

Mister Monkey Study Guide

Mister Monkey by Francine Prose

(c)2017 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Mister Monkey Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Prelude – Chapter 2.....	5
Chapters 3 – 4.....	9
Chapters 5 – 6.....	12
Chapters 7 – 8.....	16
Chapters 9 – 11.....	20
Characters.....	24
Symbols and Symbolism.....	27
Settings.....	30
Themes and Motifs.....	32
Styles.....	37
Quotes.....	40



Plot Summary

Mister Monkey tells the story of a children's musical theater production in New York called Mister Monkey the Musical and the unexpected and coincidental impact it has on the lives of those directly and tangentially involved in the show.

The Prelude tells the story of Mister Monkey, the children's novel on which the musical was based. Mister Monkey was adopted by a wealthy New York family after his parents were killed by poachers in Africa. Mister Monkey was wrongfully accused of stealing a wallet at a fancy New York party and his adoptive human father hired a lawyer named Portia McBailey to defend Mister Monkey in court.

In Chapter 1, Margot – an actress in her mid-forties – prepares for the evening's performance of Mister Monkey the Musical in which she plays Portia McBailey. On stage, Adam, the adolescent actor playing Mister Monkey, rubs his erection against Margot's hip, making her distracted and uncomfortable and disrupting the rest of the performance. A child in the audience loudly asks his grandpa if he is interested in what is happening on stage. In Chapter 2, Adam is embarrassed by what happened with Margot and hopes she does not hate him. He goes to sleep dreaming about climate change destroying the world.

In Chapter 4, the grandfather whose grandson interrupted the production takes the boy home to his parents. His daughter invites him to stay for dinner with their guests and the grandfather tells one of them that he lost his job because of a painting of a woman holding a monkey. In Chapter 5, the grandson, Edward, begins a new school. His teacher Miss Sonya selects him to give a Show and Tell presentation. Edward tells the class about Mister Monkey the Musical leading to a discussion in the class about Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution.

In Chapter 5, Miss Sonya worries that she may lose her job as a result of speaking about evolution with her class and the principal warns her not to do it again. She goes on a date in a restaurant called Enzo's. Her date accidentally sends her a text message negatively rating her appearance while Sonya is in the bathroom. In Chapter 6, Ray Ortiz, the author of Mister Monkey the book, takes his girlfriend Lauren to Enzo's, where they go to spend the royalties from Mister Monkey the Musical. Ray gives his free tickets to the waiter Mario because Ray hates the musical. During dinner they witness an argument between the couple next to them over a text message. Ray tells Lauren a story about his time in Vietnam that he has never told anyone else before. Ray asks Lauren to marry him.

In Chapter 7, Mario the waiter goes to see Mister Monkey the Musical, which he has seen several times because Ray always gives him tickets. He becomes enchanted with Margot and follows her to a restaurant after the show but fails to work up the courage to speak to her. He sits next to another member of the cast, Lakshmi, on the subway, hoping to strike up a conversation that could lead to an introduction to Margot. In Chapter 8, Lakshmi is writing a play loosely based on her own life which also mirrors



events from Mister Monkey the Musical. Lakshmi plays a comic police officer in the production and she wears her costume home on the subway because her boyfriend finds it attractive.

In Chapter 9, Eleanor, who plays the woman who wrongly accuses Mister Monkey of theft, decides to intervene to stop Adam's predatory behavior towards Margot. Eleanor goes to her day job as an ER nurse where she meets the grandfather from Chapter 3 who tells her that the production was bad but that she was very good.

Chapter 10 is told from the perspective of the Hindu Monkey God, known in the novel as Mister Monkey. Mister Monkey, the Monkey God, dreams of the future and sees happiness and personal development for all of the characters, but he does not see the future for Roger, Margot, or Mario.

In Chapter 11, Roger, the director of Mister Monkey the Musical tells the cast that the production run will end in two weeks. He reflects that he has done all that he could to do a good job but that the production has been cursed. After the show, he goes outside where he sees Mario and Margot speaking to each other. Margot tells Roger that Mario is the one who left her the fan letter, which Roger knows is not true because it was Roger who wrote the fan letter. Roger concludes that if this production of Mister Monkey the Musical leads to Margot and Mario finding love together then it will all have been worthwhile.



Prelude – Chapter 2

Summary

Set in contemporary New York, Mister Monkey tells the story of a derided off-Broadway production of a children's musical, showing the direct and indirect influence the show has on the lives of the cast of the show and the author of the book upon which the musical is based. It also tracks the show's effect on various audience members including a grandfather and his grandson and a waiter from an exclusive restaurant.

The Prelude is a page from the children's book Mister Monkey, which gives the backstory of the book's monkey protagonist. A New York woman named Mrs. Jimson moved to Africa to study monkeys and became very close to a particular family of monkeys. Mrs. Jimson died trying to protect the monkey family from poachers and young Mister Monkey was left orphaned when his monkey parents were also killed by the poachers. Mrs. Jimson's widow, Mr. Jimson, had Mister Monkey brought to New York where he moved into their family home with his two human children. Mister Monkey was accused of stealing a wallet from Mr. Jimson's girlfriend Janet and Mr. Jimson hired a lawyer named Portia McBailey to defend Mister Monkey in court.

Chapter 1 – “Margot Holds the Moment” – is told from the perspective of Margot, a 44 year old actress playing the role of Portia McBailey in a production of Mister Monkey the Musical. She has been forced by the play's director, Roger, to wear an outfit that Margot feels is unrealistic for her character: a big blonde wig and a very tight, short, shiny purple suit. Margot feels that this job marks a low point in her career. She only took the role because she was desperate for work. Margot prepares for the evening's performance by running through a soliloquy from Uncle Vanya by Anton Chekhov in her mind.

Roger the director gives Margot a letter that he says was left for her at the box office by a fan. The letter is anonymous and contains a quote from the playwright Anton Chekhov reflecting on the failures and disappointments of his life. Margot feels that the person who sent her this letter understands her despair about appearing in Mister Monkey. Margot thinks about the time she played Sonya, the lead female role in Uncle Vanya, when she was still at drama school.

On stage, Margot finishes the court scene in which Mister Monkey is exonerated of his crimes. The child actor playing Mister Monkey, Adam, leaps into Margot's arms to celebrate the verdict. Margot notices that Adam has an erection and is grinding himself against her hip. Margot abruptly drops Adam. Later in the play, still discomfited by the incident with Adam, Margot drops her prop cellphone. There is a long pause while she wonders what to do, during which a child in the audience loudly asks if his grandfather is interested in the show. Margot kicks the cellphone offstage and everyone applauds.



Chapter 2 – “Adam and On the Origin of Species” – is told from the perspective of Adam, the 12 year old actor playing Mister Monkey. Adam performs his song “Monkey Moon” in which Mister Monkey laments the death of his parents while singing to the full moon. Adam has a preoccupation with climate change and natural disasters that convinces him the world will soon end and everyone will die. Adam is homeschooled by his mother Giselle because he was expelled from private school. His dad lives with his new wife Heidi and their baby Arturo. Giselle made Adam study a lot of books about monkeys to prepare for his role in the musical, including *On the Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin, where the theory of evolution originates.

Adam has a crush on Margot which he thinks about during the run up to the scene where he leaps into her arms. When he goes on stage he is distracted by Margot’s short skirt and is embarrassed to realize that he has an erection. He watches as Margot drops her cellphone and wonders if he should help her, when the performance is interrupted by the child talking to his grandpa. After the show, Adam waits in the lobby for his mom Giselle. He sees the child who interrupted the show with his grandpa and glares at them. Giselle arrives and they both go home. Adam worries about Giselle because she is overweight and unhealthy. Adam goes to sleep worrying about the world ending and hoping he will see Margot again.

Analysis

The extract from a page of *Mister Monkey*, the book on which the musical is based, introduces the fact that the story itself is absurd and poorly written. The writing style is childish and superficial, using metaphors that carry little weight or meaning (“the full moon lit up the jungle like a baseball field”) and descriptions that are colloquial and informal rather than literary or artistic: “she became friends with a smart, friendly, playful, super-cute baby chimpanzee”. The fact that the book *Mister Monkey* has little artistic or literary merit is central to the argument that the novel as a whole posits about the nature of artistic communication. Despite being thought of as low-quality and superficial by almost everyone who encounters the production of *Mister Monkey the Musical*, the show nevertheless connects to the people who see it and perform in it in a profound and life-changing way. The novel suggests that there is no art work too lowly to make a positive impact on humanity.

The extract from *Mister Monkey* ends after the introduction of the lawyer character Portia McBailey. The character’s name contains two legal references. Firstly, it refers to the character of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare, a woman who dresses as a man in order to intervene in a legal case. Secondly, the name McBailey refers to The Old Bailey criminal court in London, England. The introduction of Portia in the Prelude sets up a technique that will be used throughout the rest of the novel, in which the character who will take center-stage in the following chapter is shown playing an important role in the preceding chapter.

Chapter 1 introduces the character of Margot, and also introduces the production of *Mister Monkey the Musical* from her perspective. This is significant as Margot has



perhaps the least positive perspective on the production of anyone else involved, meaning that the reader is immediately given a negative impression of the quality and purpose of the show. Margot is most upset by her unflattering and tacky costume. The costume itself has the unintended consequence of arousing Adam at an inconvenient moment, but also forging an unlikely connection with Mario the waiter introduced later in the novel when he sympathizes with Margot's having to wear that horrendous costume.

Margot's sense of failure and bitterness about her career is communicated through the ironic juxtaposition of a ridiculous musical about a monkey and the classic work of theatre, *Uncle Vanya* by Anton Chekhov. Margot's recitation of Chekhov at once underscores how unhappy she is to have ended up working in such a low quality production, but also highlights Margot's inflated self-esteem by indicating that she feels that she is above doing the work of playing Portia McBailey. This will be contrasted with Eleanor's more professional and less egotistical attitude to her work in the show later in the novel.

Uncle Vanya serves as an artistic parallel to *Mister Monkey* throughout the novel. The reader learns about different characters and their interactions with the Chekhov play, discovering the ways Chekhov's words have impacted each of the characters' lives, at the same time as discovering the impact that *Mister Monkey the Musical* has had on their lives. In this way, the author underscores the argument that art need not be of a genius level like Chekhov in order to make a difference in the world.

At this stage in the novel, the reader has no sense that the story will be told from different perspectives. However a number of incidents are introduced in Margot's chapter that will be told from a different perspective later in the novel. Perhaps the most significant of these is Adam's behavior towards Margot on stage which, in this chapter, feels to Margot like a deliberate, brazen, and unrepentant act of sexual harassment. Witnessing Adam's behavior, Margot thinks of him as confident in his actions and acting with deliberately malicious intent. Chapter 2, told from Adam's perspective, reveals that the interaction was much more of an accident from his perspective than Margot realizes and that Adam is deeply embarrassed by what happened.

Adam's interest in evolution and the work of Charles Darwin is included because Adam (as the human playing a monkey in the musical) is the link in the novel between humans and monkeys (just as Darwin's work was the first to draw the scientific link between these two species). Adam is an adolescent boy not fully in control of his own body and behavior making his animalistic tendencies – and the inherent links between humans and apes – more obvious in his case than with any of the other characters.

Discussion Question 1

What does the extract from *Mister Monkey* in the Prelude imply about the artistic quality of the story?



Discussion Question 2

How does Margot feel about her costume?

Discussion Question 3

What are the differences between Margot's interpretation of events and Adam's interpretation of events?

Vocabulary

tropical, preserve, wardens, scamper, godly, crusading, deranged, obscenely, hobblingly, iridescent, fetishistic, morphs, hysteria, disengaged, irresistibly, inhales, yearning, tsunamis, neutron



Chapters 3 – 4

Summary

Chapter 3 – “The Grandfather” – is told from the perspective of a man who took his grandson to see Mister Monkey the night Margot dropped her cellphone. During the show the grandson had asked him if he was interested and the grandfather wondered whether he should talk to him about being quiet in the theater. The grandfather notices a boy glaring at them in the lobby and worries that he is the actor who played Mister Monkey and that he recognizes the grandson as the child who interrupted the performance. They leave the theater in a hurry.

The grandfather suffers from some dizziness but he carries on regardless. The grandfather’s wife passed away and many things remind him of her and renew his feelings of grief. The child tells him that he’s hungry and thirsty so he takes him to a nearby Korean deli to get soda and some chips. Reflecting on the child’s question during the play, the grandfather concludes that he was interested but not for the right reasons. He was interested in the apparent desperation of the cast, especially the actress in the tacky purple suit who seemed especially unhappy.

They take the subway back to the grandson’s apartment where his mom, the grandfather’s daughter, lives with his dad. The grandfather’s daughter and son-in-law invite him to stay for dinner because they are having guests over: parents of the other children from the grandson’s school. At the dinner party, the parents all complain about the school’s principal, a German man named Hugo. The grandfather tries and fails to change the topic to something other than parenting. At dinner, he tells the woman sitting next to him about how he lost his job as a curator at a museum. He advertised an exhibition of Dutch painters with an image of a woman holding a monkey who had wrapped its legs around her. People thought it was a weird painting and the show was a failure.

Chapter 4 – “Evolution” – is told from the perspective of Edward, the grandson who interrupted the performance of Mister Monkey. Edward’s dad gets into a fight with his principal Hugo and withdraws Edward from school. Edward starts at a new school where he fears it will be too late in the school year for him to make friends. During his first week at his new school, Edward’s teacher Miss Sonya asks him to bring something for show and tell. He decides to take the program of Mister Monkey and to tell the class about the play. After his presentation, one of the other children asks Miss Sonya if it’s true that humans evolved from monkeys. Edward interjects to tell him that humans evolved from dinosaurs. Miss Sonya tells the class a bit about Charles Darwin before agreeing with the other boy that humans evolved from monkeys. Edward is embarrassed and dejected.

Analysis

Chapter 3 marks a turning point in the narrative as it is told from the perspective of someone who is not directly involved with the production of Mister Monkey the Musical. The grandpa, whose name is not revealed until later in the novel, was a member of the audience for the musical rather than a member of the cast or crew. The introduction of the perspective of an audience member confirms for the reader that Margot's fears about the production are well-founded and that it really is low-quality and her costume really does make her look ridiculous.

Throughout the novel, the narrative focuses on the impact that the musical has on those who have seen it. Further to this, the characters of the grandpa and the grandson also explore the extent to which the specific audience members at a given performance have an impact on the meaning and effect of the production. Although the grandpa and the grandson will never know it, the boy's interruption of the performance to ask the grandpa if he is interested in it sparks a chain of events amongst the cast from which the production as a whole never fully recovers. The extent of the impact the grandpa and grandson have on the cast is not made fully clear until later in the novel, however.

The grandpa is the first major example in the novel of someone discovering unexpected personal resonance with the ludicrous story of Mister Monkey the Musical. Although trite and superficial, the performance nevertheless connected with the grandpa in a profound and way because the moment when Adam wrapped his legs around Margot and rubbed himself against her hips reminded the grandpa of a Dutch painting of a woman holding a monkey that had ultimately led to the end of his career as a museum curator. Although lighthearted and optimistic in itself, Mister Monkey the Musical raised issues of failure, embarrassment, and regret in the grandpa when he encountered it.

Mister Monkey the Musical also had a negative effect on the life of the grandson, whose name is revealed to be Edward in Chapter 4. Edward starts at a new school shortly after seeing Mister Monkey which prompts him to discuss the production when he is invited to do a presentation for show and tell. For Edward, this is his opportunity to ingratiate himself with the other children and make up for lost time making friends that he missed due to starting the school year at a different school. When he makes a mistake about evolution in front of the class, and the teacher corrects him, Edward feels that he will forever associate Mister Monkey the Musical with moments of failure and rejection.

Adam and Edward are the characters who engage most with Darwin during the chapters told from their perspectives. Like Adam, the trials and tribulations of Edward's childhood are intended to reflect Darwin's theories of evolution, natural selection, and survival of the fittest. Edward feels that his place in the social hierarchy of his new school is dependent on him demonstrating certain traits to his classmates during his presentation-echoing the concept of survival of the fittest-and when he feels that he has failed this test, he thinks that means that he has no hope of social success amongst his classmates.



Discussion Question 1

How does the grandfather feel about the grandson interrupting the performance?

Discussion Question 2

To what extent was the grandfather interested in the production?

Discussion Question 3

What impact does starting at a new school have on Edward?

Vocabulary

disheveled, saggy, immensely, jittery, paranoia, gloomy, lighthearted, affectionate, pangs, trapeze, scrabbling, invisibility, interceding, glorify, presence, herbivorous, steered, extinction, forthcoming, rowdy



Chapters 5 – 6

Summary

Chapter 5 – “Miss Sonya Has a Dream” – is told from the perspective of Sonya. Sonya wakes up the day after Edward’s show and tell presentation in a state of panic that she will lose her job because she spoke with her class about Charles Darwin and evolution. Sonya gets on the subway. She receives a text from a man named Greg reminding her about their first date later that evening. Sonya is annoyed with herself for forgetting about the date because she will not have time to change after work and she has not brought any makeup with her.

When Sonya arrives at work she finds a note telling her to go see the principal, Guadalupe. Guadalupe tells Sonya that she has received several complaints from parents who are unhappy that she told her students about evolution. She warns Sonya about other public school teachers who have been fired because parents disagreed with the content of their lessons. Sonya apologizes.

Later, Sonya arrives at an expensive restaurant called Enzo’s where she is meeting Greg. Greg speaks about his job as an environmental lawyer and Sonya realizes that Greg defends big companies against environmental campaigners, rather than representing environmental campaigners as she had previously assumed.

While Greg is in the bathroom another couple is seated next to Sonya. The man gives their waiter an envelope and tells him to enjoy the show. Sonya thinks she overhears the couple give a toast “To Mister Monkey”. When Greg returns Sonya tells him about what happened at school and they discuss Darwin. Sonya drinks a lot of wine and begins to feel unwell. Sonya excuses herself to the bathroom. While there, she receives a message from Greg which he intended to send to a friend, complaining about Sonya’s appearance and giving her a rating of 4 out of 10.

Chapter 6 – “The Author of Mister Monkey” – is told from the perspective of Ray Ortiz, the man who wrote the original book “Mister Monkey” on which the musical version is based. Ray is taking his much-younger girlfriend Lauren to dinner at Enzo’s, where he goes to spend the royalties whenever there is a production of Mister Monkey the Musical. Ray hates the musical so he always gives his complementary tickets to Mario, a waiter at Enzo’s.

Ray is Puerto Rican and grew up in a poor area of New York but lives very comfortably now having invested his profits from the success of Mister Monkey. Ray wrote Mister Monkey after returning from the Vietnam War and enrolling on a creative writing course. He suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome and began a romantic relationship with his writing tutor Astrid who supported him through his struggles with PTSD and encouraged him to write. Although their relationship ended, Astrid put Ray in touch with an editor who went on to publish Mister Monkey.



Ray's publisher told him to change a lot about the story before it could be published: relocating the monkey family to a nature reserve in Africa instead of wartime Vietnam and having Mister Monkey live with a wealthy white family in New York rather than a poor Puerto Rican family. Ray's publisher argued that these changes would give the book wider appeal.

On the way to Enzo's, Ray's driver stops the car to pick up his girlfriend Lauren. Ray worries that Lauren will leave him because he does not want to get married for the fourth time or have any more children. At the restaurant, Ray gives the tickets for Mister Monkey the Musical to the waiter, Mario. Ray and Lauren are seated next to a young couple on a first date. They overhear the couple talking about Darwin, which worries Lauren because she knows that Ray is still angry that the producer of Mister Monkey the Musical banned any mention of evolution. The young woman leaves for the bathroom and when she returns she is very angry. She starts loudly yelling at her date for accidentally sending her a text message rating her appearance as 4 out of 10. The woman talks to Lauren and Ray about her date's unpleasant behavior and they take her side. The woman leaves the restaurant and the man follows shortly after.

Ray decides to tell Lauren a story he has never told anyone else before about seeing a family of monkeys hanged from nooses while he was in Vietnam. The incident inspired him to write Mister Monkey. Lauren speaks about the injustice of banning mention of evolution in Mister Monkey the Musical because understanding the connection between monkeys and humans is essential to promoting greater empathy for animals, other humans, and the natural world as a whole. Ray asks Lauren to marry him.

Analysis

In Chapters 5 and 6, the narrative expands its scope to include narrators who have not seen or participated in Mister Monkey the Musical. Chapters 5 and 6 continue to display the snowballing effects of this production of Mister Monkey the Musical when two people who are only tangentially connected to the production (Ray as the author of the source material and Sonya as the teacher of an audience member) witness the coincidental convergence of what's on their minds when Sonya overhears Ray and Lauren toasting Mister Monkey and Ray and Lauren overhear Sonya discussing Darwin with her date.

Chapter 5, told from Sonya's perspective, shows the butterfly effect of the production, as Edward's attendance at the show with his grandpa indirectly leads to Sonya being faced with being fired from her job. The controversy surrounding the discussion of Darwin and the theory of evolution in public settings leads to a cycle of misinformation that causes unnecessary difficulty and stress for all concerned. If Mister Monkey the Musical had accurately included information about evolution then Edward would not have made a mistake about humans having evolved from dinosaurs during his show and tell presentation. If Edward had not made this mistake about evolution during his presentation, then Sonya would not have felt called to tell the children the truth, thus jeopardizing her job. Sonya's transgression in terms of the school's policy regarding



evolution is contrasted with how committed she is to her job and how much she cares about the children she teaches, underscoring the illogical nature of the complaints being made against her.

Two contrasting views on the work of Charles Darwin are explored in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 through the minor characters of Greg (Sonya's date) and Lauren (Ray's girlfriend). Whilst worrying about whether she may lose her job, Sonya is reassured to read an article on the internet that claims that everyone has a different way of reading Darwin and draws different conclusions. This is shown to be the case at Enzo's when it is revealed that Greg's interest in Darwin focuses on the concept of survival of the fittest, which, to Greg, suggests that being strong enough to survive makes someone superior to weaker creatures who are destroyed by environmental damage. In contrast, Lauren feels that Darwin's theory of evolution (and the natural link it draws between humans and monkeys) should be widely known because it would promote more tolerance and empathy towards the natural world and among humans, despite the fact that this is clearly not the case with Greg.

Chapter 6 introduces the character of Ray Ortiz, author of the book *Mister Monkey* on which the musical is based. The chapter reveals the previously unknown fact that even Ray thinks that the musical is terrible. Numerous characters have many varied criticisms of both the book and musical versions of *Mister Monkey* throughout the novel, but Ray's feelings about it reveal aspects of the story that existed even before the book was fully written or published.

The book was originally supposed to be about the war in Vietnam and the violence, destruction, and lack of compassion that Ray witnessed while he was a soldier. For Ray, his publisher's decision to change fundamental details about the plot – changing the setting from the controversial location of the Vietnam War to the more neutral setting of Africa, and substituting a poor Puerto-Rican for a white family – gutted the story of its true significance. However, for Lauren, the change in location (of which she is unaware) provides the heart of why the story matters. In Lauren's mind, the book is about environmentalism and its setting in Africa is part of the power of its story about the decimation of wildlife on that continent. What for Ray is a reduction in the true meaning of his work, for Lauren provides the essence of why the story has remained relevant for so long.

Chapter 6 reveals Ray's difficult history of romantic relationships and failed marriages. Ray's PTSD has made it difficult for him to maintain close relationships with the women in his life. During the course of the meal at Enzo's Ray tells a story to Lauren – about seeing an executed family of monkeys in Vietnam – that he has never told anyone else before. This shared confidence between the couple symbolizes that Ray is allowing himself to be emotionally vulnerable with Lauren in a way that he has not been with his previous wives. This marks a powerful emotional breakthrough for Ray after a history of depression and suffering, but the events surrounding his engagement to Lauren will be perceived in a very different light by Mario the waiter in the next chapter.



Discussion Question 1

Why is it controversial for Sonya to discuss evolution with her class?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Ray dislike Mister Monkey the Musical?

Discussion Question 3

What impact does Greg have on the other characters in the novel?

Vocabulary

threatening, cradling, incisors, glisten, dependent, cascading, wandered, prattled, cajole, manipulate, broiling, airborne, toxins, semaphoric, luxury, distinction, primate, deteriorated, minuscule, reparations



Chapters 7 – 8

Summary

Chapter 7 – “A Fan’s Notes” – is told from the perspective of Mario, the waiter at Enzo’s who received Ray’s tickets for the latest production of Mister Monkey the Musical. Before going to the show, Mario steps into a nearby Catholic church and attends confession. Mario tells the priest that his sins are feeling hatred and jealousy towards the customers at Enzo’s.

Mario tells the priest that a man came into the restaurant on a first date and instructed Mario that he would give him a signal when his date arrived indicating whether he found her attractive or not: if he did, Mario should bring an expensive bottle of wine, but if he did not then Mario should bring them something cheap. The man indicated that he did not think his date was very attractive and Mario brought him a bottle of wine that was known to cause headaches. Mario tells the priest that he tried to feel compassion for the man but that all he felt was hatred. Later the man accidentally sent his date a text message ranking her appearance and she yelled at him in front of the whole restaurant. Mario confesses that he loved seeing the man embarrassed. Mario then confesses to the sin of envy. He saw how happy Ray was when he proposed to his girlfriend and she said yes. Mario says there is no hope for him to find love.

Mario leaves the church and heads to Mister Monkey the Musical. The rich and famous customers at Enzo’s know how much Mario loves the theater so they often give him free tickets to shows. The first play he ever saw was Uncle Vanya by Chekhov, which he saw soon after his fiancée left him. Mario was profoundly moved by the play.

Mario has seen Mister Monkey several times because Ray always gives him his tickets. During this production, Mario is surprised by the choice of costume for Portia. He notices that the actor playing Mister Monkey seems aggressive and that the actress playing Portia seems to be scared of him. Mario feels a wave of sympathy for the actress playing Portia for having to appear in such a terrible production. He is impressed by the way she channels her desperation into her performance. Mario decides that he must see the actress, Margot, after the performance. He spots her outside but is too nervous to approach her. He follows her to a nearby restaurant and tries to work up the courage to speak to her, but he fails. When he gets on the subway he sees Lakshmi, the wardrobe assistant, and sits near her in the hopes of striking up a conversation that could lead to an introduction to Margot.

Chapter 8 – “Lakshmi” – is told from the perspective of Lakshmi, the wardrobe assistant, as she rides the subway home. Lakshmi is planning to write a one act play mainly based on her own life that will include tales from passengers who meet the main character (Devi) on the subway. Lakshmi has a small part in Mister Monkey the Musical as a police officer and she wears her comedy police officer outfit on the subway when she goes home.



Lakshmi's biological parents were killed in the Hindu/Muslim riots in India and she was adopted by two gay Indian men in America. In Lakshmi's play, there will be a character who immigrated to America from India, who speaks to the moon at night and imagines speaking with his dead parents.

One of Lakshmi's adoptive dads picked her up from the theater one night and had a conversation with Roger the director about the Hindu monkey god Hanuman. He told him that a curse was placed on Hanuman that meant he forgot about his superpowers until someone reminded him. Roger has since informed Lakshmi that the production is no longer able to keep paying her wages.

On the subway Lakshmi notices a man further down the carriage who seems to want to speak to her, but he doesn't say anything. She rushes off the subway at her stop so that he can't follow her. Lakshmi returns to her boyfriend's apartment, who refuses to have sex with her unless she is wearing the police officer's uniform.

Analysis

Chapter 7, told from the perspective of Mario the waiter, brings the narrative back to the theater and the physical production of Mister Monkey the Musical with which the narrative began, after the previous four chapters have taken a detour into the lives of audience members and other characters tangentially connected to the production. In Chapter 6, the reader is made aware of Ray's difficult emotional life and history of failed romantic relationships. But for Mario, who is only aware of the superficial details of Ray's life, his engagement to Lauren is proof that other people can be happy but that Mario himself never will. Just as each character has their own interpretation of Mister Monkey the Musical, they also have their own interpretations of the meaning of other peoples' lives.

Mario's coincidental relationship with Ray makes him the most qualified person imaginable to critique and evaluate this production of Mister Monkey the Musical. Mario's known love of the theater, combined with Ray's dislike of the musical and tradition of spending his royalties at the restaurant where Mario works, means that Mario has seen the musical many times. This means that he is acutely aware of the different possible interpretations of the story and characters, much more so than any other audience member. Because of this background experience with the musical, Mario is especially able to pick up on the nuances of Margot's performance.

The chapter is filled with dramatic irony as everything that is revealed about Mario shows the reader how much he has in common with Margot. Mario looks back on his past as a theatre-goer and remembers the profound impact that Uncle Vanya by Anton Chekhov had on him when he first saw it. This echoes Margot's attachment to Uncle Vanya that the reader was informed of in Chapter 1. Both Mario and Margot express dissatisfaction with their romantic lives and a passionate connection with the words of Chekhov, so the reader knows that the two of them would have meaningful things in common if they ever met.



However, Mario, unlike the reader, is unaware of how much he and Margot have in common, making him too nervous to speak to her. In Chapter 1 Margot received a note from a male fan with a quote from Chekhov, so the reader is aware of how attached Margot is to the idea that there is a man in the audience who truly appreciates her work in the production. In Chapter 7, it transpires that there really is a man there who feels a deep connection to Margot's performance in this role and – through his detailed knowledge of the history of Mister Monkey the Musical – is able to understand the desperation that Margot is channeling into her performance, and feel a resonance with what is happening in his own life. Although the topic of the letter is not raised in this chapter, it is clear to the reader that if Mario ever did find the courage to speak to Margot, she would naturally assume that it must have been him who sent it. This raises a mystery that will not be solved until the final pages of the novel: who sent Margot the note?

Chapter 8 returns the narrative to the cast and crew of the production itself, through the perspective of Lakshmi the wardrobe assistant, who played a prominent part in Chapter 1 told from Margot's perspective. Similarly to the grandpa, who was reminded of a painful incident from his professional life by the musical, Lakshmi also finds surprising personal resonance in the story of Mister Monkey the Musical. Like Mister Monkey himself, Lakshmi is an orphan taken away from her country of birth to be raised by adoptive parents in the United States. Although Lakshmi has a very low opinion about the quality and political significance of Mister Monkey the Musical, she nevertheless intends to borrow the sequence in which Mister Monkey serenades the moon while remembering his deceased parents in her own play, in which an elderly Indian man does the same thing.

Lakshmi notices Mario on the subway without any idea of who he is, only feeling that he is acting strangely and making her uncomfortable. This sets up a running joke that will continue to the final chapter in which various characters who do not know Mario point him out hanging around outside the theater while he continues to try to find the courage to speak to Margot.

Discussion Question 1

What does Mario find difficult about his job?

Discussion Question 2

What do Mario and Margot have in common?

Discussion Question 3

What aspects of Mister Monkey the Musical resonate with Lakshmi's life?

Vocabulary

matinee, sinister, contrition, hermit, nuzzling, beckoned, hierarchy, sacrament, levitating, polychrome, compassionate, deranged, potentially, disarm, vintage, unruly, exhorted, communal, impassioned, monologue



Chapters 9 – 11

Summary

Chapter 9 – “Eleanor and the Children of God” – is told from the perspective of Eleanor, the actress playing Janice the evil girlfriend in Mister Monkey the Musical. During the evening’s performance, Adam grabs hold of Margot’s leg on stage and everyone worries that he is going to hurt her.

Earlier that day Roger held a meeting to tell everyone that Mister Monkey will only run for another two weeks because they are not selling enough tickets. This is bad news for everyone in the production, except for Eleanor who deliberately only appears in shows that she thinks will have a short run. Eleanor has a day job as an ER nurse and she performs as a passion, not as a career. Eleanor has spoken with Roger about her fear that Adam might hurt Margot, but Roger has brushed her off.

Eleanor often deals with emotionally disturbed patients at the ER because the other staff members know how good she is at it. After the show, Eleanor invites Adam to go for a coffee with her, leaving Roger to talk with Adam’s mom Giselle. In the café, Adam tells Eleanor about his life. She warns Adam that he has to stop mistreating Margot. Adam says that he thinks he loves Margot. Eleanor remembers having a coffee with Margot when the show first started. Margot recited a passage from Uncle Vanya that embarrassed Eleanor because she felt that Margot did not understand the real significance of the words. Eleanor convinces Adam that he has a lot to look forward to in life.

Eleanor goes to work at the ER. Her first patient is Leonard Marber, the grandfather from Chapter 3. Not recognizing Eleanor, he tells her about a terrible production of Mister Monkey he went to see with his grandson. He tells her that his grandson interrupted the performance and Eleanor inwardly seethes. Eleanor tells him that she was in the show and he says that she was really good. He tells her that he is worried about his grandson who has been depressed since his teacher got into trouble for discussing evolution.

Chapter 10 – “The Monkey God (Mister Monkey) Dreams the Future” – is told from the perspective of Hanuman the monkey god, also known as Mister Monkey. Mister Monkey dislikes the fact that he cannot remember that he has superpowers unless someone reminds him. He sees the lives of all humans and dreams of their futures when he falls asleep. He sees Miss Sonya with a baby. He sees Adam continuing to work, going to drama school, and taking circus classes. He sees Adam’s mom Giselle happily remarried. Leonard Marber passes away during the night, but the monkey god sees his grandson Edward as a teenager receiving a science award and thanking his late grandfather for sparking his interest in dinosaurs and monkeys. He sees Lakshmi and Eleanor continuing to enjoy their work.



The monkey god does not like Mister Monkey the Musical except for one line – “Mister Monkey is the smartest, cutest, nicest, strongest, most powerful chimp of all” – because it reminds him that he has superpowers.

Chapter 11 – “Roger the Director” – is told from the perspective of Roger, the director. Roger repeats a line from a Tolstoy story to himself every morning like a prayer.

Roger has been determined to make a success of this production of Mister Monkey the Musical but he feels like it has been cursed. Roger has not done anything to stop Adam’s unruly behavior because he is fascinated by the onstage reality of male adolescence which he feels has unexpectedly brought some depth and authenticity to an otherwise terrible production. Giselle, Adam’s mom, comes to see Roger in his office after that evening’s performance ends. Eleanor interrupts to tell them she is taking Adam for coffee. When Adam returns he is noticeably calmer and less aggressive.

Roger leaves the theater and bumps into Margot who is talking with a man outside. Margot introduces Roger to Mario, who she has just met. Margot tells Roger that Mario is the man who left the letter for her at the box office. Roger knows that Mario did not send the letter because it was Roger who sent the letter. He intended it as a note of solace for Lakshmi when he fired her but when he saw Margot he decided that she was in greater need of comfort. Roger decides not to tell Margot the truth about the letter because he can see that she and Mario are interested in each other and that the misunderstanding about the letter is helping.

Mario tells them how much he enjoyed the show. He and Margot are going out for dinner. Roger thinks that if Mario and Margot find love with each other the production will have been worthwhile after all. Roger takes their hands and repeats the line from Tolstoy.

Analysis

Throughout the novel, anyone who has seen the production of Mister Monkey the Musical has commented on the fact that the actress playing Janice, the evil girlfriend who falsely accuses Mister Monkey of theft, is the only performer doing a good job and the only one who does not seem unhappy to be involved in the show. Chapter 9 is told from the perspective of the actress playing Janice: Eleanor. Eleanor is different to the other performers in two significant ways. The first is that she has a day job as an ER nurse, while the others are all dependent on their theater work as their main source of income. The second is that, unlike everyone else involved in the production, Eleanor is actually enjoying performing in the show and taking her work seriously.

Throughout the novel, others in the show have commented on Eleanor’s aloof and bitchy behavior backstage, but it is revealed in this chapter that Eleanor has been behaving that way in order to stay in character as Janice, the mean girlfriend. Unlike the other cast and crew members who are focused on their own internal drama (Margot and her preoccupation with the failure of her career, Adam’s obsession with sex and, by



extension, with Margot, and Lakshmi's focus on her own playwriting rather than the production she is currently employed by) Eleanor is actually focused on the work of playing her role in the production.

Ironically, the fact that Eleanor is an ER nurse by profession, leads to her behaving in a more professional manner than the professional actors of the production. Eleanor has no ego or financial concerns tied up in her participation in the musical, meaning that her performance is part of an authentic desire on her part to bring everything she's got to the task of performing in the musical. This is symbolized by the program notes that Leonard Marber read while he was in the audience. He noticed that all the cast treated the notes as a chance to make self-indulgent speeches akin to accepting an award, whereas Eleanor's bio was a simple list of her theatrical credits.

Eleanor's job as an ER nurse also provides a different interpretation of the passage from *Uncle Vanya* that also moved Margot and Mario. For Margot, the passage is about ending up alone in life with nothing and no one to live for. Margot feels the passage speaks to her sadness about her failed career and failed romantic relationships. However to Eleanor, Margot's interpretation of this passage is superficial and corny. For Eleanor, the passage is about living a life of service, as she herself does during her work in the ER. Eleanor reflects on the fact that Chekhov himself worked as a doctor during a cholera outbreak and that people like Margot do not really know anything about the nature of a life of service. In this way, the contrast between the characters of Eleanor and Margot shows the different ways that actors can bring depth to their performances. Margot does so through connecting with deep authentic emotions, whereas Eleanor connects via real-life and practical lived experiences.

Although this production of *Mister Monkey the Musical* has been a disaster for many concerned, Eleanor's involvement brings about a vitally important moment of emotional development for Adam. Without an emotionally stable home environment, Adam's behavior throughout the novel has threatened to spiral out of control. However, through the coincidence of appearing in a production that has a cast member who is also nurse who specializes in dealing with emotionally disturbed people, Adam accidentally receives the precise psychological support that he requires at this moment in his life. Although the content of the musical itself has not served much purpose for Adam, the experience of working with this specific set of people eventually leads to his gaining greater emotional maturity.

Chapter 10, told from the perspective of Hanuman the Monkey God, gives greater meaning to the convergences and coincidences that have been littered throughout the narrative. Instead of being accidental occurrences, the chapter told from the perspective of a divine being implies that everything that has occurred and all of the apparently coincidental crossovers of the different characters, has been part of a divine plan. *Mister Monkey*, like Lakshmi and Leonard and many others throughout the novel, also finds unexpected personal resonance in the much-derided musical, because one of the lines serves the function of reminding him of his godly powers. The irony of this profound occurrence – that a lowly children's musical could have such an impact on a divine being – is underscored by the use of probably the most asinine line from the musical as



the single line that inspires the great Monkey God: “Mister Monkey is the smartest, cutest, nicest, strongest, most powerful chimp of all”.

Chapter 11 concludes the narrative with Roger who, alongside Eleanor, is the only character making a genuine attempt to do a good job of Mister Monkey the Musical. As has been made more than apparent to the reader by this point, the musical has not been a success on either an artistic or financial level. However, at this stage, it is also evident to the reader (if not yet to Roger) that the production has nevertheless had a positive impact on those whose lives it has touched. It provided a bonding moment for Leonard and Edward before Leonard passed away, it inspired Lakshmi as she began to work on her own play, and it provided Eleanor the opportunity to give Adam some much-needed emotional support.

In this final chapter, as Roger’s realizes that Mario and Margot will likely find love as a result of this sub-par piece of children’s musical theater, it becomes apparent that art works in mysterious ways and that its creators are not in control of what effects their work will have when it is unleashed upon the world.

Discussion Question 1

What impact does Eleanor have on the lives of the other characters in the novel?

Discussion Question 2

What does Mister Monkey (the Monkey God) dislike about Mister Monkey the Musical? Which parts does he like?

Discussion Question 3

Overall, did this production of Mister Monkey the Musical have a positive impact on the world?

Vocabulary

minimally, incorporate, vaults, limply, penalty, undaunted, tottering, rogue, terminal, eruption, celestial, mistook, brimming, variance, incarceration, devoted, geishas, cowers, sabotage, moronic



Characters

Margot

Margot is the central character of Chapter 1. An actress in her mid-forties, Margot feels that appearing as the lawyer Portia McBailey in this production of Mister Monkey the Musical is a low point in her career and that it is symbolic of her failure to live up to her expectations for her life that she had while at drama school. Margot demonstrates a professional attitude throughout the novel by continuing with the show despite Adam's increasingly destructive and unpleasant behavior towards her. After numerous failed love affairs throughout her life, Margot worries that she will never find love. Ironically, her participation in Mister Monkey the Musical brings about a chance meeting with Mario, someone with whom she has a lot in common, showing that her involvement in the musical was a positive moment in her life not a negative one.

Adam

Adam is the central character of Chapter 2. Adam is a child actor who was expelled from his private school and is now homeschooled by his overprotective single mom Giselle. Adam is struggling with the emotional and hormonal effects of adolescents and channels his energies into sexually aggressive behavior towards Margot and physically aggressive behavior towards other cast members. Adam's internal aggression is symbolized by his obsession with potential mass destruction brought about by climate change, which he fantasizes about regularly. Mister Monkey the Musical has a positive impact on Adam's life because it brings him into contact with Eleanor, an ER nurse with experience dealing with emotionally disturbed people, who helps to get him back on the right track emotionally before his behavior spirals out of control.

The Grandfather (Leonard Marber)

The Grandfather is the central character of Chapter 3. The grandfather is still severely bereaved over the death of his wife who died several years before the narrative of the novel begins. He channels all of his emotional energy into his relationship with his grandson, making him extremely vulnerable to the child's behavior. When he took his grandson to see Mister Monkey the Musical the boy interrupted the performance, causing a chain of events that had an impact on many other characters. The grandfather did not enjoy the production but it did remind him of a painting he had displayed during his career as a curator that had cost him his job. The reader later discovers that the grandfather is named Leonard Marber when he is seen by Eleanor at the ER. Leonard passes away during the night, but his grandson continues to have fond memories of him.



Edward

Edward is the central character of Chapter 4. He is Leonard Marber's grandson and the boy who interrupts the performance in Chapter 1, distracting Margot and angering Adam. Edward begins to attend a new school shortly after seeing Mister Monkey the Musical and decides to tell his class about the production for his Show and Tell presentation. This leads to a debate about evolution, during which Edward makes a mistake by saying that humans evolved from dinosaurs instead of monkeys. Edward's struggle to fit in and make friends at his new school echoes Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest in which only the strongest succeed. Although the incident was initially a negative one for Edward, later in the novel it is revealed that he developed a lifelong interest in dinosaurs, monkeys, and science in general that had a positive impact on his life in his teenage years.

Sonya

Sonya is the central character of Chapter 5. Sonya is Edward's kindergarten teacher who gets into trouble with her boss after discussing evolution with her class during Edward's Show and Tell presentation. Sonya's commitment to telling her students the truth puts her job at risk. Sonya is so committed to her job that it is threatening her happiness in other areas of her life, so her friends signed her up for an online dating site. Sonya has an unpleasant date with a man who takes her to a restaurant called Enzo's where he gets very drunk and accidentally sends her a message negatively rating her appearance.

Ray Ortiz

Ray Ortiz is the central character of Chapter 6. Ray wrote Mister Monkey, the book on which Mister Monkey the Musical is based. Ray hates the musical because of a clause in the contracts that states that no one is allowed to make reference to the fact that humans evolved from monkeys, so that no one would refuse to see the show because they were offended by evolution. Ray suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome as a result of his time serving in the military during the Vietnam War. Ray had initially intended Mister Monkey to be a reflection on that war but, after his editor suggested changes, the book became more associated with ecological and animal rights. After many failed love affairs over the years, Ray proposes to his girlfriend Lauren whilst at Enzo's restaurant.

Mario

Mario is the central character of Chapter 7. He is a waiter at Enzo's who served both Ray and Sonya during their meals at the restaurant. Mario is a big fan of the theater so many of the restaurant's customers give him free tickets, including Ray. Because of this, Mario has seen Mister Monkey the Musical several times and is therefore very well-



informed when it comes to judging the merits of this particular production. Mario's knowledge of the musical allows him to accurately see Margot's despair at having to take this role, a despair that speaks to Mario's pain about his own life. Mario feels like he has a special connection with Margot when he sees the production, but does not work up the courage to speak to her until he has attended the show several times.

Lakshmi

Lakshmi is the central character of Chapter 8. Lakshmi is the wardrobe assistant on Mister Monkey the Musical. Many aspects of Lakshmi's life are reflected in the story of Mister Monkey: both of their families were murdered while they were still babies and they were both brought to America to be raised by an adoptive family. Despite these connections, Lakshmi does not tell anyone on the production about her history because she does not want Roger trying to use her past to elicit sympathy in the cast for a fictional monkey. Lakshmi is writing a play about her own life that has lots of similarities to Mister Monkey the Musical.

Eleanor

Eleanor is the central character of Chapter 9. Eleanor is an ER nurse who is also playing Janice the evil girlfriend in Mister Monkey the Musical. Despite being the only member of the production who also has a day job outside of the theater, Eleanor is the most professional of all the other performers. She does not allow issues from her personal life to affect her performance and stays in character whilst in the theater despite the fact that this has made her unpopular with the rest of the cast. Throughout the novel, members of the audience comment on the fact that Eleanor's performance is the only good thing about the production. Eleanor's work as an ER nurse makes her especially well qualified to discuss Adam's emotional problems with him and bring about a positive change in his life (and, as a result, Margot's life too).

Roger

Roger is the central character of Chapter 11. Roger is the director of Mister Monkey the Musical and is sincerely committed to doing the best job that he can. Roger feels despondent because he thinks that the production has been a disaster and he is unable to feel like his work has had a positive impact. Despite being regularly vilified by the other cast members, Roger feels genuine sorrow and guilt over having to fire Lakshmi, and his sympathy for Margot causes him to give her a note with a quotation from Chekhov that he tells her is from a fan. This note inadvertently aids the budding relationship between Mario and Margot and Roger concludes that if the two of them find love as a result of Mister Monkey the Musical then the whole thing will have been worthwhile after all.



Symbols and Symbolism

Margot's Costume

Margot's costume in *Mister Monkey the Musical* is symbolic of Margot's feelings of despair and failure. Margot clings to high-minded things (such as her preparatory soliloquy from Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya*) in order to help her cope with the indignities of appearing in the production and she had hoped to prepare for playing Portia McBailey as a serious lawyer dedicated to taking on difficult cases. However Roger's choice of costume – a very tight iridescent purple skirt – stops Margot from being able to think of the character in a positive light and instead imparts the character with the same desperation that Margot feels in her own life. Despite the negative implications of the costume to begin with, it helps to forge a connection between Margot and Mario later in the novel.

Fan Letter

The fan letter that Margot receives in Chapter 1 is symbolic of the novel's theme of unexpected consequences. Through a series of accidents and coincidences, the fan note ends up changing the course of Margot's life by sparking a connection with her admirer Mario. However, unbeknownst to Margot, this was never the original purpose of the letter. Roger initially wrote the note as a way to soften the blow when he fired Lakshmi but, seeing Margot in her tragic purple skirt suit, he decided that she was the one in greater need of the consolation the note was meant to convey. In a further coincidence, Mario, like Margot, feels a deep personal connection to the play *Uncle Vanya* from which the quotation is taking, naturally causing Margot to assume that Mario is the author of the note when they meet.

Uncle Vanya

Uncle Vanya by Anton Chekhov is used in the novel as a symbol of the potential for different meanings and interpretations to be taken from a work of art. For both Mario and Margot, the meaning of the play lies in the loneliness and desperation felt by the characters in the play as a result of their failed love affairs. For Eleanor, in contrast, the meaning of the play lies in its allusions to living a life of service: something Eleanor does through her work as an ER nurse and something she reads into *Uncle Vanya* because of her knowledge that Chekhov was himself a doctor who worked during a Cholera outbreak. Like *Uncle Vanya*, *Mister Monkey the Musical* itself also means different things to different people depending on their different backgrounds and life stories.



Monkey Suit

The monkey suit made by Lakshmi and worn by Adam during Mister Monkey the Musical is symbolic of Adam's adolescence and the fact that he is a young adult trapped in the body of a child. Adam is supposed to be playing a kindhearted and innocent monkey but his tumultuous emotions lead him to playing the role of Mister Monkey in an aggressive and unpredictable manner. Just like Mister Monkey is really a human wearing a monkey costume, Adam is really a teenager in the body of a child, making those around him uncertain about what will happen next due to the disconnect between surface appearances and what is going on below.

Climate Change

Climate Change is used as a symbol of the emotional turmoil that Adam suffers during his adolescence. Like the forces of nature that Adam has nightmares about (tsunamis, hurricanes, catastrophic floods etc.) Adam feels that he has no control over the changes that are happening to his body and the powerful emotions that he is experiencing as a part of his adolescence. The forces of climate change are destructive in Adam's nightmares just as Adam's own changing emotional landscape is initially a destructive force in the world of Mister Monkey the Musical before Eleanor steps in to help him calm his storm of emotions.

Darwin

For many characters in the novel, Darwin is symbolic of failure and difficulties in communication. This begins with Ray who feels that the true meaning of his book Mister Monkey lay in its ability to communicate the connection between monkeys and humans. However, this link is censored from the musical version of the story, leading Ray to conclude that it is a failure. For Edward, his mistake in communicating Darwin's theory of evolution leads him to believe that he has failed at the task of fitting into his new school and that he will never recover from the error. Miss Sonya suffers the most in relation to Darwin when her job is threatened as a result of discussing the basic premise of his theories with her students, showing how the difficulty of communicating about sensitive subjects can lead to disaster.

Show and Tell

Edward's Show and Tell presentation is symbolic of Charles Darwin's theory of survival of the fittest in which a member of a species demonstrating the desired traits for a specific social situation will survive and those who do not display those traits will not. Edward convinces himself that a successful Show and Tell presentation is the essential trait that he has to display in his new school in order to make friends and survive the challenges of his childhood. When the Show and Tell presentation does not turn out the way he hoped, Edward's hopes of fitting in and being popular are destroyed.



Red Fingernails

The red fingernails worn by Eleanor while she is onstage playing Janice the evil girlfriend in *Mister Monkey the Musical* are symbolic of the professional distance between Eleanor as an ER nurse and Eleanor as an actress. When other characters in the novel comment on how good Eleanor is at playing Janice they invariably mention the song in which she gleefully throws her false nails into the crowd as being the highlight of the production. However when Eleanor is not in the theater, she does not wear the nails, for example when she is counselling Adam in a nearby café and is unable to flick away a crumb without them. The nails demonstrate that Janice is a role Eleanor adopts rather than a part of her real life.

Ray and Lauren's Engagement

Ray and Lauren's engagement symbolizes different things for different characters. For Ray, the engagement is symbolic of a new intimacy between the couple established when he tells Lauren about a family of monkeys he saw in Vietnam who has been hanged from a tree: a story he had never before shared with another human being. After years of failed romantic relationships and emotional problems related to his PTSD, the engagement symbolizes a fresh start and new hope for happiness for Ray. However for Mario, who struggles with envy of the wealthy customers at Enzo's, the engagement is symbolic of his own isolation and misery. Mario mistakenly believes that happiness is a finite resource and that Ray and Lauren's happiness means that there will be none for him.

Catholic Confession

Catholic Confession symbolizes Mario's isolation from the rest of society in all situations except for when he is in the theater. In the past, when the church was a more central part of people's lives, confession served the same purpose that theater now serves for Mario: allowing him to process his own life, actions, and emotions alongside other people and to seek guidance about the right way to live. However, for Mario, confession no longer provides this and he finds greater solace and support as an audience member in a theater than he does as a confessor at a Catholic Church.



Settings

Theater

The theater where the production of *Mister Monkey the Musical* is performed is the central location that most (if not all) of the characters pass through at some stage during the narrative. Although the production itself is generally agreed to have been a complete disaster for all concerned the theater itself provides a space for bonding and community: between the performers and the audience, between the grandfather and the grandson, and between Adam and Eleanor among many other examples.

Edward's Schools

Edward attends two very different schools during the course of the chapter told from his perspective. At his first school – a private school run by an eccentric German named Hugo – Edward felt himself to be popular and influential in his social group. Once he started at a public school, however, Edward felt that he had lost time in terms of making friends and that he would never be able to regain the level of social status he had at his previous school. Sonya works at Edward's second school and feels constrained by the rules about discussing evolution in public school settings.

Enzo's Restaurant

Enzo's restaurant has different significance for different characters. For Sonya, the location is the setting for a disastrous date which occurred after a particularly unpleasant and stressful day at work, marking the place as negative. For Ray, by contrast, the location is a place of indulgence and luxury where he goes to make himself feel better about how much he hates *Mister Monkey the Musical* by spending the royalties on an expensive meal. For Mario, the restaurant provides him with access to theater tickets that have a positive influence on his life, but also provides him with examples of unpleasant people who make him angry and jealous.

Church

The Church Mario attends before going to see *Mister Monkey the Musical* is rundown and almost empty, symbolizing that religion is a part of Mario's past that he needs to move on from because the theater provides him with a much greater sense of community and empathy than anything he is able to find at church.

ER

The ER is the location of Eleanor's day job and is therefore symbolic of her professionalism and real-world life of service in contrast to Margot's more self-indulgent and inward looking approach to life. Eleanor's experiences working at the ER make her perfectly qualified to intervene with Adam's escalating emotional problems before the situation gets out of hand or someone gets hurt.



Themes and Motifs

Recurring Themes and Motifs

Recurring themes and motifs are themselves a recurring theme and motif in the novel, suggesting that life itself is like a work of art in which repeating images and ideas occur to different people in different places without any logical process of cause and effect. Although the author does not explicitly use religious connotations to explain this phenomenon, the suggestion that recurring themes and motifs in the lives of disparate people is part of some higher divine order is made through Chapter 10 during which the Monkey God presides over the events of the novel, predicting the future for the characters from an abstract location.

Further to this, Eleanor reflects on her personal religious beliefs in a way that echoes the novel's attitude to recurring themes and motifs as a whole, while mulling over the coincidence of Leonard Marber being her patient in the ER after taking his grandson to see a performance of *Mister Monkey the Musical*: "Maybe Eleanor doesn't believe in God, but she pictures a cosmic playwright with a weird sense of humor setting up scenes like this one: unlikely coincidences, improbable events, good and bad surprises."

Some examples of repeating occurrences and motifs in the novel that cannot be explained by mere cause and effect include Margot's preoccupation with the time she played Sonya in *Uncle Vanya* while at drama school and the unconnected fact that Edward's kindergarten teacher is also named Sonya, despite not being Russian herself: she explains to her date Greg that her mother gave her that name because of her love of Russian literature. Sonya meets Mario without him ever knowing she shares the name of the heroine from the first play he ever saw at the theater.

Images, phrases, and songs appear in different characters minds in different locations without seeming to be transported by any traditional forms of communication such as language or body-language, instead passing from one character to another through some form of unspoken spiritual connection not limited by time or space. Adam's mother Giselle reminds him of the song "5 Little Monkeys" and, elsewhere in the city, Edward remembers how much his teacher Hugo disliked the song. A guest at Edward's mom's dinner party tells the grandfather about her art work tearing up pieces of paper and Miss Sonya, without ever meeting the dinner party guest, dreams about a monkey tearing up pieces of paper.

Personal Connections to Art

The novel puts forward the argument that the overall quality of a work of art is not an important factor in whether or not people are able to find a personal connection with the material. This argument is made through the comparison between *Uncle Vanya* and



Mister Monkey the Musical, showing that the classic play by canonical writer Anton Chekhov has had a similar level of impact on the lives of the characters as Mister Monkey by Ray Ortiz and the subsequent musical that was adapted from the book. This is an ironic comparison, rather than a suggestion that the two pieces of work are of equal merit. But by comparing the impact that both works of theater have on the people who encounter the texts and the performances, the author puts forward the suggestion that genius-level creations such as the writing of Anton Chekhov are not a necessary level of achievement in order for a work of art to have a positive impact on humanity.

Uncle Vanya influences the lives of the characters in the novel in several ways. It is first introduced in relation to Margot, who uses a soliloquy from Uncle Vanya to prepare for the evening's performance of Mister Monkey the Musical in Chapter 1. In the first instance, Uncle Vanya serves here as a reminder to Margot of her professionalism and her commitment to her work. Rather than giving in to the despair she feels about having to appear in Mister Monkey the Musical or admitting that the whole thing is a mess that is not worth her time, Margot clings to the works of a great playwright as a way to convince herself to take the role of Portia McBailey seriously. In contrast, for Eleanor, Uncle Vanya represents her belief that working as an actor is not something to be taken seriously. She feels that the play speaks to the hardships of a life of service – something Eleanor has experienced working in the ER and that Chekhov himself experienced working as a doctor during a cholera epidemic – and thinks that Margot's belief that the despair of Sonya could reflect her own life as a working actress is embarrassing and absurd.

Likewise, Mister Monkey the Musical reflects different things for different characters, reflecting the novel's suggestion that the impact of a work of art has as much to do with the person who is experiencing it as the person who created it. For the grandfather, Mister Monkey the Musical reminds him of the disastrous end to his career as a curator. For Lakshmi, it brings up thoughts of her parents' deaths in riots in India when she was still a baby. Mario, who has seen the musical so many times that the plot itself is no surprise to him, still finds unexpected personal connections to this particular production through his sympathetic connection to the desperation and loneliness that Margot channels into her performance as Portia McBailey.

Evolution

Through the theme of evolution, the novel makes the argument that scientific texts like Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* are just as open to interpretation and experiences of personal resonance as are works of art such as Uncle Vanya and Mister Monkey the Musical.

For Adam, the most significant part of Charles Darwin's theories is the suggestion that humans and monkeys are part of the same species, and that humans are merely a more highly evolved form of monkeys. Adam scoffs at the suggestion in Darwin's opening lines that there is some form of mystery involved in how our species originated, asking "What's the mysterious part? Look at a monkey for five minutes and you know



we used to be them.” Although Roger specifically instructs the cast of Mister Monkey the Musical not to think about evolution, Adam has used his interest in this aspect of Darwin’s work in developing his character Mister Monkey who he thinks of “as an intelligent animal a few generations away from becoming a human”.

Although Edward is too young to have read the works of Darwin, without realizing it, his chapter (called “Evolution”) involves him showing personal resonance with Darwin’s theory of survival of the fittest. Edward begins to attend a new school and quickly starts to learn what traits he will need to display in order to be socially successful in his new environment: “The best he can do is not talk too often, not answer any questions, even when he knows the answers.” He looks back on his previous school, where he was very popular and socially successful, with regret at his loss of status: “He was the smart one at Sunflower School, where they did the same things every day. How could he not have appreciated how awesome that was?” Edward considers himself to be in Darwinian competition with another boy, Terence, “who is the boss”. Edward concludes ruefully that Terence “is not about to surrender his power to a kid who started three weeks late and looks like a girl”.

For Sonya, the fact that Darwin’s works can and have been interpreted in many ways by many people over the years offers her comfort as she worries about being fired for bringing up Darwin at school. Googling Darwin to try to bolster her case, she is relieved to discover the variety of possible interpretations: “her racing heartbeat slowing only when she read a speech in which a famous biologist said that everyone has his own way of interpreting Darwin. Well! That was a relief!” Some of the various possible interpretations of Darwin are then played out at Enzo’s restaurant when Sonya’s date Greg confesses a love of Darwin and the concept of survival of the fittest, believing it implies that species who survive are inherently superior to species that have been destroyed. In contrast, on the next table at the restaurant, Lauren speaks passionately about how a greater understanding of the evolutionary connection between humans and monkeys would lead to greater compassion towards animals and more interest in protecting wildlife and their natural habitat.

Unexpected Consequences

The novel makes the suggestion that although human beings may think that they understand the significance of the events that are occurring in their lives, it is only later on after many coincidences have conspired to achieve a particular result, that the unexpected consequences of different moments and meetings can really be appreciated and understood.

Margot understands this in a general level in Chapter 1 when she imagines a series of events spiraling out of control after she decides to kick her cellphone offstage having been distracted by a boy in the audience asking his grandfather if he is interested in this. Margot imagines all of the unexpected consequences that might occur in the lives of these strangers whom she will never meet, as a result of her impulsive decision to kick her cellphone: “Although the child’s parents are too kind and polite to mention it to



the grandfather, they will blame him if their son kicks a phone. They will laugh about it when they wake in the darkness and talk the way couples do when they are trying to shorten the night or lull themselves back to sleep. They will agree it's hilarious, the bad behavior their son learned when loving, well-meaning grandfather took him to the theater."

Although Margot is able to imagine the unexpected consequences of her appearance as Portia McBailey in *Mister Monkey the Musical* on the lives of strangers, she has no sense of unexpected consequences that will occur in her own life as a result of the show. Margot is desperate to think of this production as a plateau in her career, a meaningless aside that will have no overall significance in her life. She says of the younger cast members: "Jason and Danielle have no idea that *Mister Monkey the Musical* is not the beginning of something but rather the middle (Margot hopes it's the middle) of something, that something being the bewildering stall in which Margot's life is circling." However what Margot does not know at this point is that *Mister Monkey the Musical* really is the beginning of something for her, namely her relationship with Mario.

Not all of the unintended consequences on display in the novel are this positive however. For example, through a series of coincidences, the decision by the original producer of *Mister Monkey the Musical* to ban any mention of evolution in the show eventually has the unintended consequence of putting Sonya's job at risk. The grandfather takes Edward to see the show, during which the boy's mistaken ideas about evolution are not challenged, meaning that Sonya feels the need to correct Edward when he tells her class that humans evolved from dinosaurs during his Show and Tell presentation.

Monkeys

The central motif of the novel is monkeys, specifically their spiritual, evolutionary, artistic, behavioral, and emotional connection with human beings. This is introduced in the Preface through the story of *Mister Monkey* himself, a monkey brought from his natural habitat and biological monkey family in Africa, to live as if he is a human in New York alongside the Jimson family. Throughout the story of *Mister Monkey*, the character is treated as if he is a human (by being invited to parties, living in an urban environment, and being tried for crimes in a court of law) despite not being able to communicate through the spoken word. *Mister Monkey* is treated as a human when it comes to the crimes he has committed, but not when it comes to matters of his own free will, for example he is not given the option to choose to remain living in his natural home.

Adam and Edward represent the behavioral links between humans and monkeys, with Edward participating in primate rituals of social performance and bonding in an attempt to fit in at his new school and not fall foul of the dominant alpha male of his kindergarten class, Terrence. Adam is more explicitly compared to monkeys (not least because he spends a large part of the narrative actually dressed as a monkey) with his aggressive sexual behavior towards Margot being compared to the behavior of the lascivious bonobo monkeys.

The connections between humans and monkeys in the novel are not limited to the tale of Mister Monkey himself, however. The spiritual connection between humans and monkeys is explored in relation to Hanuman, the Hindu Monkey God, who one of Lakshmi's dads discusses with Roger the director after coming to pick up Lakshmi from the theater. The Monkey God then plays a role in the novel himself, further enhancing the suggestion in the novel that all monkeys and humans are interrelated: "Only the heart of the monkey god is large enough to contain the hearts and souls of all the monkeys, all the humans, the gods, every shining thread that connects them."

The story of the grandfather, Leonard Marber, shows that humans have been interested in monkeys from an artistic perspective for a long time, through his discussion of a 19th century Dutch painting showing a close affectionate bond between a woman and a monkey. Ray's emotional wellbeing is strongly linked with images of monkeys. His PTSD dates back to a moment in Vietnam when he saw a family of monkeys who had been hanged from trees. Ray revisits this in his mind by visiting the monkey enclosures at the zoo, the only place where he allows himself to express his emotions and cry about what happened to him and others caught up in the Vietnam War.

Styles

Point of View

The novel is told in the present tense, in the third person, from the point of view of ten different characters associated to varying degrees with the production of *Mister Monkey the Musical*. In addition to this, one chapter is told from the point of view of Mister Monkey (the Monkey God) a celestial being who is not directly involved in the events of the novel.

The use of multiple different perspectives allows the reader to experience the same event from the point of view of different people involved. One of the earliest examples of this is when Edward interrupts the performance of *Mister Monkey the Musical* in Chapter 1 in order to ask “Grandpa, are you interested in this?” The interruption causes a philosophical crisis for Margot onstage as she ponders the significance of the question, allowing herself to be distracted once again into agonizing over how she reached this moment in her career. After the question, Margot wonders internally: “Grandpa, are you interested in what? In this blood, these tears? In these lives, the only lives these actors will ever have, in the point which they have reached in their lives and from which they can only hope and pray to ascend?” In contrast, the grandfather’s reaction to the interruption is much more practical and levelheaded. He wonders to himself as they both leave the theater: “Should he talk to the child about being quiet in the theater?” The discrepancy between the reactions has a comic effect because what the grandfather sees as a small failure of etiquette from an otherwise polite child has caused a psychological crisis for Margot that will continue to affect her and the rest of the cast throughout the production run.

The crossovers of point of view also allow the reader to understand that certain events have been occurring even when they have not been directly referred to in a particular chapter. One example of this is Mario, who is referred to by other characters who notice him outside of the theater. Although the reader only gets the details of one time Mario attended the show, the subsequent chapters contain observations from other characters who do not know Mario, but which allow the reader to infer that he is continuing to attend the show without managing to speak to Margot. In each case, these moments make reference to Mario’s strange physical appearance. Eleanor notices “a man with a long sad face who looks like Boris Karloff and seems to be waiting for someone” who Adam refers to as “Frankenstein” on his way past before informing Eleanor that “That freak is here every day”. As Roger exits the theater in the final chapter, he observes a man “with the long sorrowful face of a saint in an El Greco painting”. As well as indicating Mario’s continued presence to the reader, each character’s choice of description for Mario reflects their own personalities and cultural reference points.



Language and Meaning

The language used in the Prelude sets up the story of Mister Monkey as low quality and badly written before the reader has been introduced to the ill-fated production of Mister Monkey the Musical on which it was based. The extract includes simplistic metaphors such as “the full moon lit up the jungle like a baseball field” and “Day and night, he sat in a corner of his big cage and cried. It was like being in a zoo!” The extract also features strings of adjectives that give the writing a childish tone, for example: “big comfortable sunny apartment” and “smart friendly housekeeper”.

Different styles of language and word choice are used in each chapter in order to portray the different personalities and worldviews of each of the central characters. Margot’s language, for example, is prone to over-dramatizing and grandiosity: “The oxygen blast reminds her of what she tells herself at moments like this: give everything. Self-doubt is lethal. Irony is poison. Every role you play with your whole heart and soul can be Ophelia, Juliet, Portia. Lady Macbeth. Well, maybe not Lady Macbeth”. Where Margot’s attitude is internal, psychological, and emotional, in contrast, Eleanor’s attitude while she is at work is much more practical, outwardly focused, and engaged with others, which is reflected in the language used in her chapter: “Eleanor is good with people. She can figure out what’s wrong and what to do about it. It’s her job in the hospital, and it’s fallen to her here. She’s the one who steps in when no one else will step up. She has become the go-to person for cases that no even the social workers will touch.”

Structure

The novel is told in broadly chronological order, with multiple instances of overlapping timelines between each of the characters from chapter to chapter. For example, Margot’s chapter ends after the first occasion when she kicks away her cellphone onstage but Adam’s begins prior to this incident, earlier in the evening’s production before he rubs his erection against Margot’s hip and she drops her cellphone. Likewise, Sonya’s chapter ends when she discovers a text message from Greg ranking her appearance as 4 out of 10. Ray’s chapter begins much earlier in the day, before he and Lauren arrive at the restaurant and witness the fallout from Sonya and Greg’s disastrous date.

By including the chapter told from the perspective of Mister Monkey (the Monkey God) the author also includes the future lives of many of the characters, without these incidents and events being included directly in the narrative of the novel. Although the main story of the novel ends on the day when Mario finally speaks to Margot outside of the theater, the chapter told from Mister Monkey’s perspective allows the inclusion of events from several years in the future such as Adam attending drama school and Edward winning a science award at his high school despite only being in kindergarten at the time the novel is set.



Further to this, each chapter also features in a minor role the character who will be the central character of the next chapter. Miss Sonya plays a small part in Edward's chapter during his Show and Tell presentation, Ray is an unnamed man sitting next to Sonya during the date she goes on during her chapter, Mario is the waiter for Ray and Lauren during Ray's chapter, and Mario sits next to Lakshmi on his subway ride home during his chapter etc.



Quotes

Failures and disappointments make time go by so fast that you fail to notice your real life, and the past when I was so free seems to belong to someone else, not myself.

-- Roger / Anton Chekhov (chapter 1)

Importance: The contents of the note given to Margot in Chapter 1, that she initially believes is from an anonymous fan in the audience but which the reader later learns was transcribed for her by Roger. The words of Chekhov resonate with Margot's own sense of desperation and failure that she feels as a result of appearing in Mister Monkey the Musical. The domino effect of artistic influence continues when Margot channels her feelings of despair into her performance as Portia McBailey, resonating with Mario in the audience.

She could have been a great Sonya if she'd known what she knows now. That the thankless servitude Sonya describes, the life of lowered eyes and expectations, of unrelenting hard work, no love, no romance, no children, no reward, old age, then death – it is a real possibility!

-- Margot/Narration (chapter 1)

Importance: Margot's interpretation of a soliloquy from Uncle Vanya focuses on the emotional life of the character Sonya. This excerpt from the play clearly has serious meaning and value for Margot, which will be contrasted with Eleanor's reaction later in the novel who thinks that Margot's interpretation is embarrassing and superficial.

Mister Monkey is innocent! The quality of mercy is not strained – not even for a monkey.

-- Margot / Portia McBailey (chapter 1)

Importance: In this line from Mister Monkey the Musical, a line from The Merchant of Venice spoken by Portia is adapted and used in the defense of a misbehaving monkey. The line, delivered onstage by Margot as Portia McBailey after Mister Monkey is exonerated of theft towards the end of the show, mirrors the novel's own attitude to highbrow and lowbrow forms of art. Throughout the novel the ridiculous childish story of Mister Monkey the Musical is discussed alongside classic works of theater such as Uncle Vanya and The Merchant of Venice, ironically suggesting that even the most vapid work of art can have an impact on the world.

Grandpa, are you interested in this?

-- Edward (chapter 1)

Importance: An innocent question, accidentally spoken too loudly by Edward whilst at the theater with his grandfather, has unexpected consequences for the cast when it distracts Margot during a key moment onstage. The incident underscores the suggestion that audience members have as much of an impact on the meaning and significance of a given performance as the cast themselves.



In New York no one noticed the Danish light, but they'd noticed (in a bad way) the image he chose for the invitation: an 1898 Borgensen of a lovely woman holding a monkey, its legs wrapped around her waist. He'd thought the painting beautiful, but according to the publicity department, no one else did. During the play, this afternoon, the painting kept appearing before his eyes. Was that why he chose the play?

-- The Grandfather / Narration (chapter 3)

Importance: The grandfather remembers the incident that lost him his job as a curator. For the grandfather, Mister Monkey the Musical raises painful memories of his former life. Throughout the novel, many characters discover surprising personal resonance with the story of Mister Monkey that raise powerful emotions inside them despite on the surface feeling like the production was not very good.

Who knows what Darwin actually said? Not Sonya, who could be in real trouble. Last night she frantically Googled Darwin, her racing heartbeat slowing only when she read a speech in which a famous biologist said that everyone has his own way of interpreting Darwin. Well! That was a relief!

-- Sonya / Narration (chapter 5)

Importance: Sonya tries to calm herself over her fears that she will be fired from her job as a kindergarten teacher after discussing Charles Darwin's theory of evolution with her class. She discovers that, similarly to the varied interpretations of Uncle Vanya and Mister Monkey the Musical that are presented throughout the course of the novel, scientific discussions are also interpreted in a number of different ways by different people who connect to the text in different ways.

I thought, How ahead of your time you were! Writing about Africa and poachers and wildlife, all these things that needed to be said, things that still need to be said. You were hiding it in the story. And hardly anyone was saying it before you, Ray.

-- Lauren (chapter 6)

Importance: Ray's girlfriend Lauren praises Ray for the political attitude on display in Mister Monkey the book, not realizing that the things she thinks are at the center of the meaning of the story are changes that were suggested by Ray's publishers, rather than Ray's initial ideas for the story. Although Ray wished to make the book about the war in Vietnam, the changes that his publisher suggested went on to give the book a take on ecological issues that Lauren personally resonates with.

...the first play Mario ever saw was Uncle Vanya. A Broadway producer gave Enzo tickets, and Enzo gave them to Mario only because Mario was the first waiter he passed en route to the kitchen. Such are the workings of God.

-- Narration / Mario (chapter 7)

Importance: This quotation from Mario's chapter achieves two things. Firstly, it introduces the fact that Mario feels a deep personal connection to Uncle Vanya, foreshadowing his connection with Margot who also loves the play. Secondly, it echoes



the novel's overall view of a divine plan that pulls this varied cast of characters together through their coincidental connections to Mister Monkey the Musical.

After a few stunned seconds the audience cheers. And though Mario knows it's just stage business, he too wants to applaud. He feels as if he has participated in some collective ritual of release and redemption, a sacrament more liberating than whatever transpired with the priest in the church.

-- Narration / Mario (chapter 7)

Importance: Mario encounters for the first time Margot kicking her cellphone offstage, demonstrating to the reader that something that occurred by accident and improvisation in Chapter 1 has become a confirmed and regular part of the production by Chapter 7. The quotation speaks to the nature of art forms such as theater and their ability to bring communities together in moments of shared ritual, similarly (and in Mario's case, more successfully) to many religious rituals.

In Lakshmi's opinion, Mister Monkey is a nasty piece of imperialist propaganda justifying human trafficking, which you would know if you were smart enough to substitute a person for a monkey.

-- Lakshmi / Narration (chapter 8)

Importance: Lakshmi's opinion of Mister Monkey is contrasted with Lauren's opinion, despite both women having a broadly similar approach to interpreting the text. For both characters, the important thing is for the audience to remember that humans and monkeys are very similar species, but their conclusions as a result of remembering this vary wildly. For Lauren, remembering this link teaches the audience about the need to protect monkeys and their natural habitat. For Lakshmi, remembering this link implies that the author is in favor of people trafficking and slavery.

Embarrassing! Eleanor had always loved that speech, but Margot made it sound like bullshit. A life of service? Meaning what? Chekhov was a doctor, he'd worked through a cholera plague. He knew, and Eleanor, knows, what service is.

-- Eleanor / Narration (chapter 9)

Importance: Eleanor's response to Sonya's soliloquy from Uncle Vanya is contrasted with Margot's response in Chapter 1. Although Margot feels a profound and sincere emotional connection to the text, she fails to communicate this to Eleanor who feels like Margot's connection is superficial and insincere. For Eleanor the speech is about the practical realities of a life of service (which Eleanor has experiences firsthand through her work at the ER) rather than the emotional and internal battles that Margot reads into the words.

Mister Monkey is the smartest, cutest, nicest, strongest, most powerful chimp of all.

-- Narration (chapter 10)

Importance: One of the least artistic lines from Mister Monkey the Musical, attempting to give an impression of Mister Monkey's personality through a simple list of superficial



adjectives, has a surprising impact. It is said that Hanuman the Monkey God was cursed to forget about his divine powers unless someone reminded him about them and, although he detests Mister Monkey the Musical, he loves this line because it reminds him about his powers. Despite its lack of artistic merit, the line has profound influence on a divine being.