa framed Fidelma for her niece's benefit, not her own.

## Loyalty

The theme of loyalty is mainly used to demonstrate character traits for many of the main characters. For instance, Vlad's loyalty is very questionable. In Vlad's dream sequence involving his dead friend K, it is implied that he did the things that he had to do in the war because he loved his nation and wanted to make it a better place. In a way, he felt that the end justified the means that he had to use during the war. While it seems like Vlad's loyalty to country is present, his loyalty to those close to him is not. A major example of this are the three Bosnian men who searched for Vlad until he was arrested, causing them to assault Fidelma. The men inform Fidelma that they were once Vlad's guards. They also explain that once the conflict was over, he abandoned them even though their country was ravaged and many of their family members were killed. It seems that once the conflict was over, and Vlad could no longer help his nation, his loyalties transferred to himself, leading him to run and deceive those around him.

Fidelma's loyalty is also put on display throughout the novel. Like Vlad, it seems like through much of the book, her loyalties lie with herself. It is clear that she is not loyal to her husband, due to her infidelity and resulting deception. She simply attempts to keep both the affair and the pregnancy secret in order to benefit herself. However, while the affair is taking place, it can be argued that her loyalties lie with Vlad. She deceives for him and seems to truly care about him. Even after Vlad tells her that they can no longer see each other, she still yearns to speak with him. However, once Vlad is arrested, she begins to care for herself and only herself. Towards the end of the novel, this begins to change. Fidelma thinks about her estranged husband and the things that her actions put him through and begins to feel sorry for him. This helps Fidelma reconcile with Jack later in the novel.

# Styles

## Point of View

The novel is mostly told from an omniscient 3rd-person point-of-view, while a handful of chapters are told from the first-person perspective of a character (like the student in "Into the Woods". In the 3rd-person chapters, even though the the narrator is omniscient, it does not reveal certain information to the reader, such as Vlad's true identity, until about mid-way through the novel. The narrator also tells the narrative in past tense, implying that the events happened years ago. The first-person perspective chapters also tell the events of the novel in the past tense.

## Language and Meaning

Many of the qualities of the language in the novel lies in dialogue. Essentially, the author uses the language in the dialogue in order to portray whether someone is a non-native English speaker or not. For example, in the chapters that center around Fidelma during her time in London, Fidelma uses "proper" English while some of her acquaintances, such as Bluey, do not. This portrays a clear distinction between the two. However, this is not the only time that this occurs in the novel, as it is full of immigrant characters.

## Structure

The structure of the book is made up of individual named chapters that sometimes times shift the narrative to different characters of topics (while most of the chapters center on Fidelma). The only departure from this structure is the first page of the book that informs the reader that red chairs symbolize victims of the Bosnian War, as this page does not exist within a chapter.





## Quotes

The child of a gipsy family, who lived in a caravan by the sea, swore she saw the Pooka Man coming through the window at her, pointing a hatchet.

-- Narrator ("Cloonoila" paragraph 4)

**Importance:** In this quote, the narrator foreshadows the nefariousness of Vlad.

She watched him go down the path, lithe, straight-backed and thought that the ladies of Cloonoila, married and unmarried, would be doffing their bonnets at him.

-- Narrator ("FiFi" paragraph 19)

**Importance:** FiFi's thoughts foreshadow the attraction that many women of the town will feel for Vlad.

Very soon he will not be nice Dr Vladimir Dragan, he will be the most wanted man in Europe, with a price on his head.

-- Narrator ("Into the Woods" paragraph 16)

**Importance:** Vlad's thoughts imply that he is not quite who he seems to be.

At the risk of being too blunt . . . it seems to me Mrs McBride . . . that what you want is a lover.

-- Vlad ("Dido" paragraph 22)

**Importance:** Vlad seemingly intentionally attempts to slide his way into Fidelma's life as her lover.

My sacred duty to God and my own people."

-- Vlad ("Clouds" paragraph 28)

**Importance:** This quote acts as foreshadowing for the patriotism defense that Vlad later makes during his trial.

If you buy a canary, you have got to let it sing.

-- Unknown through Narrator ("Jack" paragraph 8)

**Importance:** This quote, said to Jack by one of his friends, implies that he figured that Fidelma would eventually be unfaithful.

But the contamination has happened.

-- Schoolmaster ("Capture" paragraph 21)

**Importance:** The schoolmaster explains that the damage has been done regarding Vlad's effect on the town. What he does not know, however, is that the damage has also been done to Fidelma.



We kill anything of his . . . we kill his cat  
-- Unnamed Man ("Capture" paragraph 56)

**Importance:** This quote shows the extent to which the three men will go in order to enact revenge on Vlad.

Honky likes snow because snow is white and I am not white, I am black.  
-- Medusa ("Dust" paragraph 5)

**Importance:** Here, Medusa accuses Fidelma of being a racist. This is a sort of snapshot of race relations between lower-class immigrants in London.

I am a child of Africa"  
-- Jade ("The Waiting Room" paragraph 19)

**Importance:** This acts as a sort of opposite attitude towards race than what Medusa holds. Jade's race brings her strength, while Medusa uses race to divide.

Beast of Bosnia . . . pumping his evil into you . . . a bayonet up the vagina . . . his words . . . his poetry.  
-- Zelmic ("Sarajevo" paragraph 7)

**Importance:** Zelmic explains that she knows about Fidelma's relationship with Vlad and what she thinks about it.

When you were carving your pure homeland, with your guns opening fire even on ambulances, what was on your mind, or did the sheer numbers, the hundreds of thousands, deaden the truth of it all?  
-- Fidelma ("The Conjugal Room" paragraph 8)

**Importance:** Here, Fidelma finally confronts Vlad and informs him that he is a monster like everyone says he is.