The Loney Study Guide

The Loney by Andrew Michael Hurley

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Hurley, Andrew Michael. The Loney. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.

A group of religious pilgrims embarked from St. Jude's parish in London to "the Loney," an isolated and stormy coastline several hours away. Their goal was to visit a nearby shrine and cure Hanny, a mute teenage boy suffering from severe learning disabilities. The novel was narrated in the past tense by Hanny's brother, an adolescent who was heavily involved in the church at his mother's request and who was given the role of protecting and assisting his brother. He narrated the events of the retreat from middle age. As an adult, he worked at a museum and attended therapy with Doctor Baxter. Hanny became a preacher and published a book titled My Second Life with God.

At the outset of the novel, longtime St. Jude's priest Father Wilfred Belderboss had unexpectedly passed away after a period when his wits sharply declined and his mood became increasingly dark. A new priest, Father Bernard McGill, was assigned to the St. Jude's parish. He agreed to reinstate Father Wilfred's tradition of embarking on an Easter retreat to the Loney and staying in an old home called Moorings. The main faction in the retreat group consisted of the Smith family: Hanny, the narrator, and their parents, who they referred to as Mummer and Farther. Mummer was extremely devout and rigid in her religious practices; Farther was depicted as far more lenient and distant. They were joined by an elderly couple, Mr. and Mrs. Belderboss. (Mr. Belderboss was Father Wilfred's brother.) Finally, Ms. Bunce, who was Father Wilfred's personal assistant, accompanied the group along with her fiancé, David.

The week of Easter, Hanny returned from his extended stay at a care facility called Pinelands and the group departed by bus. However, their bus broke down in a rural field approaching the Loney and two local farmers named Parkinson and Collier repaired it.

At Moorings, the group met Clement, the household's caretaker and a farmer who takes care of his blind mother. Hanny and the narrator discovered a rifle in their shared room. After hiding the gun and playing cards with Father Bernard, the narrator eavesdropped on Mummer and Father Bernard discussing the religious schedule for the week. When the narrator returned to the room, Hanny fired the rifle at him, but it was discovered to be unloaded. The boys played at Moorings and saw a man named Leonard, a woman named Laura, and a young pregnant girl in a car. The man and woman argued tensely and the boys left, but Hanny forgot his watch on the beach.

Over the following days, the rain kept the characters cooped up inside and tensions built between the group. Ms. Bunce and Mummer became rivals as each strove to demonstrate their superior piety. Mummer also became dissatisfied with Father Bernard and believed he was not as good of a priest as Father Wilfred. Farther discovered a secret room hidden behind the study that appeared to be used as a nursery.

The narrator eavesdropped on confessions between Father Bernard and other characters. He learned that Mrs. Belderboss crushed sleeping pills into Mr. Belderboss's drink, hoping to calm his suffering over Father Wilfred's death. Mr. Belderboss confessed that he saw a drunken half-naked woman at Father Wilfred's grave and that she called him Nathanial. Miss Bunce confessed that she fought with Father Wilfred because he did not approve of her upcoming marriage to David.

The narrator frequently reminisced on his time assisting Father Wilfred as an altar boy. On his first day working in the church, he found a photo album on Father Wilfred's desk containing many pictures of the Loney. Father Wilfred constantly abused an another altar boy named Henry McCullough. The priest cut McCullough's hands with a ruler, forced him to memorize Bible passages, and wrapped his hands around stinging nettles. Another altar boy, Paul, mocked Henry as well. He played a cruel joke on McCullough by hiding Father Wilfred's diary in the belfry and blaming it on him.

Besides fasting, the parishioners participated in religious rituals throughout the week. Father Bernard assembled 14 crosses in the yard and the group prayed at each one. Another day, they hiked up a hill and threw stones off a cliff while praying. On the return journey, Hanny found a pregnant ewe.

One day, while exploring, the narrator and Hanny found Thessaly, an abandoned mansion on the edge of the beach. The pregnant girl from the beach, named Else, was living there with Leoonard and Laura. Else kissed Hanny and Leonards returned Hanny's watch to him, having stolen it from the beach.

Hanny showed the narrator an envelope stuffed with money that he stole from Thessaly and a list of four names: Parkinson, Collier, Hale and Parry. They were interrupted by the discovery that Miss Bunce and David saw a hanged man while on a walk. Father Bernard investigated and discovered that the hanged man is a handmade effigy of a crucified Jesus, with a pig's heart placed in its chest.

The next day, a wind knocked open the locked outhouse in the backyard, revealing dozens of animals that the taxidermist who previously lived at Moorings had stuffed. Later, the boys went to Thessaly and returned the envelope to Leonard, who offered them money in exchange for their secrecy about the list of names.

The following day, the parishioners went to church and discovered that a statue of Jesus had been smashed and the church's doors were locked. After a brief outdoor service, the group returned home and had dinner with Clement, who told them that his mother has been cured of her blindness. A group of carolers including Parkinson and Collier arrived at the house and performed a skit for the parishioners. Afterwards, Parkinson warned the narrator to commit to secrecy about the envelope.

The group goes to the shrine on Easter and Mummer physically forced Hanny to drink the brackish holy water from the shrine's well even after Hanny choked. Miss Bunce and David left the retreat in disgust. Later that night, Mummer again attempted to give

Hanny holy water that she stored in tea mug. Farther discovered that the secret room at the back of the house was a quarantine where children were kept until they died.

Hanny ran away in the night to meet Else at Thessaly. The narrator followed him, and they were discovered by Parkinson, Collier, Leonard and Clement. The men revealed that each had an affliction that was cured through dark magic. The boys were dragged into the house and Hanny was shot in the thigh. Then he was carried downstairs and the men healed him by transferring his wound onto Else's baby.

Two months later, Hanny's muteness was miraculously cured. As the other characters rejoiced, the narrator told Father Bernard that he read Father Wilfred's diary. On the retreat three years ago, Father Wilfred had seen Billy Tapper drown on the beach and subsequently lost faith in God.

At the novel's conclusion, the narrator revealed that Hanny shot the baby but does not remember it. The narrator only pretended that Clement shot the baby to protect Hanny in case his diary was obtained by the police. Hanny was beginning to remember what occurred, but he still did not understand that he is a murderer.

Chapter 1

Summary

The first-person narrator begins by describing his physical surroundings in an unspecified location near London, England, focusing on the autumn weather. He mentions that he spent so long taking notes on the falling leaves that he missed his appointment with Doctor Baxter.

The narrator hears on the news that a baby's corpse has been found in the wreckage of a house destroyed in an area called Coldbarrow. Hearing about Coldbarrow prompts the narrator to reflect on his own experiences there 30 years ago. He states that something happened that “wouldn’t stay hidden forever, no matter how much I wanted it to” (1).

The narrator contemplates calling a man named Hanny, who is involved in the church, to talk about the current flooding and whether it brings back any memories. The narrator removes a book written by Hanny from his shelf and looks at the picture on the back cover, which depict Hanny, his wife, Caroline, and their two sons, Michael and Peter. The narrator states that these characters are the “happy family of Pastor Andrew Smith” (2).

According to the narrator, the book was published “almost a decade ago” (2). Michael and Peter are now teenagers, and Hanny and Caroline are still married. The narrator realizes that there are a few newspaper clippings tucked inside the book’s cover. The clippings mention interviews and visits Hanny had done following the book’s publication. The narrator reveals the book’s title is “My Second Life with God” and that its success had been surprising for both Hanny and himself.

Analysis

By narrating events that occurred in the protagonist’s adolescence from the perspective of middle age, the author creates distance between the main events of the story and the characters’ interpretation of those events. Key elements of the novel — the setting of Coldbarrow and the character Hanny — are represented in light of the years that have passed since the narrator had his primary interaction with them. This concept of memory, and the obscuration it entails, introduces an element of mistrust to the author’s narration. The potential unreliability of the narrator help contribute to the novel’s suspense by calling into question the events he describes.

The chapter’s opening also introduces a key element of the author’s style: his focus on the power and influence of nature. Descriptions such as “the glorious blaze of color” and “mist and silence followed and then, after a few days, there was only the smell of rotting and bonfires” signify the respect and fascination that the author holds for the natural world. His descriptions of the brutal results of flooding on the people that inhabit the land also emphasize nature’s power over man.

This focus on nature, as well as the English setting, indicate the author is drawing from the Romantic style of literature. Romanticism was a literary movement in England during the nineteenth century that opposed the Enlightenment (which represented strict reasoning and scientific progress) and focused on freedom and imagination. It places a significant focus on the natural world and the powers of nature.

At the end of the first page, the narrator shifts from general descriptions of his situation to a more nuanced and introspective description of Hanny. This passage reveals the narrator's closeness to Hanny, although few concrete details are revealed about either of their identities. The newspaper clippings and book's title provide only vague clues to the Hanny's life, or how Coldbarrow affected him. This vagueness is deliberate, as it enhances the suspense.

Finally, the frequent references to Hanny's role in the church foreshadow the importance of religion to the novel as a whole. Hanny is a preacher who gained fame from his book My Second Life with God. This is the first indication in the novel that religion can be used for motives beyond finding spiritual fulfillment.

Discussion Question 1

What questions do you have about the narrator after reading Chapter 1? About Hanny?

Discussion Question 2

How does the author's usage of physical and natural details impact the plot?

Discussion Question 3

"And now, with the news from Coldbarrow, it seemed likely that they would be hearing of [Hanny] again unless I got everything down on paper and struck the first blow, so to speak" (2). What impact does the last line have? What is its function?

Vocabulary

submerged, embossed, hospice, evangelical, zeitgeist

Chapter 2

Summary

The narrator describes of the Loney, "that strange nowhere" (3) an isolated coast in England where the narrator, Hanny, their parents, two members of their church — Mr. and Mrs. Belderboss — and their priest, Father Wilfred, went on a religious retreat. The Loney's sudden tides were extremely dangerous and all locals avoided the area, except for the town drunk, Billy Tapper.

The narrator then describes an encounter he had with Billy, who was rumored to have worked as a schoolteacher before his alcoholism ruined his career. The narrator, Hanny, and their mother, whom they call Mummer, met Billy at a bus stop in 1973, when the narrator was 16 and Hanny was 12.

Billy, who was incredibly dirty, was slumped on the bus stop bench holding a bottle and a potato, talking to himself in his sleep. He woke up and warned the narrator and Hanny never to drink alcohol, showing them a long scar on his arm from drunkenly falling off a roof. When Billy coughed and wiped his mouth on his beret, the narrator noticed the beret had military insignia and realized Billy served in the war. Billy then handed pages from a pornographic magazine to the narrator, who hid the pictures from his mother. As the bus pulled to the stop, the narrator realized that the potato Billy was holding was actually his penis.

That evening, Mummer discussed their encounter with Father Wilfred, who said Billy was "removed from God" (8). Mrs. Belderboss said that she felt sorry for Billy, and Farther agreed. Father Wilfred responded that pity is the only thing a drunk has in abundance. He said that Billy had many opportunities in life and wasted all of them. He also revealed that Mr. Belderboss was his brother. The narrator closed the chapter by describing his gift of sensing events in the future. He had a vision that night that Billy would die soon.

Analysis

This chapter introduces the timeframe and setting of the narrative, as well as the religious and moral elements that are major themes throughout the novel. As in the preceding chapter, the descriptions place a great deal of emphasis on setting. The events of the novel are fully intertwined with the landscape of the Loney — the same story could not exist in a different place. The narrator characterizes the land as inhospitable, dangerous, and unwelcoming. The vocabulary is consistently harsh: spring is depicted as "the soggy afterbirth of winter" (3), the beach as "a dead mouth of bay that filled and emptied twice a day" (p3), and Coldbarrow as "a desolate spit of land a mile off the coast" (3). This natural barrenness and cruelty echoes the interior states of the characters that inhabit it. Father Wilfred and Mummer are harsh and condescending

in their behavior towards Billy, thus contradicting their extreme commitment to their Catholic faith, which emphasizes Jesus Christ's forgiveness and love. Billy, too, is a manifestation of the landscape; his physical and metaphorical dirtiness are representative of the beach's neglect, and his rapid descent from schoolteacher to town drunk reflects the tide's fast and powerful shifts.

The physical description of the Loney also introduces the recurring theme of alienation that the narrator experiences. The narrator state that its "impossible to truly know the Loney," as the tides shift often and are unpredictable. The alien geography of the surrounding land emphasize the narrator's isolation from the other characters. He is surrounded by adults who all hold powerful authority positions for him, either because they are his parents or through their affiliation with the church. Hanny, his only confidant, is physically unable to communicate with him, thus heightening his sense of solitude. The narrator feels emotionally separate from the Loney, since it is the polar opposite of his native London, and even characterizes "that wild and useless length of English coastline" (3) as an enemy.

Billy Tapper is the major focus of this chapter. The narrator's fascination with Billy reveals his naivety and his sheltered existence. "As I say, vagrancy was not entirely without its romance to me at that age" (6) he says, adding that he and Hanny "gorged ourselves on [Billy's] dirtiness, on his brutal, alien smell" (7). The narrator has no direct experience with poverty and seems to have no conception of it beyond driving through "the bad part of London" (7) with his mother. He feels removed from this suffering and exhibits no empathy towards those in poverty, despite his extensive religious education. In fact, his religious training appears to have decreased his sense of empathy. "It was a safari park of degradation. What a world without God looks like" (7). The narrator directly connects the depravity of the poor with their assumed lack of faith, failing to consider other issues that may be affecting them.

Billy represents an extreme on Father Wilfred and Mummer's scale of moral judgment. They see Billy's addiction as a rejection of God, and offer him no sympathy. This also contradicts the teachings of Jesus, who had pity on the poor. The revelation that Billy served in the military offers a possible exterior contribution to Billy's emotional problems, but neither Father Wilfred nor Mummer acknowledge this. Father Wilfred and Mummer's version of faith is strict and focuses more on the direct rewards or consequences of obeying or disobeying God's words rather than their relationship with God.

The narrator's description of his "sixth sense" (9) shifts the focus at the end of the chapter. It highlights the otherworldly quality of the novel as a whole, and further reveals the character's relationship with his religion. He makes no references to religion in regards to his eerily accurate predictions, instead seeing them as emanating from an unnamed force within himself. The narrator does not believe in miracles as a religious entity as much as the other characters do; his ambiguous beliefs will become more important later in the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Does Hurley argue that Billy's alcoholism is due to factors within his control, forces outside of his control, or a combination of both? How does he use dialogue and imagery to support this view?

Discussion Question 2

How does the exchange of pornography characterize Billy and the narrator?

Discussion Question 3

How are Father Wilfred and Mummer characterized in Chapter 2? How are their behaviors similar, and how are they different?

Vocabulary

penitence, desolate, jetties, insidious, vagrancy, non sequitur, ulna, insignia, degradation, germinate

Chapter 3

Summary

Father Wilfred became increasingly distraught and distant over the next several months, and the group did not return to the Loney. Three years later, Father Wilfred died and a new priest, Father Bernard McGill, was assigned to the parish. Father Bernard attended a reception on the presbytery lawn and was a friendly, outgoing person who talked to each of the parishioners. The bishop remarked that Father Bernard was very successful at his previous parish and encouraged many younger people to attend church, further mentioning that he would like the new priest to take the congregation on an Easter retreat. Mummer responded that some of the older members of the parish would oppose the idea, but she was very interested and wanted to pursue it further.

A few weeks later, Mummer held a meeting about the potential retreat. Mr. and Mrs. Belderboss attended with their housekeeper, Miss Bunce, and her fiancé, David Hobbs. Father Bernard arrived and brought his dog, Monro. Father Bernard called the narrator Tonto, implying he saw himself as the Lone Ranger, a storybook hero, and the narrator as his sidekick.

The narrator describes Father Bernard as enormous, with large features and hands roughened from an adolescence filled with physical labor. He also noticed that Mummer was critical of the new priest and constantly compared him to Father Wilfred. The narrator and the other altar boys liked Father Bernard because he ate biscuits and talked with them in the presbytery after church. The narrator wondered what Father Bernard did in his free time and if he was ever allowed to relax.

Father Bernard asked how Andrew (Hanny's real name) was and mentioned that he would be back from a place called Pinelands by Easter. Hanny had severe learning disabilities; he had recently learned how to tie his shoes.

The conversation then turned toward finding a location for the retreat. Miss Bunce suggested an outdoor church called Glasfynydd, but the older parish members, including Mummer, rejected the idea. Mummer suggested going back to the shrine the parish had visited earlier with Father Wilfred. Father Bernard suggested a vote, and Mummer won.

Mummer grew up near the Loney and still retained her accent from the location, as well as a taste for the food served there. Her religious commitment was also a product of her upbringing, and she insisted on celebrating the many saint days that she had honored as a child. Mummer believed that the shrine at the Loney was the only place where Hanny could be cured of his undefined illness.

Analysis

After the encounter with Billy, Father Wilfred's decline from hardworking and capable to distracted and self-involved occurs extremely rapidly, echoing Billy's rapid deterioration into alcoholism. The narrator refrains from inserting his own opinions throughout his description of Father Wilfred's behavior, thus giving the reader a more reliable and objective view of his behaviors, highlighting the seriousness of Father Wilfred's struggles.

Father Bernard contrasts sharply with Father Wilfred. He is lighthearted and charming, with a personality that opposes his predecessor's. This polarity creates friction for Mummer, who idealized Father Wilfred. She is strict and procedural, and finds it difficult to deal with change, as the very idea of change challenges her commitment to her faith. She rejects Father Bernard's more modern approach in favor of Father Wilfred's strict tradition. Mr. and Mrs. Belderboss align themselves with Mummer in this disagreement, and Miss Bunce and David (who are notably younger) are more supportive of Father Bernard. Thus, the vote over where to hold the retreat carries symbolic weight for each of the characters. After Mummer wins the voter, the narrator thinks "she knew she could beat Miss Bunce and her Glasfynydd hands down…" (19).

Hanny's absence also carries a great deal of weight in the chapter. The narrator reflects that Mummer loves his brother Hanny "with an intensity that made Farther and I seem like we were merely her acquaintances sometimes" (17) but that she is pained by his progress in gaining physical and mental functioning. Significantly, he further notes that she is not pained by Hanny's suffering, but by the idea that "he reminded her of a test that she still hadn't passed" (17). This detail further characterizes Mummer as focused more on details and procedures than on larger ideas.

This chapter also offers dual motivations for Mummer's religious intensity. She sees God as a mechanism for curing Hanny, and is focused on the end results of her faith. Simultaneously, her upbringing in the Moorings has ingrained a religious fervor in her that is not necessarily related to her actual spiritual faith — her obedience is the main factor that contributes to her religious intensity.

Discussion Question 1

Which character has the most control over others during Chapter 3? What in the text supports this?

Discussion Question 2

How does Hanny's absence affect his family? The guests?

Discussion Question 3

How is the idea of a vote significant in characterizing Father Bernard? Would Father Wilfred be willing to have a vote?

Vocabulary

ubiquitous, presbytery, ingratiated, cassock, cosseted, stagnant, prodigals , sacrosanct, tabernacle, theodolite

Chapter 4

Summary

Hanny returned from his stay at the Pinelands facility for the Easter holidays. He used masks and objects to communicate, since he was unable to speak. He joined the religious group who, along with Monro, left for the retreat early morning Tuesday during Holy Week. Before leaving, they prayed around a statue of the Virgin Mary. Several hours into the drive, the bus broke down. Hanny and the narrator watched a religious video tape through a pair of binoculars, then went outside so Hanny could relieve himself. Standing in the rain, the narrator believed he heard Mummer and Father's raised voices, and stated that the cheerful mood of the morning had been replaced with despondency. A car drove by with a young girl sleeping in the backseat.

Three men, wearing dirty jackets and boots, walked towards the bus from a field adjacent to the road. One carried a shotgun and another had a terrier on a leash. The third appeared older and walked behind the other two, coughing. Father Bernard called to the men and they conversed. From the bus, Mr. Belderboss speculated the older man was suffering from toxoplasmosis, a common disease in farmers.

Returning to the bus, Father Bernard announced that the younger men — named Mr. Parkinson and Mr. Collier — had fixed the engine, and the bus moved forward. A while later, the narrator saw Coldbarrow, the stretch of land across the water, and Thessaly, a house that sits at the northernmost point of the land. The bus stopped at Moorings, a house surrounded by weeds and boulders. The home had belonged to a taxidermist and his third wife in the 1950s, but was now rented by their son, who lived in Hong Kong. As the narrator walked to the door, he reflected on childhood games he had played with Hanny at the Loney.

A Land Rover was parked on the lawn. A large man and a much smaller woman stood in the doorway, and Mrs. Belderboss explained the man's name was Clement and the woman was his blind mother. Clement was a quiet, lonely man who ran a nearby pig farm and looked after Moorings. The group approached Clement, who asked where Father Wilfred was. Father Bernard explained that Father Wilfred had passed away, but did not respond when Clement asked how. He introduced himself to Clement's mother, who walked away to wait in the car. Inside, Moorings smelled like cigars and the air had a "hard, porcelain coldness to it" (35). Clement, who was wearing a homemade wooden crucifix, said he would return in a few days with firewood, as bad weather was likely coming, and left the group to get situated in the house.

Mr. Belderboss showed the group oil paintings and expensive objects that the taxidermist had left in the house. Mr. Beldeross stated that Moorings was built by a cotton mill owner called Greyson and that various families had lived there in the ensuing years, most hoping that the fresh sea air would improve their children's health. He

remarked that time seemed to move very slowly here and that historical moments felt very close. The leftover brushes, books and objects made the narrator feel uneasy.

Analysis

The narrator's response to Hanny's return emphasizes the value he places on their relationship. The narrator takes pride in being the only one who can fully understand Hanny's method of communication, stating "although Mummer and Farther pretended they knew what it all meant, only I really understood him. We had our world and Mummer and Farther had theirs" (21). He believes that even Pinelands, a facility specifically meant to treat people with Hanny's condition, lacks his understanding about Hanny. "Pineland didn't do him much good. They didn't know him. They didn't care for him like I did" (22). The narrator, who is largely controlled by Mummer and the church, lacks autonomy in the outside world. By serving as Hanny's protector and confidant, he gains an important role and feels more valued. Like Mummer, his commitment to helping Hanny is not entirely altruistic. Mummer wants to feel accomplished and normal, so she focuses on curing Hanny's disability; the narrator wants to appreciated, and relies on Hanny's disability to give him a position of importance. The narrator and Mummer both act out of love for Hanny, but it is not the sole factor in their actions concerning him.

Hanny's oncoming puberty also affects the boys' relationship. Hanny is approaching adulthood; he is taller, "the puppy fat has slipped from his face and he had no need to fake a mustache with a piece of burnt cork anymore" (22). The physical changes of puberty heighten the noticeability of Hanny's mental limitations. The narrator is unsure how to deal with these changes; he fears they may negatively impact his role as the protector, as Hanny ceases to need assistance physically.

The clear shifts in the landscape as the bus travels from London to the Moorings physically represent the shift from the narrator's typical life to the surreal world of the retreat, in which normal rules and routines do not apply. There is a clear sense of moving from civilization, where manmade institutions — most notably the church — control the characters, to a world where nature dominates and human efforts are small in comparison. Descriptions such as "the temperature dropped and the clouds darkened" (24) emphasize the increasing role of nature in the characters' lives. The rain is a physical manifestation of the Loney's power, as it limits the character's actions and affects their decisions.

The local farmers that the parishioners encounter also emphasize the dichotomy between London and the rural Moorings. and introduce the theme of social class The group is inherently distrustful of the Loney locals, considering themselves to be both morally and financially superior to the farmers. Although Clement is clearly also religious, as evidenced by the wooden cross necklace he wears, the group feels no connection to him. They view the two men from the bus and comment on them from afar, thus physically reinforcing this metaphorical distinction.

The passage of time is an important motif throughout the novel. The narrator states “Time didn’t leak away as it should. There was nowhere for it to go and no modernity to hurry it along. It collected as the black water did on the marshes…” (31). Mrs Belderboss reinforces this standppoint, stating “There’s something timeless about [Moorings]” (37). Time, one of the most basic aspects of our world, is manipulated at the Loney. This contributes to the surreal mood of the novel and reinforces the importance of the setting. When even time’s meaning has changed, the world of the story is far more flexible.

Discussion Question 1

How are Parkinson, Collier and Clements characterized? Which of their attributes does Hurley emphasize most?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the relationship between Hanny and the narrator. How is it special and how is it flawed?

Discussion Question 3

How does the physical setting of Moorings impact the characters' behaviors?

Vocabulary

plumage, chevron, albeit, intercession, magnesium, toxoplasmosis, prophylactic

Chapter 5

Summary

The narrator unpacked Hanny's things for him and bathed him, allowing him to bring a stuffed mallard duck left by the taxidermist into the bath. Hanny was uncooperative when the narrator dried him off, and the narrator realized Hanny was disappointed that they had to stay at the house. As he and Hanny were going to bed, the narrator noticed two farmers walking across the lawn. Hanny suddenly got out of bed and began rubbing his hands over the wood floor and knocking it with his knuckles. At first the narrator was perplexed by this behavior, but then realized that Hanny was looking for the knothole in the floorboards where they had previously stored things they did not want Mummer to see. Hanny lifted the board and retrieved a penknife, the pornography from Billy Tapper, and half a dozen stuffed rats. When he reached his hand further, he found a semi-automatic rifle.

Father Bernard knocked on the door and the narrator hid the rifle under a blanket. He asked the boys if they would like to play cards, and the narrator, sitting on top of the rifle, realized he did not know if it was loaded. They began playing cards and Father Bernard reminisced about his brutal childhood on Ratlin Island, his father, and his harsh schoolteacher.

Father Bernard asked the narrator if he knew where a book belonging to Father Wilfred was, reminding him that, as a priest, he must keep all information confessed to him private, "even with a gun to my head" (49) which made the narrator suspect Father Bernard had seen the rifle. The narrator replied that he was not in confession and Father Bernard laughed and told him to think about it. Mummer knocked on the door and reprimanded the narrator for not putting Hanny to bed earlier.

As they walked down the stairs, Mummer informed Father Bernard of the practices that Father Wilfred kept at Moorings, including regular confessions and taking Hanny to the shrine. The narrator returned to the bedroom and saw Hanny standing at the window, holding the rifle. Before the narrator could react, Hanny pointed the rifle at him and pulled the trigger.

Analysis

Throughout the novel, Andrew Michael Hurley uses animals as the connecting factor between the parishioners and their natural surroundings. At the beginning of the chapter, the rooks that swarm around the Moorings' rooftop represent, to Mummer, a bad omen regarding Hanny's health. The birds, and other animals throughout the book, are an aspect of the natural environment that the characters place a great deal of weight on, seeing them as mechanisms to communicate with nature or God.

The discovery of the rifle further symbolizes the group's removal from society's regular power structures and rules. The boys now have access to an incredibly dangerous weapon, an extreme manifestation of their newfound autonomy while on the retreat. The gun represents the power and freedom that they have been denied — Hanny due to his disability, and the narrator due to his religious intensity. At Moorings, however, the boys are more capable of questioning their roles within the institutions that dominate their lives.

Hurley also further emphasizes the theme that the group members have experienced poverty yet are still unsympathetic of it. Mummer grew up in the Loney, which is an economically desolate area. Mr Belderboss and Father Wilfred grew up in small, poor communities, and Mr. and Mrs. Belderboss suffered extreme financial hardship during the war. This chapter focuses on Father Bernard's relationship to poverty. Although he has experienced hardships, they have not distorted his views or caused bitterness as they did in Mummer. Father Bernard and Mummer are represented as foils in this chapter. Their discussion on the stairs emphasizes the clash integral to their relationship; Mummer's desire to control Father Bernard contradicts his desire for choice and freedom in exercising his religious duties.

Finally, Chapter 5 considers the role of punishment in regards to children. Father Bernard's teacher, O'Flannery, was extremely harsh and sadistic. Yet the priest insists that his ruthless measures ensured that the children retained information. Hurley is using Father Bernard's anecdote to subtly critique the church. The Catholic church has a history of extreme punishments in regards to religious standards. Father Bernard, a representative of the church, is attempting to convince the narrator that the punishments and restrictions he may have faced as a member of the church are ultimately beneficial. "The law is harsh, but it is the law," he says (48), reinforcing the church's all-encompassing presence in the characters' lives.

Discussion Question 1

How do Father Bernard's childhood experiences manifest themselves in his current behaviors?

Discussion Question 2

What are some examples from the text that show the narrator's protective attitude towards Hanny?

Discussion Question 3

How is O'Flannery similar and different to Father Wilfred? Does Hurley support or oppose O'Flannery's discipline techniques?

Vocabulary

unperturbed, sucesso, intricately, saltire, transfiguration, timorous, cavity, accomodating

Chapter 6

Summary

The narrator initially thought he was dead. When he realized the rifle did not fire, he took the rifle from Hanny, but did not punish him and began reading him a story. Hanny fell asleep and the narrator went to the stairs to look at photographs of the taxidermist and his wife posing in front of stuffed animals. The narrator stated that the taxidermist went insane following the death of his wife and was sent to a hospital near Preston. The narrator then overheard Mrs. Belderboss entering confession with Father Bernard. He hid in a broom closet to hear their conversation more clearly.

Mrs. Belderboss said that Mr. Belderboss had not been sleeping lately, instead getting up and walking to some unknown location. Father Bernard asked if the death of his brother had been bothering Mr. Belderboss, and Mrs. Belderboss said she did not think so. Mrs. Belderboss confessed that she crushed sleeping pills from the chemist into Mr. Belderboss's drink to help him sleep. After Mrs. Belderboss left confession, the narrator slipped out of the broom closet and returned to his room. He held the rifle again before going to bed.

Analysis

This chapter explores the differing levels of morality among the characters. By firing the rifle, Hanny attempts to commit a decidedly heinous crime — the murder of his own brother. However, Hanny is simultaneously a representation of pure innocence; the narrator, acknowledging this, does not react negatively to Hanny's actions. One of Hanny and the narrator's favorite games is "war," played with harmless stick rifles — Hanny was only attempting to engage the narrator and did not realize the seriousness of his action. The narrator feels that Hanny's condition absolves him from sin, granting Hanny an idol-like status throughout the novel.

In confession, Father Bernard — again utilizing his more liberal and forgiving approach — recognizes that Mrs. Belderboss's sin was motivated out of love. His relatively light penance (penance is the Catholic practice of atoning for one's sins after confession, usually through prayer) and his instructions to pray for God's patience are indicative of his forgiving view regarding morality.

Finally, the narrator wrestles with his own conceptions of morality in this chapter. Although he is an objectively moral and religious character, he succumbs to his curiosity in this chapter and commits a serious sin, eavesdropping on a confession. In the Catholic church, confession is an intimate ritual between a churchgoer, their priest, and God. The priest is obligated to complete secrecy regarding the confession; the narrator is violating a central tenant of his religion. He recognizes that what he is doing is morally

wrong, which directly contrasts with Hanny’s lack of understanding regarding his actions. Hurley believes that one’s self-awareness plays a large role in morality.

Finally, this chapter demonstrates that religion can serve as a coping mechanism. The characters in the novel are still reeling from the loss of Father Wilfred, who was a central figure in each of their lives. They find comfort within the church, giving it a role beyond the pure belief in God.

Discussion Question 1

How would Mummer have reacted to Hanny pulling the trigger?

Discussion Question 2

Does Mrs. Belderboss appear to feel more or less spiritually secure after Father Bernard's confession? Provide textual evidence to support your answer.

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Hanny's act of firing the gun to the narrator's decision to eavesdrop on confession.

Vocabulary

tempest, plywood, philosophical, peculiar, vulnerable, gadding

Chapter 7

Summary

Late that night, the narrator heard voices shouting in the distance. He thought he may have dreamed the noises but in the morning, the group discussed them and what they could have meant. The narrator believed the sounds were coming from the woods, and considered telling Father Bernard this, but he was interrupted by a crash from the kitchen. Mummer was reprimanding Hanny for eating stew when he was meant to be fasting. Mummer then pushed Hanny outside and forced him to regurgitate the food.

The narrator tried to get Hanny to go to sleep again, but Hanny was agitated and feeling unwell. The narrator laid next to Hanny until he fell asleep, then went outside, where he was joined by Father Bernard. Father Bernard defended Mummer's actions in the morning, believing that she meant well. The narrator said he would like Hanny to be able to talk but was unsure if Hanny was unhappy with his muteness. Father Bernard asked the narrator if he prayed, and the narrator lied that he did, although he sensed that Father Bernard knew he was lying. They came upon a rock and Father Bernard discovered a bullaun, a hole made to collect rain. Father Bernard said his grandparents believed water that did not touch the ground had healing properties and made their sick cows drink from bullauns.

The narrator noticed Clement's Land Rover parked on the road below them. The two men sitting in the front were Parkinson and Collier, the men who had helped fix the bus the day before. The narrator asked Father Bernard what the noises were from last night, and the priest responded that he heard nothing and only said it was farmers to help calm the parishioners. Father Bernard and the narrator headed back to the house and the Land Rover drove away.

When the narrator returned, Hanny was still sleeping, while the other parishioners were at the church for the Blessing of the Oils and the Washing of the Feet. Hanny and the narrator decided to play at the beach for the day.

Analysis

This chapter explores the boundary between excessive and effective punishment. Hurley creates tension by clearly depicting Mummer's love for Hanny while simultaneously revealing her harsh discipline techniques. There is a clear parallel between Mummer's view on discipline and Father Wilfred's intensive but ostensibly loving measures to further his parish in their faith. The evocative language of this section, with phrases like "hiss of rain" (59), emphasizes the physical intensity of Hanny's punishment. The narrator withholds judgement during the description of the scene, and only states his opinion once Father Bernard raises the subject.

Father Bernard again stands in opposition to Mummer, yet he simultaneously understands and accepts her motives. Although he is formally in a position closer to the church, he is more lenient towards Hanny's behavior, which is consistent with his more individualistic approach to morality. Father Bernard is echoing Jesus's philosophy of forgiveness and attempting to convince the narrator of this viewpoint as well.

The narrator and Father Bernard's conversation also raises questions about the morality of Father Wilfred and Mummer's relentless quest to "cure" Hanny. The narrator feels that Hanny is not unhappy in his current state and that the trials he is forced through on the retreat are perhaps unnecessary. Hanny's illness creates a space where morality is blurred and the best possible outcome is unclear.

Finally, the bullaun provides another level of complexity to the narrator's conversation with Father Bernard. The archaic tool is symbolic of the group's shift from modern society to a rural, timeless area. It foreshadows the novel's focus on ancient customs that are not directly related to religion but possess a similar theme of hope and "unnatural" occurrences. Father Bernard frowns when the narrator asks him if the bullaun worked because he wants to emphasize the distinction between religious faith and faith in manmade objects that are supposedly imbued with power. This dichotomy between religion and superstition will be echoed in later chapters.

Discussion Question 1

How can Mummer's discipline style be described? Why might she discipline in this way?

Discussion Question 2

How is Father Bernard characterized in Chapter 8 and how is it similar or different to his characterization in previous chapters?

Discussion Question 3

What is the symbolic significance of the bullaun?

Vocabulary

curlew, bivalves, ammonites, bullaun

Chapter 8

Summary

Hanny and the narrator brought the rifle and several stuffed rats to the beach. Nothing had changed since the narrator's last visit to the ocean, apart from the addition of a spray-painted swastika on the side of a pillbox. Dead seagulls, tree stumps, driftwood, trash, and seaweed coated the beach's surface.

Hanny indicated that his headache was gone and he felt much better. The narrator repeated Father Bernard's opinion that Mummer was well-intentioned but afraid. The narrator and Hanny crawled into the pillbox. It was intended for protection against bombing, but was never used, as the Loney was not an important martial territory and the Third Reich never approached the Irish Sea.

Hanny and the narrator removed the sand from the floor and arranged the stuffed rats and toy soldiers on the ground. The narrator positioned the gun in a slit in the pillbox and watched the ocean through the sight of the gun.

The boys observed a seagull that became injured when the flock rushed away from the incoming tide. The narrator told Hanny that they had to kill the bird to take it out of its misery. As the boys exited the pillbox, hiding the rifle, they noticed a car passing by, and hid in the dunes to watch it. The car was the same one that had passed their bus when it had broken down, although now there was a woman in the passenger seat. The car reversed on the sand and paused. The woman sitting in the passenger seat applied makeup and appeared to be arguing with the driver, although the boys could not discern her words. The girl in the backseat attempted to intervene but was ignored. She looked out the window directly towards the narrator but did not see him.

Hanny realized that he lost his watch and they were about to look for it when the two adults exited the car. The man began smoking a cigar as the woman questioned him about what to do. The narrator learned that the two adults' names were Leonard and Laura. Leonard, was dressed in expensive clothes and wore aftershave. Laura fiddled with the trunk of the car, then called for Leonard, and together they took out a wheelchair and opened it. The girl from the backseat emerged and the narrator realized she was pregnant and probably about 13 or 14. She sat in the wheelchair and Leonard brought her to the edge of the road, Laura following behind. The narrator noted that Laura was dressed formally, in a style of clothing from the 1930s. Leonard, who walked with an awkward limp, began examining the pillbox. He had trouble climbing the pillbox and, once he reached the top, fell down onto the sand. He told Laura it was full of rats. She handed Leonard his discarded shoe, and he noticed Hanny's watch in the sand. He pocketed the watch, and when the narrator turned to tell Hanny, he found him watching the pregnant girl, who was still sitting in her wheelchair, stroking the injured seagull. The bird let the girl stroke him several times before flying away.

Analysis

Hurley again utilizes the physical landscape to make a statement about the Loney's effect on the characters. The empty beach and the pillbox that never served its function represent the neglect and isolation that permeates the Loney. The "botched swastika" (66) painted on the shed symbolizes the presence of evil on the Loney's shores, while descriptions like the "grey sea" (65) and "dumping ground for the North's detritus" (66) further highlight the Loney's unforgiving atmosphere.

For the boys, the Loney also represents a refuge from reality. At the Loney, the boys escape the parameters of an adult-controlled world, a place and their imaginations can take full control. The narrator states that their games feel more realistic at the Loney, because it is fully shut off from the regular outside world.

The arrival of the unfamiliar car disrupts the boy's self-imposed isolation and shatters the building atmosphere of independence from the outside world. The presence of adults engaged in adult-like tasks — driving a car, applying makeup, discussing options for travel — alters the world of the Loney for the boys. Their intense fascination with the people in the car arises not just from natural curiosity but from an attempt to create some sort of imaginative story out of the mundanity of the outside world.

The pregnant girl presents another twist. She is young, but her pregnancy twists her youthfulness and makes it clear she is not as innocent as the boys. She signifies another threat to the boys' self-contained world and again symbolizes darker forces on the Loney. She also represents a manifestation of the Loney — she is mysterious and clearly struggling. Her close connection with the seagull furthers this connection to the natural world.

Discussion Question 1

What does the pillbox represent to the boys?

Discussion Question 2

How are Leonard and Laura characterized? What do you think their relationship is?

Discussion Question 3

How does the presence of strangers on the beach affect the boys?

Vocabulary

pillbox, philtrum, hawthorne, blitzed, brogues, bladderwrack, gait, gammy

Chapter 9

Summary

The narrator mentions that he has not told Doctor Baxter about Moorings or the Loney, but that the doctor has noticed he is “harboring a lot of negativity from the past" (74). Since the narrator works in a museum, he feels that he lives in the past in some ways.

Shifting back to the story of the retreat, the narrator says that the group spent the next week trapped inside Moorings, waiting for the rain to stop. The group became restless from spending so much time inside, and each member found a separate task to occupy themselves. Only Father Bernard exited the house, taking Monro on a long walk. When he returned, Mummer informed him that Father Wilfred typically held prayer services throughout the day to prevent the parishioners from focusing on their hunger while fasting. Mrs. Belderboss encouraged Mummer to be more lenient with Father Bernard and stop comparing him so closely to Father Wilfred. Mummer replied that Father Bernard smelled like alcohol and that he should not have brought his dog. Farther told the group he found a hidden room behind a tapestry in the study.

The narrator recalls how he was sent to talk to Father Wilfred about becoming an altar boy at age 13. He met another altar boy, Henry McCullough, who was always assigned to duties “that required little or no wit” (81) such as holding towels or straightening candles. Father Wilfred began quizzing McCullough about the Pentential Rites and the order of the mass, and became irritated when McCullough failed to answer correctly. The narrator was able to answer these questions correctly, and he taught them to McCullough through repetition. After this test, the narrator was told to get a pyx, censer and chaplet from the office next to the vestry and return them to the priest.

The narrator found the required objects and noticed photographs of the Loney on Father Wifred’s desk. The narrator began examining the photographs with a magnifying glass left lying next to them, but was interrupted by the entrance of Father Wilfred and McCollough. As the narrator exited, he saw Father Wilfred sitting at the desk and examining the photo album with the magnifying glass.

Analysis

Chapter 9 is the most structurally complicated of the novel so far. The events take place in three distinct time periods — during the present day, during the retreat to the Loney, and during the narrator’s first day as an altar boy. These time periods are connected by their rich physical descriptions; each scene possesses an equally thorough amount of description and detail.

The narrator begins by describing spring at the Loney. The rain and mist cause the shorelines to flood, and the air becomes “permanently damp" (74). The Loney has retained its sense of despair and isolation, which is consistent with the narrator’s earlier

statements that it is timeless. The untamable wildness of the natural world continues to be the Loney's defining feature.

The events during the retreat focus more on characterization. The narrator reflects that his Mummer considers his grandfather a disgrace, and that she refuses to speak about him except to say he spent his adult life going to different bars. This provides another explanation for Mummer's behavior. Like the other characters in the novel, she has suffered significant brutality in her past. Mummer's reaction to the harsh nature of her childhood is to adhere strictly to principle she believes will provide a rationale for suffering. She does not believe in randomness and seeks to impose order onto the world around her. This fixation is further evidenced by her insistence on continuing with prayers even after Farther's discovery of the secret room. She opposes any disruption of order or reason. Mummer further believes that all boys should serve at the alter and consider the priesthood; she has told the narrator that she is jealous she does not have "the opportunity to be closer to God" (80) because she is female. This presents another interesting facet of her character — her faith in God is certainly absolute, and she refuses to criticize the church, instead blaming herself for her gender.

This chapter also explicitly reveals that the narrator is at least partially cynical about the church. He compares the church to a "mill or factory," stating its purpose is to "churn out obedience, faith or hope in units per week according to demand" (82). Even the Eye of God affixed to the steeple resembles an overseer watching a factory floor. This dreary description of the church counteracts Mummer's and Father Wilfred's view of its absolute goodness, yet it also reinforces their view that religion should be strict and focus on producing certain outcomes. Father Wilfred's emphasis on direct devotion to God is emphasized by the pictures in the book on his desk — Jesus being tempted by a horrific-looking Satan and Simeon Stylites, a martyr whom Father Wilfred regularly mentions in his sermons, praising his absolute devotion to God.

Discussion Question 1

What is the purpose of the shifts in time during Chapter 9?

Discussion Question 2

How is Henry Mccullough similar and different to the narrator?

Discussion Question 3

How does gender play a role in the novel, specifically in relation to religion?

Vocabulary

Penitential Rites, lectern, tabernacle, facetious, reredos, pyx, censer, chaplet

Chapter 10

Summary

Mummer woke Hanny and the narrator up early on Good Friday. The narrator looked out the window and saw Father Bernard propping a wooden crucifix against the gate. He said this cross is one of 14 that Mummer wanted Father Bernard to place around the property. Father Bernard leaned on the fence as he placed the cross in the ground and appeared tired.

Hanny reached into the cabinet for cornflakes, and Mummer reminded him they must fast until dark, after which they can only eat fish. Farther remarked that he had knocked down the secret door in the study and discovered a room behind it with a bed. He speculated the room may have been used to quarantine children with tuberculosis, as it had a barred window bricked over from the outside. He coughed loudly and said the dust had been irritating his throat.

The group went into the rain-soaked backyard and began praying. They circled Moorings, stopping at each of the 14 crosses and praying for each of the steps of Jesus's crucifixion. Afterwards, the narrator was allowed to take Hanny to a church service, but the pair instead went to the beach to find Hanny's watch. As they approached Coldbarrow, a slender albino cat darted past the boys.

The boys followed the cat, which ran toward Thessaly, the old house at the tip of Coldbarrow. As he approached, the narrator heard the bell in Thessaly's tower moving in the wind. He also saw the girl from the car at the Loney, still sitting in her wheelchair. Laura emerged from the house, wearing pearls and smoking a cigarette. The boys asked for their watch back and Laura invited them inside.The narrator felt an ominous, ghostlike presence inside the house. Hanny wheeled the girl, named Else, down a corridor lined with hooks. Hanny touched Else's hair and felt the baby kicking her stomach. Else told the narrator to look through a collection of items located above the chimney, where Leonard kept items that he stole. The narrator discovered a rotting sheep's skull with the optic nerve attached. Else then allowed Hanny to examine an encyclopedia, and suddenly kissed him. Leonard returned home and gave Hanny his watch, warning him about the shifting tides.

Analysis

Religious rituals play a more explicit role in this chapter than in many previously. Father Wilfred is uninterested in the placing of the crosses, physically expressing his exhaustion. His actions imply that Mummer is again the driving force behind the ritual and that Father Bernard would rather eschew traditional processes. His tiredness also indicates that he has been engaging in some activity other than reflection and prayer, and these odd behaviors echo Father Wilfred's mood swing on the prior retreat. In terms

of religious practice, Father Bernard's actions are increasingly distinct from Father Wilfred's and the dichotomy between their philosophies grows even stronger. For example, when Father Beranard asks the narrator if he slept well, and the narrator responds yes, Mummer sharply reminds him to say 'thank you for asking" (88). Father Bernard momentarily slows his brushing, perturbed by even this slight instance of reprimanding and by Mummer's drive to abide by Father Wilfred's rules.

At the beach, the narrator reflects that the farmers who have lived in this area for many years must constantly worry about the tides. These types of basic concerns — about physical safety and shelter — are far removed from the narrator's life. The Loney is his only exposure to rural life and to poverty, and his wonderment about the tides highlights his curiosity about this alternate lifestyle. Else, in particular, represents a completely different life than that of the narrator's. It is clear that she has experienced hardships and understands much more of the world's evils than the narrator does. The narrator also feels exposed by the large expanses of sand that are visible on the bay. His unease about the retreat in general manifests itself in this scene.

Thessaly is the cumulative representation of all the sinister and unnatural aspects of the Loney. It is desolate, ugly, and warped by weather conditions. Each physical description — and the subsequent descriptions of Leonard and Laura — heighten the sense of unease and suspense. The house's remote location and the dangerous tides separates it from even the Loney; it is the most detached location in the novel, both physically and metaphorically. The narrator physically senses this precariousness, thinking "No one had ever laughed there. It had a kind of airlessness, a heavy silence, that made it immediately unsettling" (94).

The kiss between Hanny and Else shocks the narrator. The kiss, however, is an expression of pure innocence and affection. Else recognizes Hanny's inherent goodness and there is an instant emotional connection between the two. Each is suffering in their own way; Hanny's disability and Else's pregnancy connect them, creating an unspoken bond. Leonard notices the kiss but says nothing, simply dabbing the lipstick from Hanny's lips. Leonard is a manifestation of corruption and cruelty, and refuses to respond to such a pure act.

Discussion Question 1

Explore the contrast between the narrator's unease and curiosity. Why does he decide to go to Thessaly, beyond seeing the cat?

Discussion Question 2

"I've done this before. It gets easier the more you have" (97). Analyze this quote from Else. How is it significant?

Discussion Question 3

Analyze Hurley's language when describing Thessaly. How does his specific wording contribute to the characterization of the Loney?

Vocabulary

quarantine, clapper, portico, russet, garbadine

Chapter 11

Summary

Mummer was very angry at the boys because they were late returning. The narrator was also upset that Else kissed Hanny, as he believed he could leverage the story of the kiss to gain popularity with his classmates.

Heading to the church, the group saw butterflies in the field and decided they were a sign from God that the pilgrimage would be successful. As they drove, the narrator contemplated the suffering in the world and how Mummer and Father Wilfred believed suffering was a gift from God that allowed humans to see their imperfections. He recalled that Father Wilfred would test McCullough about the lives of the saints and cut his hand with a ruler if he failed to answer. Father Wifred berated McCullough for being late and forced him to look up passages in the Bible, claiming he was a liar and must come to confession for his soul to be saved.

Analysis

The narrator's jealousy about the kiss reminds the reader that he is not an objective observer but is swayed by typical emotions and biases of someone his age. His mention of telling the story of the kiss to his friends is one of his few references to his classmates, and it indicates a desire to belong that might also influence his involvement with the church. The church serves as a social organization as well as a religious one; it provides a context for forming relationships and give structure to daily life.

The parishioners place great emphasis on symbols and signs; the narrator states that "signs and wonders were everywhere" (101). Father Wilfred consistently reminded them of the role that faith played in determining life outcomes. Similarly, Mummer told the boys stories intended to prove that "God had seen fit to reward the good and justly punish the wicked" (102). This provides further textual evidence that Mummer feels religion is a mechanism for obtaining benefits.

As the narrator ruminates about Father Wilfred, his punishment techniques are described in greater detail and the intensity of his method becomes clearer. He hates McCollough because he sees McCollough as possessing wealth that he is undeserving of. Father Wilfred believes everything must be earned and the thought of someone like McCollough being well-off when Father Wilfred grew up in poverty infuriates him. He is angry that God is not providing his righteous judgements in this instance. His intense violence when dealing with McCullough goes beyond any justifiable action for a religious figure and reveals a darker side of his nature.

Discussion Question 1

Why do the characters view the butterflies as a sign? What other natural elements of the setting could they interpret as signs and what might these signify?

Discussion Question 2

Could McCullough be considered a foil of Father Wilfred? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

How do social distinctions affect the characters' religious views? Provide details from the text to support your answer.

Vocabulary

exploits, discerning, inversely proportionate, inhumane, intercede, petition, affront, interred, brethren

Chapter 12

Summary

The group explored the local church, which, due to its secluded location, survived destruction during the Reformation period. At the front of the church was a "Doom painting," that contained scenes of intense torture in Hell. The narrator said that the senseless violence depicted reminded him of a school playground, as it was “ruled by the logic of children” (110).

The group sat in the pews for the duration of the two-hour Mass, during which Hanny and Mr. Belderboss fell asleep. Mummer clutched her rosary and Miss Bunce wailed as the priest described the various punishments of Hell.

After the service, the group went to a fish shop, according to a tradition established by Father Wilfred. The group noticed Clement’s Land Rover pull into the parking lot. Parkinson and Collier exited and the group speculated that Clement either loaned or sold them the car. Mummer attempted to begin a conversation with the two men but they did not respond.

On the bus ride home, Mummer and Miss Bunce argued about the freshness of the fish and whether they were allowed to eat it — Mummer and Father Bernard won, allowing that, according to the rules of the fast, fish may be eaten but not meat. Father Bernard saw Clement standing on the side of the ride and picked him up. The narrator stated that Clement was rumored to have spent time in Haverigg, a nearby jail.

Clement warned the group that some residents of Moorings were unhappy that the parishioners were at Moorings. Father Bernard replied that Parkinson, who he said was the local butcher, was very welcoming and bought him a drink at the pub when he stepped inside to get out of the rain. Clement replied that Parkinson was attempting to make Father Bernard feel obligated to him. Father Bernard pressed Clement as to why Parkinson could not be trusted, but Clement responded that he must return to his mother, and left the bus.

Analysis

The church’s gothic architecture is indicative of religious severity. Father Wilfred favored this church because it physically represents his viewpoint of religion. The wood is “blackened to ebony” and statues of saints stand covered “like ghosts half hidden in the shadows of the alcoves” (108). The architecture also reasserts the social aspect of church — just as the community surrounding the Loney is somber and decrepit, so is its place of worship.

This chapter continues to pay significant attention to nature, mainly in terms of the weather. Rain is a constant force on the Loney. It not only limits the character’s actions

but influences their attitudes. As the rain wears on, the characters' ability to effectively communicate and resolve decisions decreases. The rain increases their sense of isolation and confinement.

The graveyard associates images of death and sickness with the church itself. Death is a key part of religious thought, and the way death is represented carries significant weight in terms of the faith. By emphasizing the gruesome nature of death through the Doom painting, which depicts people with "limbs torn off...tongues nailed to trees and their bellies slit to feed the slavering dogs that obediently attended the devils" (110), the book symbolically emphasizes the potential negative consequences of death, or hell. The narrator spends a significant amount of time throughout the novel pondering the potentiality of hell as it is often a close presence.

Mummer and Father Bernard deviate from the novel's pattern by agreeing about an issue. This time, both characters favor the more lenient interpretation of their faith--both want to eat the fish even though it may technically violate the fasting rules. Father Wilfred also supported eating the fish. This scene provides textual evidence that Mummer is more concerned with Father Wilfred's opinions than with a true orthodox interpretation of her faith.

The group's attitude towards Clement is overly suspicious and is only detrimental to them. They stick to strict social norms and refuse to accept that Clement may actually want to help them.

Discussion Question 1

Research the Reformation and the time period when it occurred. How is Reformation related to Catholicism? What does its time period tell you about the age of the village church?

Discussion Question 2

How does the church's atmosphere affect the narrator's mood? Does the church affect Hanny?

Discussion Question 3

What is the relationship between Mummer and Miss Bunce? How do they affect each other?

Vocabulary

dispersed, amphibiously, atmospheric, clerestory, misericords, melange, despotism, lascivious, jaundice, rosacea

Chapter 13

Summary

The group was concerned by Clement's unusual behavior, but dismissed his claims. They felt that the pressure of looking after his mother was damaging his mindset. As Mummer and Mrs Belderboss prepared dinner, Farther examined figurines that he took from the secret room behind the study. His cough was worse, and Mummer warned him to stay out of the room.

Miss Bunce decided to go for a walk and asked if anyone would like to join her. Mummer declared that even though she wanted to go, cleaning the table was more important. Miss Bunce's fiancé accompanied her, and they brought Monroe.

The narrator went to his room, where Hanny was playing a game. Hanny showed the narrator an envelope that he took from Else's house. It contained several dozen ten-pound notes and a list of names: Hale, Parry, Parkinson, Collier. Frightened, the narrator said that Hanny must return the envelope the next day. The narrator heard sobbing and ran downstairs to discover Miss Bunce crying on the porch. The narrator followed Father Bernard and Farther, who were searching for David. They found him in the woods, and David told them that, while on their walk, he and Miss Bunce stumbled upon a man who hanged himself.

David said he would rather not show the group where the man was. Father Bernard said that he would go to the pub to use the pay phone, as the house had no phone. After debate, Father Bernard, Farther and the narrator entered the woods, Monro barking beside them. They found beer cans scattered on the ground and smelled the remnants of a fire and cooked meat. Finally they arrived at a clearing, where a dead animal sat on a burnt-out fire. They followed Monro's barking and found an effigy composed of a sheep skull, sandbags, wood, and wool blankets hanging from a tree. Father Bernard remarked that the figure may be meant to resemble Jesus, as there was a crown of thorns laced around the skull. The chest was made from what appeared to be an old rabbit hutch. A pig's heart stabbed with nails fell out of the hutch, and Monro attempted to bite it. The group quickly left, silently agreeing to tell no one about the disturbing sight.

Analysis

Clement's behavior provides another mechanism for Hurley to reveal disagreements and clashes within the group. The parishioners are divided as to whether Clement needs charitable assistance or not; Mummer reacts in astonishment and anger at Father Bernard's suggestion that it is their Christian duty to provide him with support. In Mummer's opinion (which was forged by Father Wilfred) there is no spiritual duty to help the Others, as they are removed from God and are outside of the influence of faith.

Therefore, this scene introduces another facet of the orthodox faith — it is more narrow-minded and restrictive than the liberal view. Father Bernard's approach would lead to greater charitable works which, regardless of their motivation, would be more in line with Christ's original teachings because they would be motivated out of kindness and love for one's neighbor.

Furthermore, Mummer's view persists even though Clement is clearly religious and is therefore technically not one of the "Others" that Father Wilfred described. Socially, however, he lies within the Other category — he lives among people who are in poverty and therefore must, according to Father Wilfred, be removed from God. This emphasizes the power of social distinctions in determining Mummer and Father Wilfred's classifications of faith. Mummer and Miss Bunce's disagreement over the walk is another symbol of the divide in their faith — Mummer, contrasting from her earlier uncharitable decision, is determined to prove that she is still more committed to Catholicism than Miss Bunce.

The discovery of the envelope serves to foreshadow the effigy. Symbolically, the characters are moving closer and closer to the evil that pervades the Loney, and the protections of their faith and urban proclivities are being eroded by the environment. Just as the Loney's waves wear away the beach and weather conditions wear away Moorings, the characters' urban, normal lives are beginning to fade as they become more acclimated to the strange world of the Loney.

The discovery of the effigy is a turning point in the novel; it symbolizes that the encroaching evil forces surrounding the characters have invaded their physical space and are no longer separate from them. Furthermore, the effigy is composed of materials sourced from or related to nature — a sheep's skull, wood, wool, a rabbit hutch, a pig's heart — thus distorting the purity of nature into a grotesque mockery of Catholic values.

Discussion Question 1

An effigy is, by definition, symbolic. What does this effigy symbolize beyond Jesus's crucifixion?

Discussion Question 2

How is Hanny's behavior childish in Chapter 13, and how is it mature? Why does Hurley create this contrast?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the details in this chapter regarding nature. How does the effigy distort nature?

Vocabulary

satchel, inevitable, coax, serpently, leering, hutch

Chapter 14

Summary

Father Bernard told the others that someone strung a blanket from a tree as a joke. Miss Bunce remarked that something like this would only happen at the Loney, and before Mummer could angrily respond, Father Bernard steered her away by the shoulders. He asked her if she could get him a bottle of brandy, saying it was for Miss Bunce's shock.

Miss Bunce sent David to pack her bags, insisting that she could no longer stay in the house and must leave immediately. Father Bernard convinced her to stay, saying that things will improve once the group visits the shrine.

The narrator returned to his room to find Hanny asleep, clutching the envelope of money in one hand and the pornographic pictures in the other. This reminded the narrator of an incident that occurred with Henry McCullough and Father Wilfred. One day, Father Wilfred instructed the narrator and a recently instated third altar boy, Paul Peavey, to collect as many stinging nettles as they could from the nearby graveyard, giving them gloves to do so. When the boys returned, Father Wilfred stated that onanists received the worst punishment in Hell, and accused Henry of stealing underwear catalogs from his mother's room. Henry begged for forgiveness, but Father Wilfred forced him to squeeze the stinging nettles in his palms. He warned the other boys not to tell anyone else about the punishment. As the boys exited the church, they saw Henry crying in front of a statue, his hands swollen. Paul laughed.

Analysis

The conflict between Mummer and Miss Bunce has escalated to the point that it is detrimental to the functioning of the entire group. Each is determined to prove their superiority not just to the other characters but to each other and, in a way, to Father Wilfred. Although both consciously recognize that Father Wilfred is dead, they are each determined to uphold his memory by emphasizing their commitment to his belief system.

Miss Bunce also attempts to wrest control through drama. She consistently acts out in order to draw the group's attention towards her; the discovery of the effigy is the point at which she most decisively gains the group's sympathy and she capitalizes on this by extending her reaction, claiming that she must leave the retreat immediately.

The narrator's discovery of Hanny holding both the envelope and pornographic pictures symbolizes Hanny's further descent into immorality. Hanny is maturing, and his condition is no longer enough to protect him from the temptations and dangers of the outside world. How much Hanny understands of what he is doing is unclear, but the narrator again accepts his actions at face value and does not pass judgement.

The narrator’s recurring reflections on Father Wilfred reveal the priest’s disproportionate hatred for McCullough. He focuses all of his attention on McCullough, simply enlisting the other boys to devise increasingly cruel punishments for McCullough. The stinging nettle punishment described is less of a technique for advancing faith than a torture mechanism that defies the very doctrine of Christianity. Father Wilfred hypocritically preaches about Christ’s love and strength, but is unable to exhibit similar characteristics in his own life. Paul represents the corruption of the Church as well, as he is ostensibly a model member of the church but is morally flawed. Paul demonstrates that formal status within the church, such as working as an altar boy, does not necessarily equate with a personal conviction for the church’s teachings.

Discussion Question 1

How does Miss Bunce's reaction to the effigy reveal a new facet of her character? How does it emphasize her previous characterization?

Discussion Question 2

Based on evidence from Chapter 14, how do you think Hanny and the narrator's relationship will be affected by Hanny's transition into adulthood?

Discussion Question 3

Research the mortal sins according to Catholicism. How does Father Wilfred's lecture to McCullough reflect or differ from Catholic doctrine?

Vocabulary

havoc, tabloids, nefarious, heathens, onanists

Chapter 15

Summary

The narrator became preoccupied by the strange effigy in the woods. He believed that the roasted animal was used to lure Monro to the clearing, ensuring the group would discover the hanging shape. The narrator slept with the rifle, although his sense of protection was not strong because he knew Parkinson and Collier would recognize that it was unloaded.

The narrator hid in the broom closet and listened to Father Bernard and Mr Belderboss drinking brandy. Mr. Belderboss began his confession, telling Father Bernard that he went to the cemetery very late one night to see Father Wilfred's grave and make sure the flowers had not been bothered. The police found him in the graveyard and took him home.

While in the cemetery, he saw a drunk woman wearing a coat but no pants. She was holding the flowers meant for Father Wilfred and kept thanking Mr. Belderboss, whom she called Nathaniel, for sending them. Mr. Belderboss tried to take the flowers from her and she began screaming. When the policemen on patrol heard the noise and came running, she disappeared. Mr. Belderboss felt conflicted as to whether or not he should tell Mrs. Belderboss about the strange event, and Father Bernard told him that God would provide him with the right course of action.

Mr. Belderboss also mentioned that he was concerned about Father Wilfred's choice to be buried away from St. Jude's cemetery. He said that after the retreat three years ago, Father Wilfred seemed to have lost his faith. Shortly before his death, he refused to speak to anyone and shut himself off from the world.

Mr. Belderboss exited and Father Bernard stared into space, deep in thought. Then he drank the remainder of both brandies and began reading a book. He looked up through the crack in the door, looked directly at the narrator, and continued reading.

Analysis

The narrator's ruminations on the effigy represent not only his preoccupation with the evil present in the clearing but his concerns about religion in general. "It was meant to frighten us into leaving. And if we didn't, what then?" (136). The narrator is adopting the mindset of a martyr, considering the implications of standing firm in his faith despite outwards pressure to reject it. The narrator is also unafraid of using the rifle to defend himself even if it means violating the tenants of his religion. This again demonstrates the subjectivity of morality — an action that would be immoral in one circumstances is acceptable under another.

The drunk woman that Mr. Belderboss encounters in the cemetery represents deviation from the church's values. She embodies both what Father Wilfred despises and fears becoming. Many of the characters have a complicated relationship with alcohol. Mummer's father was an alcoholic and despises drinking; Father Bernard has a weakness for alcohol and allows it to influence his actions. Ironically, Father Bernard is drinking alcohol during the confession.

Mr. Belderboss states explicitly that he fears Father Wilfred was losing his faith prior to his death. This a shared but, to this point, unspoken fear among the parishioners. Father Wilfred is a paragon of faith that the other characters strive to emulate. If he was indeed losing his faith, this calls into question all of the characters' commitments. This is particularly applicable for Mummer and Miss Bunce, who seem to value Father Wilfred's opinion over the doctrine of the church itself.

Discussion Question 1

St. Nathanael, also know as St. Bartholomew, was one of the 12 disciples (original followers) of Jesus and some scholars believe Jesus stated he was incapable of deceit. Use this information to analyze the graveyard scene. What does the drunken woman represent symbolically?

Discussion Question 2

How does Hurley's use of dialogue create suspense in Chapter 15?

Discussion Question 3

Compare and contrast Mrs. and Mr Belderboss's confessions. How are they similar and different? How does their confessions change the reader's perception of their marriage?

Vocabulary

dismissively, prying, grubby

Chapter 16

Summary

It stormed overnight and the strong winds knocked one of the locked outhouse doors off its hinges. In the morning, the boys found that the outhouse was filled with stuffed animals, the rejected works of the taxidermist. Squirrels and rabbits mainly covered the floor, two chimps were seated on a tandem bicycle in the corner, and bird skeletons hung from the ceiling. The boys also found spent bullet casings on the floor, as well as boxes of bullets in the drawers.

Father Bernard helped the boys remove the tandem from the outhouse and fixed it. Mummer insisted that the group wait for him to clean up and say grace before they could eat. At lunch, Mr. Belderboss examined a small, corked bottle with a gargoyle face carved into its surface. He speculated that there was some sort of liquid contained inside. The group talked about Father Wilfred, admiring that he studied at Cambridge and had gone on a trip to the Holy Land. They also mentioned that Miss Bunce was Father Bernard's personal secretary on the trip, which greatly bothered Mummer. Clement's mother arrived and brought firewood. The group was astonished to see that she was no longer wearing her glasses and that her eyes were a bright blue, with no cataracts. Her blindness was apparently cured.

Hanny and the narrator went to Thessaly. Leonard's car was parked outside but the house was silent. The boys entered the bell tower, which was drafty and empty. As they were exiting, they bumped into Leonard, whose working clothes contrasted with his usual formal attire. The narrator handed him the envelope of money, saying that he found it tucked inside the book Leonard's daughter gave Hanny. Leonard seemed puzzled by the mention of a daughter, but the narrator clarified that he was referring to Else. Suddenly, they heard a baby crying from the house. Leonard gave the narrator a few of the bills from the envelope and said that there was no reason for him to come back to Thessaly. He also told him that he should forget the names written inside the envelope. As the boys walked away, Hanny noticed Else standing in the window. She waved, but quickly left, as if someone had called for her.

Analysis

The violent storm echoes the internal chaos occurring within the parishioner's group. The confluence of ominous natural elements and the growing sense of isolation and hatred the group receives from the Loney locals creates an oppressive atmosphere, and the group members begin anticipating their return home.

The contents of the outhouse are further representative of this building animosity. The taxidermist's work opposes many aspects of the church. The church believes in burials; further, taxidermy borders on the attempt to provide a second physical life on Earth,

which starkly contrasts with the Church's views. The stuffed animals are disturbingly reminiscent of the effigy in the woods. These warped, failed replications of nature also indicate nature's absolute power over the characters — nature is impossible to capture and refuses classification. The weather conditions in the outhouse have destroyed even the stuffed animals, indicating that nature spares no mercy even on itself.

The narrator remarks that Father Bernard gives her a "curious look" when she says this. She says that Father Bernard suddenly realizes what the narrator has known about Mummer's faith for a long time: every ritual and tradition must be strictly followed, or her faith will collapse. The narrator thinks that Father Bernard begins to pity Mummer when he realizes this.

Discoveries of objects play an important role in the novel's overall function. Physical objects are core to the Catholic religion — the tabernacle, the Eucharist, even the church itself — and, similarly, objects influence the characters' actions throughout their time at the Loney. The bottle is closed off and mysterious, echoing the uncertainty surrounding the character's current situation on the Loney.

Clement's mother's cured blindness also reinforces the motif of miracles. The characters all want desperately to believe that a miracle can cure Hanny's illness. Clement's mother's sight appears to be a very similar miracle, although the character speculate that she may have received a medical operation.

The reader can infer that Else is not Leonard's daughter, which opens interesting possibilities for their relation. Leonard's disregard for the boys make it evident that he is concerned with personal benefit. He only passingly mentions Else and seems fixated on some larger objective. Leonard provides a foil for Father Bernard, who is earthy and welcoming. The sharp contrast between their behaviors highlights Father Bernard's goodness and makes all of the parishioners more sympathetic. The reader can see that, despite their failings, they are striving in some way to be morally correct, while Leonard makes no attempt to do so.

Discussion Question 1

"Inside was an ark of stuffed animals--a hundred or more" (142). The Old Testament of the Bible includes a story of how Noah filled an arc with all the animals of the world in order to protect them from a flood God created. How is Hurley creating a parallel between these two stories? Analyze in terms of both the imagery of flooding and the imagery describing the animals within the shed.

Discussion Question 2

The narrator believes that Father Bernard is beginning to pity Mummer for her rigid adherence to faith. Why is this a source of "pity"? How does this help characterize Father Bernard and Mummer?

Discussion Question 3

What is significant about Father Wilfred's trip to Jerusalem? Compare and contrast the priest's trip to the retreat.

Vocabulary

abridged, exasperation, contention, skirting

Chapter 17

Summary

The narrator eavesdropped on another confession, this time between Father Bernard and Miss Bunce. Miss Bunce began by telling Father Bernard that her last confession was three months ago, with Father Wilfred shortly before his death. She also said that she was the one who discovered his body, and that they were on bad terms when he died. The last time she saw him at the presbytery, he was acting paranoid and distracted. He tried to convince Miss Bunce not to marry David, seeming angry that she would have to move away from the church for David's new job.

After this conflict, Miss Bunce returned home and drank half a bottle of her mother's sherry. She called David but could not recall what she said to him. He came to her house and put her to bed.

Miss Bunce was worried that she would be sent to Purgatory, but Father Bernard told her that her guilt was creating a Purgatory on Earth and that she has already paid for her sins.

The narrator recalled that he had noticed Miss Bunce acting agitated and crying after the carol service that she spoke about. She had asked the altar boys if they had seen her umbrella, but they had not. After she left, Paul mocked Henry, saying that he probably imagined Miss Bunce naked. Father Wilfred entered the chapel and asks the boys if they had seen Miss Bunce. He noticed her umbrella hanging on a hook and went into the street, but hurried back to the presbytery when he could not find her.

Analysis

This chapter hints at the possibility of an illicit relationship between Father Wilfred and Miss Bunce. The subtext indicates that Father Wilfred's anger about Miss Bunce's possible marriage to David stems from its romantic implications and not from her potentially leaving the church. This raises an interesting point about the power of priests over their parishioners. There is a long history within the Catholic church of priests abusing their power to perpetrate heinous sexual acts. Father Wilfred, as an orthodox priest, is highly critical of sexual desires and believes they should be oppressed. His lust for Miss Bunce creates extreme cognitive dissonance for him and contributes to his mental deterioration. His request that Miss Bunce accompany him on a second trip to Jerusalem, and his mention that it is where he feels "safe," is his attempt to conceal his desire behind socially and religiously acceptable motives. Similarly, Father Wifred's condemnations of David are not based in any substantial social or religious evidence, providing clear support for an ulterior motive.

Father Wilfred's extreme anger over McCullough's "onanism" may stem from his own sexual frustrations regarding Miss Bunce. The boys perceive that Father Wilfred's

distress over Miss Bunce is more than spiritual, and Paul’s subsequent mockery of Henry stems from his anxiety over this issue.

The chapter again reinforces the symbol of alcohol. Alcohol is depicted as highly powerful temptation and is a frequent source of sin and conflict within the novel. "Drunks," such as Billy Tapper an the woman in the cemetery, are characterized as ultimate religious failures. They also directly contradict Father Wilfred’s belief in self-determination, as they often begin in social positions of wealth and power and fall to moral and financial depths. Miss Bunce is unaware of Father Bernard’s problems with alcohol while she confesses, and does not realize what impact her words may be having on the priest. Father Bernard states that he does not consider drunkenness a sin unless it leads to other sins, taking a more lenient view then Father Wilfred.

This chapter draws a direct parallel between the two priests -- just as Father Wilfred struggles with his sexual desires, Father Bernard struggles with his desire for alcohol. The priests are doubly confined by the moral strictures of their faith and by their attempts to resist temptation.

Discussion Question 1

Much of the novel has examined the intellectual aspects of faith; Chapter 17 looks more closely at how emotion impacts faith. How does Miss Bunce's confession reveal her emotional perspective on faith? How might emotions negatively impact one's adherence to their religion?

Discussion Question 2

What role does temptation play in Chapter 17? In your response, consider Hurley's language when describing alcohol.

Discussion Question 3

Describe Miss Bunce and Father Wilfred's relationship. Which character holds more power?

Vocabulary

purgatory, wrath, impertinent, brolly

Chapter 18

Summary

The group spent the morning collecting egg-shaped stones to fill their pockets with as part of the ritual. They then progressed towards Nick's Lane, a path through the woods where, inexplicably, no trees grow. They dropped their stones off a cliff and prayed.

On the return from the hill, Hanny noticed a ewe laying in the grass. Father Bernard realized the ewe was giving birth and helped remove the caul from the newborn lamb. The group remarked that Father Wilfred would know exactly what to say in this situation. They mentioned that, on the last retreat, they heard a golden oriole singing in the middle of a thunderstorm, and Father Wilfred had them all kneel and pray in response.

The narrator reflected again on Father Wilfred's strange behavior following their visit to the shrine. In the winter months of 1975, he barely spoke, stopped visiting the ill, and refused to answer phone calls. The Sunday after Christmas, he gave a long but incoherent sermon about martyred children. Afterwards, he asked the altar boys if they'd seen his diary. Paul told Father Wilfred that Henry was the last one in the room where the diary was kept, and Father Wilfred demanded to check Henry's pockets. Henry resisted and accidentally knocked Father Wilfred over. The boys left and Paul showed Henry his jacket tangled in a tree. Henry told Paul that he'd never return to the church, and Paul admitted that the book is hidden in the belfry. Paul biked away, and Henry told the narrator that his mother forced him to continue going to the church and that he was afraid of going to Hell. The narrator returned to Father Wilfred, who brooded about Henry and insisted that he only punished him out of love for his soul. He said that he would get the diary from the belfry and walked down the center aisle of the church, holding an antique sword from his office and muttering to himself.

Analysis

This chapter demonstrates the arbitrariness of the character's rituals. The characters feel immense pressure to find God and to feel God's presence on the Loney, a place that is purely natural and should theoretically be closer to the natural power of God. However, in their desperate quest to be consumed by God, the characters are willing to engage in practices that are counterintuitive and unproductive. The stone-throwing ritual is only vaguely connected to the beliefs of the Catholic church. At this point, the characters are simply participating in rituals for their structure and comfort, not for a concrete purpose.

The ewe strengthens the motif of pregnancy present throughout the novel. Pregnancy signifies new beginnings and natural regeneration. As the "begats" in the beginning of the Old Testament in the Bible demonstrate and Mary, the mother of Jesus, demonstrate, childbirth is a central tenant of Catholicism. In this way, the pregnant ewe

bolsters the spirits of the group, as they at last have a physical symbol they can attach meaning to. Further, at the Loney, nature is dominant, and the natural process of pregnancy is not concealed or altered whatsoever the way it is in civilized London society.

The flashbacks have also been steadily increasing in depth and frequency throughout the novel, and at this point the text devoted to flashback is equivalent to that of the central narrative. This chapter depicts McCullough's firsts step towards independence when he semi-inadvertently stands up to Father Wilfred's bullying. While McCullough's power increase, Father Wilfred's is slipping away, and he relies on the concrete, written power of the diary to supplicate him.

McCullough symbolizes the negative aspects of the character's reliance on faith to find purpose. When Father Bernard criticizes McCullough, it deeply affects him, as his self-worth is largely tied to the church. He is unable to extract himself from the church's power due to his family. In this way, McCollough and the narrator are linked — the novel explores the connection between the requirements of the church and of the family.

Discussion Question 1

What is the function of flashback within Chapter 18? How might the flashback connect the main story?

Discussion Question 2

How is McCullough characterized in Chapter 18? How is Paul? How do their behaviors contrast?

Discussion Question 3

Research the significance of lambs in Christianity. Why might Hurley have chosen to include a lamb in the novel?

Vocabulary

incoherent, martyred, convulsing, apocalyptic, belfry

Chapter 19

Summary

When the group approached the church, they found that the statue of Jesus on the cross had been smashed and the church door was chained shut. Miss Bunce suggested having Mass outside and the town priest complied. Halfway through the service, the police arrived to examine the damage, and the narrator noticed Clement watching them anxiously.

After Mass, Clement joined the group for dinner and said grace flawlessly. He said his mother had an operation and was no longer blind. He also said that the farm was doing poorly and they were being forced to sell it. Mummer brought in a large cake depicting the face of Jesus, with 12 marzipan balls representing the 12 disciples. The group drew leaves and Clement got the shortest, so he was chosen to throw the marzipan ball representing Judas into the fire. He did this reluctantly, and as the group applauded, Miss Bunce noticed a screeching noise. The group stared out the window and saw Collier's dog dragging a small animal across the lawn. Munro became extremely agitated and knocked over the earthenware jar Mr. Belderboss had been fascinated by. It cracked open and revealed the missing Jesus figurine, urine, human hair and nail clippings. Clement stared at the remains of the jar and said that he would like to go home now.

Clement went to the hallway to get his coat and the group argued about his behavior and what it meant. They agreed that Clement must have had to sell his farm to pay for his mother's operation. The narrator went into the hall, where Clement told him that Parkinson and Collier went to Coldbarrow on New Year's Eve and starting ringing the bell at Thessaly. He said the jar that was accidentally smashed was meant to keep witches away from the house, and that the group was in danger and must stay away from Parkinson and Collier. He was about to explain when they heard a loud knock on the door.

Analysis

The narrator utilizes nature to create a contrast between the characters' expectations and the reality they face. "The deep blue calmness" (173) of the sea and "the warm sunlight, the soft shadows on the fields..." (173) evoke one of the novel's view positive descriptions of the natural world. In this chapter, nature is depicted as pure, while man is a destructive force that erodes it.

However, the chapter signals that evil is approaching the characters. Hurley spends a significant amount of time examining "evil" and what it entails. Nature, although it is cruel and relentless, is not evil because it lacks harmful intent. The same principle that made Hanny innocent even as he pulled the trigger on the rifle makes the ocean

innocent even as it kills fishermen. However, characters that are aware of God’s laws and violate them are characterized as evil. The sighting of the effigy and even the language of the chapter contribute to a growing sense of unease and trepidation. Although the effigy was intended to deliberately frighten the group, the vandalized church extends this aggression to affect the wider community. Further, when Collier's dog kills the baby lamb, he is destroying one of the group's last vestiges of innocence.

Hurley intentionally chooses Clement to draw the Judas leaf at dinner. Judas betrayed Christ three times in the day leading up to his crucifixion. Clement is a similar position; as the link between the locals and the parishioners, he possesses the power to betray and condemn the characters. He understands that Parkinson and Collier are involved in some sort of plot, but refuses to provide the characters with details.

The objects that the book describes become increasingly sinister throughout the book and also reveal layers of complexity beneath the surface. The seemingly simplistic object Mr. Belderboss examined is actually a sinister force that contains frightening religious implications. It appears to be attempting to destroy or at least detract from Jesus's power. This object raises hints of the occult or other anti-religious forces.

Discussion Question 1

How does Hurley use imagery to describe the vandalism on the church? How is the description similar and different to that of the effigy?

Discussion Question 2

Clement refers to "witches" when he sees the shattered object. How does witchcraft relate to Christianity? Research historical perception of witches (such as religious motivations behind the Salem Witch Trials) to support your answer.

Discussion Question 3

What role do objects and architecture play in establishing the mood and tone of the novel?

Vocabulary

derisive, inscription, albeit

Chapter 20

Summary

A group called the Pace Eggers -- six local men including Parkinson and Collier -- stood at the door. The narrator mentioned seeing them on prior retreats and being disgusted by their strange fairy-tale costumes and props. Clement was very alarmed when he saw them. Father Bernard admitted to the narrator that Parkinson had mentioned at the pub that he would bring the Pace Eggers to Mooring, but he assumed that he was not serious.

The group performed a play Collier was Brownbags, a beggar who collected money from the other characters. Next followed Saint George with Mary, who was played by the altar boy from the village church service. David and the Turkish Knight, the play's villain, fought over Mary, and the Turkish Knight was killed. Mary cried over his body, saying that he was her true love. David asked the village doctor, Doctor Dog, to rescue the Turkish Knight from death. Doctor Dog gave the Turkish Knight a "brew of holy breath" (193) and the Turkish Knight began dancing and singing. A final character arrived, dressed in a black cloak and holding a single candle, with a red-painted face and horns. This character, Devil Doubt, pinched out the candle and ominously asked where God was now.

Hanny ran away in terror, and the narrator searched for him. When he checked the kitchen, he found Parkinson and the elderly man they had seen from the bus walking across the field. The man now looked much more healthy and youthful, and Parkinson told the narrator that he was dying from the drink but has improver. He told the narrator that if he and Hanny came to Thessaly, they could heal Hanny like they healed the man. In return, the boys must keep the envelope of money they found a secret.

Analysis

The Pace Eggers enter the home both aggressively and subtly, echoing Parkinson and Collier's approach to frightening the parishioners. Their behavior is violence masquerading as social niceties. When they perform for the parishioners and dance with the women afterwards, they are relying on social norms to conceal their intentions and allow them to operate. Their grotesque dress and exaggerated behavior echoes the disturbing vividness of the effigy in the woods and the objects hidden in the house. They also take advantage of Father Bernard's leniency twice — once at the pub, and again when they perform their play. In this instance, Father Bernard is failing his parishioners in his role as "shepherd." He is both unwilling and unable to protect the other churchgoers from the unwelcome advances of the locals.

The play's very premise mocks religion. It uses drastic, exaggerated costumes to caricature religious events. Extremely significantly, the play also provides

foreshadowing for the following chapters. The resuscitation of the Turkish Knight cannot come without consequences — it was not enacted by God, but by Devil Doubt, who represents the evil that is present at the Loney.

Finally, the narrator and Hanny have their first direct confrontation with Parkinson. Parkinson is characterized as both ominous and knowledgable, a source of information in the bleak darkness of the Loney but also a potential enemy. His comments about "healing" Hanny echo the process in the play and indicate that there are consequences attached.

Discussion Question 1

How does Hurley use imagery to represent the Pace Eggers' play?

Discussion Question 2

Are Parkinson and Collier's characters in the play consistent with their actual behaviors or personalities? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

What is Devil Doubt meant to signify? How is Devil Doubt presented in the parishioners' lives?

Vocabulary

homely, doorstepped, vulnerable, scabbard

Chapter 21

Summary

The narrator found Hanny asleep underneath his bed, surrounded by drawings of Else. One of the drawings showed Hanny and Else with a baby standing between them, and the narrator decided that Hanny must think Else's baby is his. He stated that Hanny would not remember what would happen at the shrine tomorrow until they arrived there. "I knew what they would make him do at the shrine tomorrow but he wouldn't understand even if I tried to warn him" (197). He also stated that he would be forced to keep Hanny calm throughout the ordeal.

He recalled that last year, Hanny was forced to drink a mug of holy water. As he choked on the water, he emitted a noise, but was not able to speak beyond that. The group felt that Hanny's speech was possible if they prayed harder.

The narrator told Father Bernard that they should leave today, but Father Bernard, although sympathetic, said they must remain to take Hanny to the shrine. The narrator left and Mummer talked to Father Bernard. She said that he did not understand the needs of the congregation, that he was opening old wounds by discussing Father Wilfred, and that he must be more severe and traditional, like Father Wilfred. She left in anger and Father Bernard poured himself a drink.

Analysis

This chapter characterizes Hanny much more strongly than many previously. Hanny's desire for Else is a specific manifestation of his desire for human contact and strong relationships. Hanny is extremely isolated, even more so than the narrator. Father is distant and Mummer is far more concerned with curing Hanny's illness and guiding him in his faith than she is with his actual wellbeing. The narrator is Hanny's only true friend, and even this relationship is repeatedly strained by their other family members and by the church.

This scene clearly depicts Hanny's limitations. He is only capable of focusing on one facet of the situation is unable to sense the danger surrounding him. His naïveté is not just a result of his disability but of his sheltered existence. Mummer and the narrator dictate his daily actions, and Pineland pays him little attention; neither setting provides him with the right amount of stimulus and assistance to help him.

The scene that the narrator describes at the shrine is psychological torture under the guise of religion and love. This scene provides true textual evidence that Mummer and Father Wilfred are willing to push beyond the boundaries of morally acceptable behavior in order to cure Hanny. Just as Hanny can only process a single situation at a time, they are single-mindedly fixated on curing his illness.

Simultaneously, the danger in the novel continues to escalate in this chapter. Even Father Bernard, who is fully willing to accept other's flaws and deficiencies, is recognizing the potential danger in the situation. The narrator attempts to obtain an escape route by planting the idea of leaving the retreat in Father Bernard's mind, but is unsuccessful, and resigns himself to facing the upcoming dangers. In many ways, the Loney prepares him for confrontation while causing the issues in the first place.

The recurring tension between Mummer and Father Bernard also reaches its peak in Chapter 21; "…there can only be success in a church when the priest and his congregation are in harmony," Mummer states (202). Having fully subscribed to Father Wilfred's orthodoxy, she believes the congregation is steeped in his methods and unable to change. Father Bernard believes he is accusing her of intentionally sabotaging the congregation. He refuses to change his belief system simply to match her strict expectations, and uncharacteristically stands his ground against conflict. However, after Mummer leaves, he drinks alcohol again, indicating that his inner battles are also becoming harder to fight.

Discussion Question 1

Does Hurley argue that an act can still be immoral if it is motivated out of love? Support your answer with textual evidence.

Discussion Question 2

How does Hurley use language to emphasize the scene involving the well? Pay specific attention to his choice in verbs.

Discussion Question 3

Analyze Father Bernard and Mummer's conflict in Chapter 21. Who do you believe "won" the argument?

Vocabulary

bounty, nosing, bishopric, hoopla, apathy

Chapter 22

Summary

The next day, Mummer and Mrs. Belderboss prepared Hanny for the shrine by washing his face and hands. Hanny kissed his hands, indicating he thought they were going to see Else, but the narrator told him they were going to see God. Mummer gave Hanny a new, crisp white shirt with an embroidered cross, and Mr. and Mrs. Belderboss gave him a candle blessed by the bishop.

On the walk to the shrine, Father Bernard reminded the narrator not to be too disappointed if the miracle does not happen. The group arrived at the shrine entrance, which was empty, although a woman used to sell information leaflets there. The final path to the shrine was lined with grottoes in honor of saints and holy men. The group was disappointed to find a smashed statue of Saint Francis. Further along the path, they encountered a well that was beautiful on their last visit. Now, the flowers and candles were gone and the well was cramped and dank.

Father Bernard filled a chalice with the holy well water, and each of the group members drank from it. When Hanny was offered the chalice, he panicked and ran away. Mummer dragged Hanny back, and Father Bernard suggested taking him again tomorrow, but Mummer insisted he must drink now. She grabbed a jam jar filled with dead stalks from the side of the well, plunged it into the water and forced Hanny to drink while he struggled away. “What’s the matter with you? Don’t you want to get better?” she said (215). Hanny, choking, spat the water into her face, and she shoved the jam jar back into her pocket. Everyone left the shrine, except Farther, who stared at Mummer in shock.

Analysis

The group’s physical preparations for Hanny to visit the shrine are reminiscent of Jesus’s physical preparations before his crucifixion. In many ways, the entire process is similar to crucifixion in that its outcome is predetermined and the other characters feel like pawns in a process dictated by a higher power. Further, Jesus washed the disciples’ hands and feet in the same manner that Mummer and Mrs. Belderboss now wash Hanny. The final reference to Christ comes in the presentation of Hanny's gifts, which echoes the presentation by the three wise men.

The main function of Chapter 22 is to reveal Mummer’s intensity regarding Hanny. She forces him to drink water that is “black and silky-looking with a smell of autumn deadfall and eggs” (212). Even after each of the other characters recognize that she is overstepping her boundaries, she relentlessly pursues her goal and forces Hanny to continue drinking the water. She is willing to risk Hanny’s physical safety — potentially his very life — at merely the chance to cure him. This fully reveals that she is not

entirely focused on religion. If she was truly dedicated to Catholic principles, she would have mercy on Hanny and respect his decision to stop drinking the water.

Hurley continues his technique of using the physical setting to describe the symbolic meaning of the scene. He describes “a statue of Saint Francis that had fallen over and smashed” (210) and “hedges [that] had gone wild” (211). The shrine’s decrepit appearance, compared to its former beauty, highlights the fact that the characters’ worlds have shifted. No matter how hard the parishioners try, they cannot retain Father Wilfred’s presence in their life.

Discussion Question 1

Analyze the dialogue within Chapter 22. How does its escalation contribute to the scene as a whole?

Discussion Question 2

How does Chapter 22 characterize Hanny? Do his actions indicate innocence or independence?

Discussion Question 3

How does Hurley use imagery to depict the intensity of Chapter 22? How do the images of nature contrast with the characters' actions?

Vocabulary

machismo, pearlescent, crusader, subdued, rutted, throttled, magnesia

Chapter 23

Summary

Miss Bunce and David packed their things and caught the train at Lancaster, despite Father Bernard's protests. Hanny went to sleep, and Mummer entered his room with a mug of tea, which she poured the holy water from the jam jar into.

After Hanny drank the tea, Mummer invited the rest of the group except Father Bernard into the room and they knelt and prayed for Hanny. Mummer and Farther began an argument. Mummer thought that Father Bernard believed that Father Wilfred took his own life and that he might start rumors about Father Wilfred. Farther thought they should tell the police if there were any suspicions that Father Wilfred committed suicide. Farther also told Mummer she should accept that Moorings was not helping Hanny.

Farther then reveals that he found four names scratched into the wall in the room behind the study, each with a line scraped across it. He also found letters in a box, from the taxidermist addressed to a governess. The entire house was used for quarantine for the children, who all died. The taxidermist kept insisting that the governess take the children to the shrine, even when it was clear they would not get better. Mummer accused Farther of losing his faith and attempting to ruin hers.

The chapter suddenly cut forward in time when the narrator states, "Hanny has changed beyond all recognition since then, but if I do see anything of the old him it is always through the eyes" (227). He says that, when Hanny put on his gorilla mask during Mummer and Farther's argument, the narrator saw a fear in Hanny's eyes that he would later see again when the narrator was arrested outside his house. "A fear that I was going to be taken away and I wouldn't be able to protect him" (228). He says that Hanny's wife and children cannot protect him in the same way that the narrator can.

The narrator describes a conversation he had with Doctor Baxter. Apparently, Hanny pays for the narrator's visits to Doctor Baxter. The narrator had been sitting outside Hanny's house at all hours of the day and a neighbor called the police on him. The narrator had invented various threats that Hanny was supposedly receiving, making them up so he could have a reason to protect his brother. However, the narrator is now beginning to realize the flaws in his logic, and Doctor Baxter is pleased with his progress.

Analysis

The characters have lost the sense of optimism and hope they possessed at the beginning of the novel. Miss Bunce and David refuse to continue staying on the retreat, too alarmed and disgusted by Mummer's actions and the general ominousness that surrounds the trip.

Mummer is undeterred by the other characters' condemnation of her behavior. She still attempts to force Hanny into drinking the holy water, completely uninterested in receiving his input about the healing process. Further, Mummer's refusal to repent signifies her departure from the principles of the faith. Similarly, her failure to communicate with Hanny, coupled with the way she overlooked his suffering at the shrine, call into question her love for Hanny. Mummer's childhood suffering due to her drunk father is manifesting itself in the form of an obstinate endurance that disregards morality.

Father Bernard, on the other hand, is willing to accept that the ritualistic strength of Moorings is false and the sense of hope that the characters have cultivated over the trip is purely constructed. "It's not about faith…It's about knowing when to admit defeat," he says (227) He recognizes that Hanny's illness is simply a puzzle or game to Mummer, something to be sorted out; his cure is an accomplishment, not a miracle.

The narrator even compares Hanny's expression while sleeping to Father Wilfred's corpse, evoking imagery of death and hopelessness. The character recalls that Mummer seemed unsure if Father Wilfred would truly go directly to heaven. This uncertainty reveals that even Mummer believes on some level that outward displays of piety do not guarantee the inner moral goodness that Catholicism values. Father Wilfred upheld the rituals and structures of his faith, but his cruelty and potential suicide contradict these action. Hurley deliberately paints a somewhat vague picture of Father Wilfred — it is unclear whether he is morally upright and struggled to be good, or if he is truly heartless and represents the cold power of the church.

Either way, Father Bernard represents an opposition to Father Wilfred, and at this point in the novel, Mummer is frustrated by this and desperately hoping for a return to the emphasis on rituals and signs that might justify her behavior at the shrine."I've never met a priest so flippant and carefree. He makes a mockery of everything we do," Mummer says (222), explicitly revealing her hatred for Father Bernard. She also feels that he should be sent back to Ireland to be with "his own kind" (222), revealing that social and class distinctions separate Father Bernard and Mummer and that she holds prejudices, again counteracting her faith.

Chapter 23 also exhibits a rare shift outward to the frame story. The narrator's current delusions are revealed more fully than ever before. "…[Hanny] still needs me. It's obvious," he says (228). At this point in the novel, the narrator's religious faith is weakening, and he grasps for another structure to give him purpose and guide his actions. In this case, he chooses the protectorate role and refuses to relinquish it. His special connection with Hanny gives him a similar sense that a special connection with God would — a feeling of belonging, acceptance and responsibility. Doctor Baxter, who represents the caustic voice of realty, reminds the narrator that Hanny is "stronger than you think" (230).

Discussion Question 1

How is Mummer and Farther's relationship characterized in Chapter 23?

Discussion Question 2

How does Doctor Baxter advance our understanding of the narrator? What insight does he provide that the other characters cannot?

Discussion Question 3

How is Hanny represented in Chapter 23? Find imagery to support your answer.

Vocabulary

draughtsman, waxwork, interlaced, interrogation, blustery, slender

Chapter 24

Summary

The narrator woke up in the night to discover that Hanny had slipped away. He laid towels on the floor so the narrator would not hear him walking and left treats for Monro so he would not bark. The narrator biked on the tandem into the rain, convinced that Hanny had left to visit Else at Thessaly. He saw Hanny carrying the rifle and heading towards Thessaly, but they were separated by the incoming tide. He also saw a large tree that had explicably bloomed too early.

The narrator attempted to run on one of the pathways towards Hanny but was knocked into the sea. He swam through the freezing water, choking on it several times, and was beginning to drown when Hanny pulled him out by the rifle strap. The narrator, infuriated that Hanny snuck off without him and that they would not be able to return to the house until morning, threw Hanny's gorilla mask into the sea. Hanny struck him with the butt of the rifle and walked across the heather towards Thessaly, determined to see Else. The narrator followed, too exhausted to try to stop him. Suddenly, a dog darted past them and attacked a nearby hare. At the same time, two men emerged from the mist, watching the boys.

Analysis

Chapter 24 reinforces the recurring suggestion that Hanny is capable of far more than the other characters believe he is. Throughout the novel, the extent of Hanny's abilities is a source of tension between the characters, particularly Mummer and Father Bernard. Hanny's effective escape demonstrates that he has the ability to plan and scheme. Hanny's escape is certainly morally questionable, and this calls into question the narrator's opinion that Hanny cannot be punished for his earlier immoral acts as he did not have malicious intent. At the same time, however, Hanny is motivated out of love — he wants to see Else and her baby — and is therefore pure in his intent. This creates a sense of confusion within the narrator as he feels his role as protector being called into question.

As the plot reaches its climax, the violence escalates. The narrator evokes his near-drowning in vivid detail, pulling the reader into his panicked experience. "I swallowed mouthfuls of salt water and choked it out in bouts of desparate coughing," he states (233). When he emerges, he attacks Hanny instead of thanking him, again twisting the expected reaction, just as when he did not punish Hanny for firing the rifle. This echoes the point discusses earlier, that Hanny is now capable of distinguishing right from wrong.

Discussion Question 1

"It's always my fault when you do something stupid. You do know that, don't you, Hanny?" (234). What is the significance of this quote?

Discussion Question 2

Does Hanny understand that Thessaly is a dangerous place? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

How does the narrator try to fulfill his responsibility to protect Hanny in Chapter 24?

Vocabulary

briny, gnarled, garland, declivity

Chapter 25

Summary

The men were Parkinson and Collier. Collier pulled the dog away from the hare and chained it. Parkinson took the rifle from Hanny. The narrator told them that he and Hanny were going home to London today, and that they would swim to get back to Moorings, but the two men just laughed. The narrator told them that they could take whatever they want from Moorings once the group left, and they became angry at his insinuation that they are thieves.

Parkinson and Collier took the boys to Thessaly, where Leonard was loading the car with Clement's help. Leonard questioned Parkinson if it was really necessary to do this, but sighed and allowed them inside. The narrator was stunned by the gravity of the situation and did not attempt to fight or run. They passed by the cellar door and heard the baby screaming from inside. Hanny kissed his fingers, and the narrator explained that he wanted to see Else. Leonard responded that Else was not his daughter, and that both she and Laura had been paid and left. The men also revealed that they framed Clement for arson and that was why he was in jail.

Collier said that his dog bit off his hand, but that it was now back. Parkinson said that he had throat cancer, but it disappeared. Leonard's arthritis was also cured. Collier grabbed Hanny's arm, and as the narrator attempted to free him, Parkinson shot Hanny in the thigh. Clement begged to go home, but Parkinson pointed the rifle at him, and he and the narrator carried Hanny downstairs.

Analysis

The narrator's attempts to escape Parkinson and Collier highlight his youthful naivety and his inability to deal with this charged, dangerous situation. Parkinson's casual physical handling of the narrator indicate his power; he appears unconcerned about the boys and is determined to deal with them efficiently. He speaks with "mock concern" (239) and is condescending towards the boys. The dialogue allows Hurley to take a step away from the narrator's close perspective and reveal the severity of his predicament--Parkinson and Collier are truly dangerous and have complete control over him. The narrator attempts to respond with "bravado founded entirely on fear" (239), hoping to retain the illusion of power and protection that he bases his identity off of.

This chapter also emphasizes evil's inevitability. Parkinson and Collier insist that the boys are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, and seem unconcerned that the boys do not deserve to be harmed. This directly contradicts Mummer and Father Wilfred's opinion that religious faith will determine good and bad outcomes in life. For Parkinson and Collier, who are decidedly anti-religious, suffering is simply the outcome of random processes.

Finally, this chapter most fully departs from reality. Parkinson, Collier and Leonard were cured of grievous illnesses by a type of dark magical ritual. They shoot Hanny in order to force him to stay at the Loney and force the narrator to accept their proposition of healing. Parkinson and Collier believe that, if the boys are drawn into the black-magic plot, they will never tell anyone about what occurred so as to avoid implicating themselves. In a sense, the men are purchasing insurance, as they do not want to risk the boys revealing their evil to the outside world.

Discussion Question 1

What do Parkinson and Collier feel towards the narrator and Hanny? Hatred? Indifference? Another emotion, or a range of emotions?

Discussion Question 2

Are Parkinson and Collier being at all merciful in Chapter 25? Why or why not? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Discussion Question 3

How does Hurley use metaphor to describe the seriousness of the boys' predicament?

Vocabulary

prise, misting, gawping, arthritis

Chapter 26

Summary

The story jumps forward two months to June and the narrator's final exams. The narrator was unsure about what to do after he graduated, seeing work as just a repetition of the dull routines of school. Mummer was pressuring him to study theology and go to the seminary, and the narrator felt too weak to assert himself since he was unsure about his own goals.

The narrator stated that Collier and Parkinson did something to Hanny that cured his shattered leg. Hanny returned to the Pinelands facility, and the narrator stated that he had regressed since the retreat, although his parents ignored Hanny's increasingly childish behavior. The narrator had also been upset and distant over the past two months.

The narrator came downstairs because he hears Mummer dropping a plate. The narrator asks if anything is the matter, and Hanny replies with, "Nothing, brother" (247).

Mummer called Father and Mr. and Mrs. Belderboss, who rejoiced over the miracle and credited the shrine for it. Later, Father Bernard came, and he and the narrator discussed the situation. Father Bernard believed "something happened to you and Andrew there at that house on Coldbarrow, and it wasn't anything to do with God" (251). The narrator wanted to let the others believe that Hanny's speech really was an act of God. He revealed that he found Father Wilfred's diary and it confirmed that the priest had lost his faith in God. He questioned Father Bernard if the death really was an accident, and Father Bernard seemed uncertain. Father Bernard said that, when he was a priest at Belfast, it was very difficult to manage the different secrets people told him in confession. He believed being a priest was like being a firefighter, and that it did not matter how Father Wilfred died anymore, because everyone believed that he had come back and blessed them through Hanny.

The narrator reflects that Father Wilfred fell from the belfry tower with a sword in his hand, and the police assumed it was accidental. One day, the interim priest who was working while the bishop searched for Father Winfred's replacement sent the narrator to the belfry to check on the pigeons he believed were roosting there. The narrator did not find any pigeons, but he saw Father Wilfred's robes folded in the corner, along with a crucifix, a Bible, and his diary.

Analysis

By suddenly shifting forward in time at the exact moment of the story's climax, Hurley creates suspense and adds an additional layer of complexity to the plot. He also reveals that the events in the cellar do not ultimately significantly impact the character's life, as he still attends school and still does not feel driven or motivated in his actions. Despite

surviving a life-threatening experience, the narrator still feels unable to resists his mother’s plan for his life. Just as the narrator characterized church as a factory, he sees schools as an industry as well, churning out graduates.

The narrator then reflects back on Coldbarrow, which emphasizes the role of the frame story in the novel’s events. By narrating from the future, the narrator creates distance between himself and the situation and thus de-escalates the scene’s inherent tension. The narrator increases this distance by simply stating he "still wasn’t sure what had happened at Thessaly."

The next section of the chapter is shocking despite the fact that the frame story established its inevitability. The "miracle" completely shifts Mummer and Farther’s attitudes, transforming Mummer into a dancing woman filled with joy. Ironically, it is only after Hanny is cured that we fully see the pain his illness inflicted on his family members.

Hurley does not stop at a single shocking moment in this chapter however — he also reveals that the narrator had stolen Father Wilfred’s diary from the belfry and confirms that the priest lost his faith. The contrast between the success of the miracle, which is meant to be the ultimate manifestation of religious faith, and the concrete proof that Father Wilfred no longer a believed in God create a dissonant effect. However, the narrator and Father Bernard understand there is no such dissonance — Hanny’s miraculous recovery is the product of dark magic, a product of evil, not of the divine benevolence of God. Hurley contrasts the narrator and Father Bernard’s disillusionment and sorrow with the extreme, faithful joy of the other characters.

Father Wilfred's funeral does not last long. “It seemed an absurd ending to a life,” the narrator says (259). This again emphasizes the characters' lack of faith. Things happen just as they are -- Father Wilfred's death does not carry any weight beyond its practical implications.

Discussion Question 1

How does Hurley use suspense and dialogue to heighten the emotional intensity of Hanny's speech?

Discussion Question 2

What are the implications of the narrator's disillusionment with school? How do his feelings relate to religion?

Discussion Question 3

How has Father Bernard's view on religion demonstrated in Chapter 26?

Vocabulary

prelude, acquiring, intestinal, thrummed, spite, diffused, latterly

Chapter 27

Summary

Farther joins the narrator and Father Bernard, telling them that Hanny is going to read to the group inside the house. Father Bernard tells the narrator he must get rid of the diary, and then they go inside. However, shifting forward again to the present day, the narrator admits that he never got rid of the diary and has read it many times over the years. He describes the day in which Father Wilfred began to change his behaviors.

Father Wilfred felt a compulsion to go the ocean and believed it was a message from God. However, once there, he felt uneasy, but found comfort in the idea that God has conquered the lonely wilderness. He reflected on the mysteriousness of nature and how that could guide him in the priesthood.

Watching seagulls on the beach, he felt disgust and thought about the “people of the Other world” (266) who have lost faith in God and felt no accountability for their actions. Then he thought about his relationship with Miss Bunce, and says “She couldn’t be his housekeeper without being his lover also” (267).

Suddenly, he saw boots in the water, and ran forward to find a drowned man—Billy Tapper, the town drunk. Indecisive, the priest attempted to grab Billy’s body, but Billy was dragged away by the tide and his corpse slipped into a trench, disappearing. Shocked, the priest suddenly felt the absence of God at the beach. “Here there was only existence coming and going with an indifference that left him cold,” (272) he said. He searched dunes, channels, and rock pools along the beach, but found nothing.

Analysis

As he approaches the beach, Father Wilfred is thinking about how all of nature is connected to God and that God imbues every aspect of the natural world with his power and beauty. “And down here on the beach, even though it was bleak and deserted, God was still at work” (264). However, Father Wilfred’s disgust with the seagulls directly contradicts his supposed faith in the natural world. He does not appreciate all facets of nature, instead dividing into good and bad the same way he divides people into religious and not. At the beach, he felt uneasy, but found comfort in the idea that God has conquered the lonely wilderness. He reflects on the mysteriousness of nature and how that can guide him in the priesthood.

Watching seagulls on the beach, Father Wilfred feels disgust and thinks about the “people of the Other world” (266) who have lost faith in God and feel no accountability for their actions. By referring to the “people who lived in the esurient underworld” (266), Father Wilfred draws a clear distinction between people of faith and people who lack faith. He believes that religion is not only a personal choice but a social factor that

divides the world into different classifications. Father Wilfred has sympathy for people who lack faith but his pity for them is also condescending.

This chapter also provides further textual evidence of Father Wilfred's opinion that he God dictates rewards and punishments for people on Earth. "The sinful no longer worried they would be punished by God…it was up to him to interpret and judge the world as it truly was" (266). Father Wilfred's main goal is to provide accountability and structure for people throughout the world.

Father Wilfred also rationalizes his lust for Miss Bunce. "She couldn't be his housekeeper without being his lover also" (267) he states, acting as if morality has no effect on the issue. Ironically, he is attracted to her due to her piety. He refers to her as a "a beacon of light in the presbytery" (267) but seeks to dull her light by ending her upcoming marriage simply to satisfy his selfish desire of keeping her in the church.

The discovery of Billy Tapper is the novel's most symbolically important moment. At this point, Father Wilfred's perception of faith itself is altered completely. Shocked, the priest suddenly feels the absence of God at the beach. "Here there was only existence coming and going with an indifference that left him cold," (272), he says. He search dunes, channels, and rock pools along the beach, but finds nothing. Father Wilfred realizes that the Loney is simply a cold place of natural beauty and lacks the presence of God. Its danger, its beauty, its power, all simply exist.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast the imagery that Father Wilfred uses to describe nature before and after Billy's drowning.

Discussion Question 2

Reevaluate Father Wilfred's behavior in light of this event. Why do you think he became so withdrawn? Why do you think he had pictures of the Loney on his desk?

Discussion Question 3

How does setting influence Chapter 27? What role does setting play in Father Wilfred's mentality?

Vocabulary

egret, buntings, panorama, interdependencies, bisected, esurient, permissive, petulant, potent, iniquities, sousing

Chapter 28

Summary

Hanny read a passage from the Bible while the group watched in amazement and Mummer sobbed with Farther’s arms around her.

The narrator says, “I’ve let this part until last, but it must be set down as well as everything else” (275). He states that Doctor Baxter has encourages him to look at the big picture of life rather than the minutiae, but that he now has no choice and must consider the details. He does not care what Doctor Baxter thinks, particularly after seeing the note "classic fantasist" written about himself in Baxter’s files. The narrator has thought about the cellar steps over and over for the past 30 years, remembering dragging an unconscious Hanny to a stained mattress on the floor. He saw medical instruments in a bowl on the floor and realized that Else had given birth there.

Leonard and Clement told the narrator to leave but he refused, wanting to be with Hanny. Clement dragged the narrator to the top of the stairs and they waited for an hour or two. Finally, Leonard called them back down to find Leonard, Parkinson, Collier and Collier’s dog standing inside a chalk circle. Hanny was lying on the mattress with the baby next to him. The baby did not appear human. Hanny was no longer bleeding and was able to stand and walk to the narrator, although he did not appear to recognize him.

Parkinson brought palm leaves toward the group, having apparently stolen them from Moorings when the Pace Eggers visited for Easter Sunday. He offered one to Leonard, who laughed and said he was not part of the draw. Collier, Clement, the narrator, and Hanny each took a leaf, and Clement began to cry. Hanny drew the shortest leaf, and Clement protested, saying it was unfair. Parkinson disregarded him and handed Hanny the rifle, who took it in a daze. Clement hesitated and then took the rifle from Hanny. Clement told the boys to leave and as they walked up the stairs they heard him praying for mercy and forgiveness.

Analysis

The narrator deeply distrusts others and relies only on himself. He is irrational in this passage, and the extent of his delusions is revealed more clearly, calling into question his reliability as a narrator. The reader is also given much greater insight into his writing process and the frame story as a whole. “I’ve left this part until last, but it must be set down as well as everything else” (275), he says reminding the reader that he has been consciously orchestrating the organization of the novel. He states that Doctor Baxter has encouraged him to look at the big picture of life rather than the minutiae, but that he now has no choice and must consider the details. He does not care what Doctor Baxter thinks, particularly after seeing the note "classic fantasist" written about himself in Baxter’s files.

This chapter is climactic and reveals the secret at the novel's core. Through no fault of his own, Hanny has been drawn into the dark magic ritual and is now part of it. Else's baby is a type of demon which has taken each of the character's illnesses and incorporated them into its body. This strange, unnatural process links Hanny and the other characters with the very opposite of religion.

Discussion Question 1

How does Chapter 28 work to conclude the novel?

Discussion Question 2

What does the baby, and the language used to describe the baby, signify?

Discussion Question 3

Research the significance of palm leaves to Catholicism. How does the usage of palm leaves in Chapter 28 characterize Parkinson and Collier?

Vocabulary

bludgeoned, stalactites, scalpel, forceps, swaddling, graciousness

Chapter 29

Summary

The narrator says that Coldbarrow is all over the television. The police have launched a murder inquiry and have taken two local men in for questioning. Newspapers show pictures of Thessaly tumbled to ruins. The narrator wonders how long it will be before Parkinson, Collier or Clement are pictured. He speculates that they are now in their seventies or eighties.

The narrator enters the museum where he works, mentioning that his coworkers think he is a recluse and that they are correct. The narrator retreats to his workspace and sits at the desk, which he has moved to the window in order to watch people's shoes as they walk by. The narrator begins rebinding and re-sewing an old encyclopedia of Scottish flora and fauna. One of his coworkers, Sarah, enters and tells him the museum is closing work early for the day because of the snowstorm. The narrator insists he has too much work and chooses to stay, not pausing from his work until three in the afternoon when Jim, the custodian, knocks on the door. Hanny is behind him.

The narrator and Hanny drink tea and talk briefly about Doctor Baxter. Hanny is encouraged by the narrator’s progress and says that God will heal him. He also mentions that the church has been crowded every day of the week and that they always light a candle for the narrator.

Then Hanny brings up the mentions of Coldbarrow in the news. He confesses that he has been having strange, shadowy memories about their stay at Coldbarrow. He mentions the shrine, which Mummer talked about constantly, but also a pressing feeling of guilt. He vaguely remembers Thessaly and holding a gun. He says he wishes Mummer and Farther “were still around” (292) and the narrator agrees.

Hanny invites the narrator to visit his house, and they board the tube together. The narrator thinks that the police will never believe that Hanny fired the rifle. They would believe him, however, when he says that they were running away when they heard the gunshot echo across the Loney.

Analysis

This chapter reveals the narrator’s ultimate sacrifice for his brother. Over the past decades, he has been keeping Hanny’s secret and protecting his brother. He is fulfilling his protectorate role in the greatest way that he can. This chapter provides rationale for the narrator's actions, but it is still clear that he is overstepping his boundaries. Over the past years, Hanny has been unaffected by the evil occurrence and is able to have a family and a life in the church. This provides a more optimistic interpretation of the previous chapter's event.

The narrator’s now-reclusive nature is a product of the pressure from keeping this secret and from concealing his lack of faith. He also lacks trust in other people, which is why he refuses to connect with his coworkers.

Much in this chapter is unresolved. Mummer’s role in either of the boys’ lives is unclear, and she is no longer alive. Finally, the murder inquiry hints at possible future conflict to come.

Discussion Question 1

What is the importance of time to Chapter 29? How does time influence the narrator's emotions?

Discussion Question 2

How does the narrator's work atmosphere reflect his internal state?

Discussion Question 3

How does Hurley use the dialogue between the brothers to characterize their relationship?

Vocabulary

syndicated, grainy, fastidious, reclusive, plaintive, emasculated

Characters

The Narrator

The narrator, who goes unnamed throughout the novel, is the story's protagonist. He is a middle-aged man who works at a museum, lives alone, and attends therapy at his brother's request. The narrator is largely capable of functioning in society but is unable to form beneficial relationships and holds a delusional obsession with protecting his adult brother Hanny. The narrator seems satisfied with his current life and expresses anger at Doctor Baxter, his therapist, for not accepting his delusions.

The story mainly focuses on the narrator's teenage self in 1976. At that time, the narrator is heavily involved with the church and serves as an altar boy; he is also responsible for looking after Hanny, who is mute and disabled throughout the main narration. The narrator and Hanny have an extremely close fraternal bond and are able to communicate through a system of masks, objects and body language.

The narrator is observant and curious, often noticing details of his environment or facets of other people that the other characters do not observe. His curiosity often leads him to act against the moral guidelines of his faith; for example, he regularly eavesdrops on confession services throughout the novel. He is also highly obedient, as he allows both his mother and his priest to dictate his actions.

The narrator seeks to gain control and purpose throughout the story. He revels in "protecting" Hanny and prizes their close bond because he sees their relationship as a means of increasing his own power. As an adult, the narrator refuses to relinquish this protectorate role, despite its negative impact on his own life. The narrator also becomes increasingly disillusioned throughout the course of the novel, losing faith in both the role of the church and the authority figures around him.

The narrator is not completely trustworthy, as he is deeply scarred by the plot's events, and is relating them from many years in the future. However, he keeps many of his own observations quiet and the text is more descriptive than opinionated. His observational nature and his youth allow him to serve as a funnel for describing the events of the story; furthermore, his closeness to Hanny allows him access to the story's parallel plot regarding Hanny's developments and the secrets manifesting themselves in the Loney.

Hanny

Hanny is an adolescent who is mute and has severe, unspecified learning disorders. Much of the novel's action centers around Hanny, but as he is unable to speak or express himself, he is also one of the novel's most mysterious characters. Hanny's transition from childhood to adulthood brings tension to the story and causes conflict between the characters. He also tends to draw out facets of the other characters' personalities that would remain hidden otherwise. The novel's central twist hinges on

Hanny, and he undergoes the most radical transformation and is the most dynamic of the characters.

Hanny's actions blur the line between moral and immoral. The narrator believes that Hanny cannot be punished for his immoral acts because he has no intention to cause harm. Mummer believes that Hanny must be strictly punished and held to high standards despite his disability.

At his core, Hanny is a kind character who desires love and strong relationships. He is easily scared by conflict between loved ones and wants a strong, stable family. However, Hanny is forced to confront issues with his family and struggles to find the security he needs.

Father Bernard

Father Bernard McGill is a priest was recently assigned to the Smiths' parish, St. Jude's, and he leads the religious retreat. He is a morally complex character. Although he truly does want to help the parishioners and improve their lives both spiritually and practically, he is limited by his inner flaws. Father Bernard represents the intersection of the public and the church. He is bound to represent the church as an institution, but his history and his personality characteristics are more representative of the common people that make up its believers. He eschews the strict formality that the church endorses in favor of more direct and open spiritual communication, which is a result of his outgoing personality, his ability to empathize, and his impoverished background. His liberal approach contrasts sharply with Father Wilfred's orthodoxy. He is also an astute psychological observer capable of analyzing character's mindsets, as evidenced by his effective advice during frequent confession services.

Father Bernard's background working at impoverished churches is significant throughout the novel. His past involved living a pious and difficult life in Ireland, controlled by the church and other social institutions. His involvement in the church may have been his attempt to escape the difficulties of his childhood.

Father Bernard has a drinking problem which negatively impacts his behavior and prevents him from realizing obvious truths. He is not as invested in his parishioners' spiritual wellbeing as he could be, and they therefore react against him, particularly Mummer. Much of Father Bernard's actions, such as his visits to the local pub and his internal narrative, are not directly relayed in the text as they are outside the observational scope of the narrator. By the novel's end, Father Bernard has lost much of his faith in religion and is disturbed by the evil that he believes occurred at the Loney.

Mummer

Mummer, or Esther Smith, is Hanny and the narrator's mother. She has been an extremely devout Catholic since childhood and is committed to upholding the rituals of her faith. Her background is similar to Father Bernard's -- she struggled with poverty

and her father was an alcoholic who was rarely home -- although she actually grew up near the Loney. Mummer relied on religion for strength and purpose during the troubled years of her youth, which established her view of Catholicism as a win-or-lose game; she believes that her piety will grant her wishes and that sin will result in failure.

As a result, Mummer places less of an emphasis on the underlying principles of Christianity than on its exterior displays. She is greatly concerned with appearances and perceptions, and her win-or-lose attitude colors her faith with strict binaries. In Mummer's view, religion proves that good people will be rewarded and bad people will be punished. As such, she sees religion as a mechanism for "fixing" perceived issues, such as Hanny's illness, rather than a relationship with God. She is willing to go to extreme lengths when punishing her children, and she is highly focused on exhibiting her piety as compared to others, particularly Miss Bunce, who serves as her rival.

Mummer's actions cause friction between her and each of the other character's. Throughout the novel, the characters become both increasingly frustrated and sympathetic towards her. Mummer does possess great love for her sons, particularly Hanny, but this love manifests itself in harsh discipline. She represents the antiquity and rigidity of the church, and her refusal to change or adapt is a subtle critique of the church.

Father Wilfred

Father Wilfred served as St. Jude's priest for many years before his unexpected death. He was a strict, highly orthodox priest who believed in rigid adherence to rituals and intense discipline. Although Father Wilfred is not alive at the time the novel takes place, his presence is nearly tangible because of is immense influence on the other characters. Father Wilfred's unexpected death — which the characters believe, some subconsciously, was a suicide — has a shattering effect on the parish and the story largely deals with the emotional turmoil following his actions. Father Wilfred represents the immovability of their faith, and when his own adherence to the faith is called into question by the suicide (the Catholic church considers suicide a mortal sin), the parishioners struggle to cope.

Mr. Beldberboss

Mr. Belderboss is an elderly church parishioner and Father Wilfred's brother. He accompanied the Smiths' and Father Wilfred on the earlier retreats. He is a voice of reason throughout the story and struggles to accept his brother's death.

Mrs. Beldberboss

The wife of Mr. Belderboss and another church parishioner. She is kind and well-intentioned, striving to find a balance between Father Wilfred's orthodox religious

approach and Father Bernard's more liberal tendencies. She also serves as a mediator between Mummer and Miss Bunce's conflicts.

Farther

Farther is depicted as far more absent than Mummer. His function to the story is based on his discovery of the secret room. He rarely adds input to the religious training or general upbringing of his sons, and supports Mummer in her decisions. However, he is a dynamic character and grows more mistrustful of Mummer's harsh actions throughout the novel. He is also exhibits the same strong sense of curiosity as the narrator, and he works to discover the meaning of the hidden room.

Clement

Clement works as a housekeeper for Moorings. He is a farmer who lives alone with his blind mother and is responsible for caring for her. Clement is deeply religious but conflicted. In many ways, he demonstrates his inherent moral goodness, but he eventually becomes entangled in an evil plot. He attempts to warn the characters about the perils of the Loney but is ineffective. The characters are highly suspicious of Clement but also feel sympathy for his isolated existence and admire his commitment to helping his mother.

Parkinson

Parkinson is the town's local butcher. He is a rough man who uses intimidation tactics on the other characters and seems to dislike their presence on the Loney. He remains mysterious throughout much of the novel, but the other characters become increasingly fearful of him. Parkinson is manipulative and takes advantage of Father Bernard's kindness and drinking habit.

Collier

Collier is a rural worker and handyman. His temperament is highly similar to that of Parkinson's, and they are often seen together throughout the course of the novel. Collier leads a lonely and difficult existence and is unafraid of evil. Along with Parkinson, he is the novel's main antagonist.

Else

Else represents innocence in the face of evil. She is a pregnant girl brought to the Loney in order to give birth to a baby that will be used in Collier and Parkinson's dark-magic ritual. Little to no information is given on Else's background, and she is only present for a fraction of the novel. Her kindness towards Hanny and her innocent

affection for him highlight the vestiges of her innocence. However, her pragmatic approach to the evil surrounding her shows that she has become desensitized to acts of cruelty.

Leonard

Leonard is one of the least complex characters. He is represented as inherently evil and seems to hold little regard for others, actively attempting to harm them. He is even cruel towards animals and may be categorized as psychopathic. Leonard’s specific role in the black-magic plot is unclear, but he is one of its central figures.

Laura

Laura is Leonard’s accomplice and possibly Else’s mother. She may be using her daughter in order to gain something. She is indifferent towards the narrator and Hanny and is largely self-involved. She is also characterized as wealthy, indicating that she may be financially benefitting from the black-magic scheme.

Miss Bunce

Joan Bunce is Mummer's religious rival. She is Father Wilfred's assistant, which generates jealousy and resentment from Mummer. She attempts to assist Father Bernard in helping the retreat run smoothly, but she resents the fact that Mummer chose the location successfully and that the group did not choose to attend Glasfynydd. Miss Bunce is also easily discouraged and frequently wishes to leave the retreat early. In large part, she is truly religious and wants to help the other characters achieve their spiritual goals. She is also unaware that Father Wilred is romantically interested in her.

Billy Tapper

Billy Tapper is a local alcoholic who used to be a teacher. The characters are disgusted by his fall from grace and believe that he has turned away from God. Billy served in the war and suffers continuously throughout the novel.

David

David is Miss Bunce's fiancé. He has a more moderate approach to religion and supports Miss Bunce in her decisions and in her rivalry with Mummer.

Doctor Baxter

This character is only present in the frame story. He is the narrator's therapist, who was hired by Hanny. He is depicted as materialistic and fails to understand the religious motivations behind the narrator's actions. He helps the narrator come to terms with his irrational decisions and hopes that Hanny and the narrator will be able to restore their relationship.

Symbols and Symbolism

The Loney

The most significant symbol in the novel, the Loney represents the all-consuming power of nature and nature's indifference to man. The Loney is frequently the site of drownings and deaths, and its tides regularly kill fishermen and others. These deaths occur absent of morality, as the Loney is only operating according to natural principles and has no connection with ethics or spirituality. The Loney simply exists, separate from all constructs and institutions, and its power cannot be harnessed or quantified. Even the dimension of time seems to be irrelevant at the Loney.

The Loney is also a guiding force in the landscape and thus the lives of the people who live at Coldbarrow. The Loney controls and restricts their actions, and its desolate landscape represents the desolation and moral depravity of the people that live along it. The Loney is the site of Father Wilfred’s spiritual breakdown because it reveals nature’s raw existence and the nonsensical, unpredictable results of a purely biological world.

The Loney’s rapid, dangerous tides and the isolated beachfront also represent complete removal from society. The narrator and Hanny are able to play richly imagined games at the Loney that feel realistic because they are removed from the rules that govern the outside world. The very factors that make the Loney a symbol of spiritual crisis for Father Wilfred make it a symbol of freedom and power for the boys. The Loney’s indifferent power can have different meanings for the characters depending on their interpretations of it.

Water/Rain

Water symbolizes many concepts throughout the novel--isolation, danger and secrecy. In one sense, the constant rain at the Loney limits the characters' activities and forces them inside, thus marking the rain as a symbol of confinement. From the bus ride to the church visit, the rain prevents the characters from exploring their surroundings and gaining a deeper sense of the Loney. The rain works as a shield that guards the true Loney from outsiders. The ocean, another embodiment of water, extends this theme. The characters are unable to truly understand the Loney because the tides constantly shift to conceal it.

Finally, the holy water, which typically represents the power of healing, instead emphasizes the characters' problematic fixation with the rituals associated with their faith. Thus, Hurley contrasts the world's typical association with water -- renewal and purity -- with its actual symbolism in the novel.

The Rifle

The rifle symbolizes power and detachment from society. In London, Hanny and the narrator would never have access to such a powerful weapon. They live in a world strictly controlled by rules, structures, and institutions. At the Loney, the rifle becomes a secret source of power. It symbolizes the boys' freedom from the prior world and entrance into a world where their actions have serious consequences.

The rifle is also used to symbolize Hanny's growth throughout the novel. At the outset, Hanny fires the rifle at his brother, but since it is unloaded his actions have no consequence. However, the rifle is also used at the novel's conclusion to perpetuate the ultimate evil. When the rifle fires at the end of the novel, Hanny loses all vestiges of innocence and is inextricably linked to darkness.

The Ewe

The ewe symbolizes the intersection of nature and religion. Pregnancy can be interpreted as a simply biological function, yet it also have significant religious implications. Childbirth is literally required for life and is one of the founding principles of biology. Further, Mary is revered in Catholicism for giving birth to Jesus. The role of the mother in religion and biology is central. The lamb of God is also a significant part of Catholicism and means being a child of the Lord. As a maternal figure, the ewe links the two competing forces affecting the characters' lives and symbolizes their struggle to reconcile both aspects.

When the parishioners see the ewe, they immediately interpret it as a sign of success for Hanny's ritual at the shrine. The characters want to interpret the ewe as a religious symbol and allow their desire to dictate their perception. As the story progresses, the narrator and the priests would be more likely to see the ewe as simply an animal fulfilling one of its biological functions.

Father Bernard assisting the ewe in childbirth further emphasizes this intersection. In his role as a priest, Father Bernard represents the church and Catholicism as an institution. The ewe represents natural processes and the world of the wilderness.

The effigy

The effigy symbolizes religious corruption and distortion. Jesus, the central figure of Catholicism and a paragon of pure religious success, is mocked by the effigy. The pig's heart takes the "heart of Jesus" and transforms it into a dark and disturbing symbol of death and pain. The crudely assembled materials that compose the effigy mock the flesh and blood of Jesus, which is rejoiced and praised in every Mass. This complete reversal of meaning fully symbolizes the extent of Parkinson and Collier's moral depravity. It transfigures religious ideals into dark warnings.

Billy Tapper

Billy Tapper symbolizes moral disgrace and represents the "Other" that Father Wilfred believes in. He does not hold himself morally accountable and appears to make no attempt to better himself or overcome his addiction. He also attempts to expose the sheltered, religious boys to his immoral world by giving them the pornography. In this sense, Tapper is echoing the religious theme of the Devil tempting Jesus in the desert. More broadly, he represents the temptations and sins that the church discourages.

However, Tapper allows Hurley to more fully explore morality and what composes such a concept. Tapper was in the war and has likely suffered emotional pain; he may even be suffering from PTSD. In Father Wilfred’s original view (fully supported by Mummer), such pain is irrelevant because it is a punishment from God. However, when Father Wilfred sees Tapper drowning, he loses his faith and subsequently recognizes the error in his assumptions about Billy.

Quarantine Room

The quarantine room is a dual symbol: it represents the isolation that the characters face and the dangers of the Loney. The children that were quarantined at Moorings all eventually died because the shrine was ineffective in curing them. This indicates to all of the characters except Mummer that the costs of staying at the Loney outweigh the benefits. The children died because their taxidermist father was unable to accept that the Loney could not save them. Mummer refuses to recognize this and continues to place her faith in the religious conception of a quarantine.

Quarantines also echo the isolation that the characters experience while at the Loney. By definition, a quarantine involves loneliness and removal from the outside world. Although the characters are not ostensibly quarantined, they experience the same effect.

Father Wilfred's diary

Father Wilfred's diary represents the concept of managing the truth. As Father Bernard states, priests must sometimes "manage the truth" in order to make their parishioners happy. Father Wilfred attempts to accomplish this by describing his concerns and fears in his diary but not relating them to his parish.

Bells

The bells symbolize activity and industry. Whenever bells ring in the novel -- at Thessaly or in church -- action quickly follows. Bells have a connotation of warning or celebration within the Catholic church. In the novel, the bells indicate that danger is approaching.

Stuffed Animals

The taxidermy profession symbolizes the manipulation of time because it involves preserving animal bodies. In effect, the taxidermist physically contradicts death by creating the stuffed animals. This is what the quarantine was also meant to accomplish--reversing the effects of preserving people. Most significantly, this is also what the parishioners hope to accomplish in their retreat. The symbol also relates to the larger atmosphere at the Loney, which is one where time is distant and easily changed.

Settings

The Loney

The Loney is a secluded and dangerous coastline located in northwestern England, between the Wyre and the Lune rivers which empty into the Irish sea. At the Loney, high tide occurs twice daily and is extremely powerful, regularly killing fishermen. The beach contains various decrepit structures such as a "pillbox" intended for defense during war. Few people venture onto the Loney due to its inhospitable conditions, but the characters find it conducive for a religious retreat. Historically, families believed the sea air benefitted sick children and used the Loney as a quarantine site. The group hopes the site may have a similar effect on Hanny.

The Loney's isolation and ominous power make it a defining factor in the story, both in terms of plot and symbolically. Rain and other dangerous weather conditions are constant, often restricting the characters from venturing outside and thus fostering tensions between the group. The Loney's isolation and its distance from their native London also create a sense of removal from society and the institutional rules that dictate the character's lives.

Hanny and the narrator associate the Loney with childhood memories and imagination. Since it is so isolated, adult rules and even time itself become distorted, granting the children unprecedented power in their play and giving them a space they consider their own.

Finally, the Loney is such a forlorn place that the natives who do live there are extremely wary of strangers. The Loney is secluded and unwelcoming enough to be the ideal location for nefarious deeds, and the characters are unaware of how much the natives dislike their presence.

Moorings

Moorings is the mansion where the characters stay during their retreat. It provides most of the surprises and secrets that the characters encounter throughout their trip. Moorings was formerly owned by a taxidermist who utilized a secret room behind the study as a quarantine chamber for children sick with TB. The characters find other disturbing objects within the house, such as a rifle under the floorboard, a nativity set figure locked in a vial with human fluids, and a shed crammed with stuffed animals.

Thessaly

Thessaly is another mansion, this one located at the edge of the beach. It has been abandoned for many years, but Leonard and the other villagers take advantage of its remote location to carry out their disturbing magic. The house is where Else gives birth

to her baby, which is a central part of the sacrifices. Thessaly is where the climax of the novel occurs and where Hanny loses his innocence.

St. Jude's Church

The narrator's flashbacks center around St. Jude's. He states that St. Jude's is architecturally imposing and its physical appearance echoes its purpose of educating people in religious philosophy and providing them with hope when they need it. Father Wilfred dies when he falls from the belfry of the church.

The Shrine

The shrine is described as forlorn and decrepit, but the other characters reminisce that it was once beautiful. This is where Hanny is forced to swallow holy water in hopes of producing a miracle cure for his muteness.

The museum

In the frame story, the present-day narrator works at a museum, analyzing historical documents. He works in a forlorn, isolated basement, which echoes the remoteness of the Loney.

Themes and Motifs

The Power of Religion

Through its emphasis on differing approaches to Catholicism and the subsequent interpersonal conflicts these approaches generate, The Loney examines how religion controls both behavior and thought processes.

The church's teachings serve as the basis for the characters' individual philosophies and opinions. Catholicism as interpreted by Father Wilfred promises not just rewards in the afterlife but rewards on Earth. The characters feel that, if they are pious, they will be justly rewarded with personal benefits from God, and if they sin they will be punished before death. Similarly, the parishioners feel pressure to have God's presence manifest itself in their lives. For example, Mummer's behavior on the retreat is not solely motivated by her desire to help Hanny, but by her desperation to receive proof of God's intervention in her life. She is willing to go to great (even dangerous) lengths in an attempt to justify her beliefs.

The confines of the church reveal fundamental personality differences between the characters and spawns conflicts. Most significantly, differing approaches to the philosophy of religion cause extreme tension between the characters. The more orthodox characters believe in an approach based in rituals and rites. The more liberal characters are focused on establishing a relationship with the Lord. These different views between the characters create tension within the group because neither side is willing to allow the other to practice the way they wish. The question of which religion to practice and how to practice it has historically resulted in conflicts on a major scale. By examining this issue through the microcosm of a small parish, the author is able to explicitly examine the benefits and drawbacks of religion on a larger scale.

Parkinson, Clement and Collier take a third, and far more extreme, viewpoint towards religion. Although Catholicism was a significant part of their life, they eventually turn towards mocking and distorting faith. The book equates a lack of belief with moral depravity; thus it argues that religion is, at least in part, necessary for morality.

The novel does not attempt to condemn or support religion or Catholicism as a concept. Rather, it considers the implications of certain actions related to religious thought. It also thoroughly examines the consequences of losing faith.

Civilization vs. Nature

Through its portrayal of the unforgiving landscape, The Loney argues that nature is an all-powerful force that only follows explicitly scientific and natural laws, with no regard for human life or desires.

The Loney is the ultimate representation of pure nature, differing significantly from the organized urban life that the characters are accustomed to in their ordinary lives. In the city, the characters feel greater faith in the institutions they belong to, as nature has been tamed and human inventions and organizations hold more power. In a rural setting, the church's control, and the power of humanity in general, is much less absolute.

Hurley emphasizes bleak natural descriptions as much as possible in order to emphasize not only nature's inherent power but its disregard for human activity. By depicting a few scattered, decrepit buildings and a struggling community on the backdrop of an incredibly powerful and large natural setting, Hurley emphasizes the inefficacy of human efforts in the face of nature's raw power. Instead, grassroots derivations of faith gain prominence, which is what eventually results in the black magic scheme. Further, the sense of time is distorted on the Loney as well, underscoring the inevitability of nature. Hurley seeks to state that nature has existed and will exist for far, far longer than the results of any human undertaking or organization, even the Catholic church.

This theme is consistently reinforced by the natural descriptions and the characters' encounters with nature; it is most explicitly stated in Chapter 27, a highly important thematic section of the novel. In this chapter, Father Wilfred experiences a crisis of faith instigated by an undramatic, brief drowning he witnesses on the beach. "Here there was only existence coming and going with an indifference that left him cold. Life here arose of its own accord and for no particular reason. It went unexamined , and died unremembered" (272).

Such a brutal and unemotional sentiment argues in favor of the power of science and against religion. It contradicts everything the characters struggle and stand for, and thus undermines the importance of their activities.

The Connection between Morality and Religion

The Loney argues that morality is not an inherent aspect of human nature and that even institutions such as law or religion do not guarantee adherence to moral standards.

Two religious extremes are represented in the novel. At one end of the spectrum, the parishioners are highly devout and dedicated to their church; they celebrate each of the Saint days, participate on the retreat, attend Mass, and attempt to involve themselves in the church to the maximum extent possible. However, even these pious people are not immune from immorality. In fact, their religious dedication contributes to gaps and declines in their ethical practices. Father Wilfred perpetrates punishments that border on psychological torment for McCullough, ostensibly motivated out of a desire to improve his religious faith. Similarly, Mummer harms Hanny in her attempt to create a religious miracle. Blinded by adherence to the rituals and practices of their faith, the characters allow their inherent moral standards to be eroded.

At the other end of the spectrum, the local farmers perpetrated acts that are clearly evil and exhibit no remorse about them. This behavior reveals Hurley's argument that humans are not inherently decent beings. Not a single character in the novel can be considered morally pure, despite their desire to be so. The characters that lack religion and turn to black-magic are depicted as both pragmatic and chillingly careless about their actions. Having lost a sense of religious responsibility, they are even further removed from morality. Even if the more religious characters may falter in their approaches to religion, they still benefit from their moral accountability and have a reason for maintaining good behaviors.

Clement was certainly religious at one point and likely remains so in a sense throughout the novel, as he wears a crucifix, attends Mass and says grace at the dinner table. However, Clement allows his desire for mercy — his desire to cure his suffering mother of her blindness — to guide him down a morally wrong road. This presents an interesting puzzle in the novel. An action that is motivated out of love and decency can still be connected to evil. Clement represents the intersection of the church and evil, and is a symbol of the complexity surrounding morality.

Hurley reveals that morality is not always as clear-cut as it appears on the surface. The priests, who in theory should be morally pure, suffer from their own personal demons, while the criminals are motivated out of a desire to heal, in a basic sense.

Family Power Structures

The Loney creates a parallel between control by the family and the church, arguing that both structures seek to organize behavior to a restrictive extent. Besides the church, the family is the strongest unit within the novel, and the most influential. The Smith family, which is organized in a rigid hierarchy and displays clear patterns of power allocation, is a vehicle for exploring family relationships on a larger level.

Mummer, the most powerful member of the family, is also the most heavily involved with the church; she echoes the power of the church itself in her rigid control of the family's decisions. Throughout the novel, Mummer makes decisions for the family as a whole, with little to no input from the other members — from the decision to attend the retreat, to the intensity of the religious rituals performed, even to the decisions of which foods to eat, Mummer unilaterally exercises her control. She pressures the narrator to serve as an altar boy and prepare for the priesthood, disregarding his opinions. Hanny and the narrator recognize this control but are powerless to resist her, since she is an adult and therefore is capable of exercising such control. Farther, however, seems unaware of her influence until a pivotal event in the novel. Mummer's dictation of the family's actions culminates in her forcing Hanny to drink the holy water even as he chokes. At this point, Farther recognizes the unhealthy amount of power that she possesses in the family, and they begin to argue at points throughout the novel, demonstrating that Farther is attempting to assert his independence.

The narrator's intense and eventually debilitating desire to protect his brother from harm is, in large part, motivated by these rigid familial power structures. Hanny has the least amount of power in the novel and his muteness is a physical manifestation (and cause of) his complete inability to assert his will. As Hanny moves towards adulthood, he finds the control of his family members to be more and more oppressive. This is why he attempts to resist the holy water at the shrine when he never had previously.

Disabled Hanny provides the narrator his only segment of power within the family, as he is responsible for looking after and assisting his brother. When Hanny gains his speech, the narrator loses that power; his obsession with protection is an attempt to reclaim it.

Guilt vs. Innocence

The Loney uses religion and morality to examine the boundary between guilt and innocence and the role that guilt and innocence as mindsets play in dictating our behavior.

The parishioners are made to feel extremely guilty for any action they perpetrate that contradicts the church's teachings. The confessions throughout the novel reveal the extent to which the characters harshly judge themselves. The novel is set in the 1970s, a time in which America had already experienced an era of liberalization in which alcohol and drugs were highly prevalent. However, Miss Bunce feels it necessary to confess that she drank a bottle of sherry, something which few contemporaries would consider worthy of the wracking guilt it brings her. Similarly, Ms. Belderboss's sin was motivated out of love for her husband, while Mr. Belderboss's sin was perhaps the least worrisome, as he simply describes a scene that he witnessed.

To the orthodox characters, as instructed by Father Wilfred, even a minor sin brought extreme guilt as it rose the possibility of Purgatory or Hell. Father Bernard is more liberal and has a more relaxed definition of guilt versus innocence. He feels that the motivation behind an action is more important in determining guilt or innocence than the action itself. In Father Bernard's view, Hanny's firing of the rifle is not indicative of moral depravity but simply of confusion.

The antagonists express no guilt over their truly actions, although at the end of the novel the narrator speculates that they may have felt guilt in the intervening years between their crimes and the discovery of the baby. Hanny also presents an unusual case regarding guilt as compared to innocence, since he is unaware of the consequences of his actions through much of the novel.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is narrated from the point of view of an unnamed man who grows up in an extremely devout Catholic family. The narrator remains consistent for both the outer and inner stories, which is uncommon for a frame-story structure. This perspective also remains consist throughout the chronological shifts of the narrative. The narrator delivers his own opinions only rarely, but his perspective colors the entire novel and dictates the details that we receive regarding the main events.

The first-person narration allows for deep insight into the character's inner mental processes, which is essential in a novel where much of the action is psychological. The narrator is also a central figure in the plot, so he is able to perceive all relevant action. Having access into the narrator’s thoughts and feelings allows us to truly understand the terror and unease that he experienced at various points throughout the novel.

However, the first-person narration also produces limitations and concerns about reliability. The narrator is relating the events of the story from many years after they have passed, which raises questions about memory. Further, the story is influenced by the narrator’s subjective biases regarding religion, particularly as the plot progresses. These limitations, however, are also what creates the story’s unique tone, so they are important for the formation of the narrative.

Language and Meaning

The Loney is a highly descriptive novel; one could potentially characterize it as a meditation the landscape. The weather comes to life through descriptive language such as “a light drizzle, briny and ripe, spread across the fields and its moistures grew on me like fur” (231) or “the butterflies dispersed as the rain returned and began the next washing of the land” (107). The descriptive passages are consistently detailed and evocative throughout the novel; this is essential for the novel’s plot, as the setting is central to the novel’s message. These sections clearly depict what it is actually like to live and worship at the Loney. They also turn the landscape into another character, with its own goals and its own influence on the plot. The author uses imagery to explore the significance of the Loney and its tides. He also utilizes descriptions of the architecture of churches or the composition of objects to reflect their symbolic meaning. In this way, the language ties together the symbolic and the material very effectively and strengthens the novel as a whole.

Throughout the novel, the language is restrained and formal, which is consistent with the narrator’s perspective; the narrator has a practical, disturbingly emotionless outlook on life after his ordeal. For example, he states “I hadn’t eaten any lunch, but I wasn’t hungry, and I often lose track of time down there in the basement anyway, separate as I

am from the world of scurrying feet above” (286). The narrator craves order and control, which explains his logical method of storytelling.

Finally, the tone of the novel is bleak and hauntingly lyrical. Phrases such as “swathes of green grass that seemed to have appeared overnight…” (149), “the street outside was breathless and hazy in a prelude to the punishing heat that summer was to bring” (245) and “the days of mist and driving rain, where Moorings dripped and leaked” (74) enrich the prose with a poetic quality that emphasizes the richness of nature.

Structure

The novel is structured a "frame story," or a story within a story. The frame story consists of the narrator, now a middle-aged man, writing a diary for an assignment from his therapist, Doctor Baxter. The narrator informs the reader that he has not seen the Loney, where the main story takes place, for many years. His relationship with his brother Hanny has also changed significantly since that time period, and Hanny no longer has the disabilities that he suffered as a child.

The inner story in the two-part frame structure also consists of multiple stories. The main section of deals with the events that take place at the Loney during a week-long religious retreat in order to cure Hanny at the local shrine. Within this format, the events are ordered chronologically and proceed logically. However, they are frequently interrupted by flashbacks in which the narrator recalls his time serving as an altar boy with Father Wilfred. Finally, another shift in structure occurs towards the end of the novel, when the narrator relates a portion of Father Wilfred’s diary almost verbatim.

Furthermore, the end of the novel introduces another shift in structure — the narrator suspects that his therapy diary may be eventually confiscated by the police, and thus has related a slightly false version of events in order to protect his brother. The framework thus takes on an additional meaning — a piece of evidence — and elevates the novel as a whole.

This novel is structurally complicated because it relates multiple stories within the same framework. The narrator serves as the connecting link between these stories, as his perspective governs all of them.

Quotes

Dull and featureless it may have looked, but the Loney was a dangerous place. A wild and useless length of English coastline. A dead mouth of a bay that filled and emptied twice a day and made Coldbarow--a desolate spit of land a mile off the coast--into an island.
-- The Narrator (chapter 2)

Importance: This quote is a succinct description of the Loney, which is one of the most important pieces of the novel. The Loney's power is absolute in shaping the events and tone of the work as a whole.

There is no malice in your heart. The worst you're guilty of is a little desperation and that puts you in the company of a good many others, believe me.
-- Father Bernard (chapter 6)

Importance: This quote, in response to Mrs. Belderboss's confession that she had crushed sleeping pills into Mr. Belderboss's drink, demonstrates Father Bernard's compassion and leniency.

In some ways, she said, she was envious of me because I had the opportunity to be closer to God, to assist in the miracle of transubstantiation, whereas she had to make do with organising fetes and jumble sales.
-- The Narrator (chapter 9)

Importance: This quote characterizes Mummer as not only extremely devout but as focused on the rituals and passages of faith rather than faith's inherent value.

Indeed, it seemed purpose-built in the same sort of way, with each architectural component carefully designed to churn out obedience, faith or hope un units per week according to demand.
-- The Narrator (chapter 9)

Importance: This quote reveals the narrator's budding cynicalness regarding religion.

Father Wilfred had told us time and time again that it was our duty as Christians to see what our faith had taught us to see. And, consequently, Mummer used to come home from the shop with all kinds of stories about how God had seen fit to reward the good and justly punish the wicked."
-- The Narrator (chapter 11)

Importance: This quote reveals Father Wilfred and Mummer's belief that faith will results in punishments or rewards from God. They therefore view faith as a mechanism for obtaining what they want.

God couldn't have sent us a more obvious sign. And Andrew finding it as well. Wonderful things are going to happen at the shrine, Esther.
-- Mrs. Beldbeross (chapter 18)

Importance: This quote is referring to the pregnant ewe and the butterflies that the characters find while performing the stone-throwing ritual. It highlights the parishioner's practice of interpreting natural event as signs from God.

I remember their faces last time we'd been to the shrine. Half fearful, half rapturous that they were about to witness a miracle as Hanny took a mugful of holy water and started to choke.
-- The Narrator (chapter 21)

Importance: This quote reveals how dedicated the parishioners are to the pursuit of a miracle, even at the expense of Hanny's safety.

I've never met a priest so flippant and carefree with his authority. He makes a mockery of everything we do. I for one will be very glad when he's sent back to Ireland with his own kind.
-- Mummer (chapter 23)

Importance: This quote highlights the tensions between Mummer's orthodoxy and Father Bernard's more liberal approach. It also reveals geographic distinctions in religion and Mummer's prejudices.

I only remember the smell of the wet ferns, the sound of water churning out of a gutter, the feeling of numbness, of knowing that no one was coming to help us and that we were surrounded by those people Father Wilfred had always warned us about but who we never thought we'd face, not really.
-- The Narrator (chapter 25)

Importance: Here, the narrator realizes for the first time how sheltered his life has been.

It's the way it has to be. There's nothing you or I can do about it. You just fucked up, that's all. Wrong place, wrong time.
-- Parkinson (chapter 25)

Importance: This chapter demonstrates the randomness and inevitability of evil, which directly contradicts Father Wilfred's belief that punishment is delivered by God. Parkinson feels he must shoot Hanny just because he is in the wrong place at the wrong time.

And that's the trick, Tonto. Making them believe that you know what the right answer is. God knows if I'd been honest about what I knew, the whole place would have gone up in flames.
-- Father Bernard (chapter 26)

Importance: This statement deeply influences the narrator and is his motivation in keeping Hanny's involvement with the black magic a secret.

God was missing. He had never been here. And if He had never been here, in this their special place, then He was nowhere at all."
-- Father Wilfred (chapter 27)

Importance: This quote reveals Father Wilfred's sudden loss of faith. His subsequent deterioration hinges on this moment.