

# **Outline Study Guide**

## **Outline by Rachel Cusk**

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# Plot Summary

Faye, an unhappily divorced mother who has just moved to London with her children, narrates the novel *Outline* by Rachel Cusk. Faye, a writer, is on her way to Athens, Greece, to participate as an instructor in a summer writing course. Ironically, in life, Faye struggles with separating reality from illusion.

Before going to the airport, Faye attends a meeting at a London club with a man who wants to start a literary magazine. Instead of talking about the new magazine, he tells her about his rise in life, all of the other projects he has completed, and those that he plans to complete. Then, he talks about his family. Faye says that he gives her an outline of his life. The meeting leaves her feeling overwhelmed.

On the plane, Faye sits next to a Greek man. During the flight, he tells her about his childhood and his two failed marriages. As with the billionaire, the narrator does not speak much, but she does challenge his view of his second wife. Also, she corrects his word choice when she deems it appropriate to do so.

The narration continues with Faye having a conversation with a fellow Irish teacher named Ryan. He tells Faye about his childhood in Ireland and the time he spent studying in the United States. Then, he tells about his family. He also talks about the book he published and why he has not been able to repeat the feat. While they are at the cafe, Ryan flirts with the waitress. His actions bother Faye, but he assures her that it is okay. He goes on to tell her about the way his marriage functions and manages to stay alive. While they are talking, the Greek man contacts her to find out whether she would like to go out on his boat. She agrees to meet him, never answering Ryan's question about what she is working on now.

Out on the boat, she swims, going much further away than the Greek man would like her to go. While they are at sea, they see a family on a neighboring boat. She thinks that their happiness is just an illusion. She goes swimming again, but she stays closer to the boat this time.

Faye meets Paniotis, an old friend, for dinner. Angeliki, a famous feminist writer named friend of Paniotis, will be joining them soon. Before Angeliki arrives, Faye and Paniotis catch up with each other. He tells her that he had felt like a failure the last time he had seen her. Her family was also there and they looked perfect. He had taken a picture of them and he has it with him. She does not want to see it. He goes on to tell her about what he has done since he last saw her, what he is doing now, and his views of marriage. He is also divorced.

When Angeliki arrives, the conversation turns to her travels in Berlin and Poland and the women she met who challenged the idea of the traditional role of women. At the end of the evening, Paniotis give her the photo which is in an envelope and tells her that she should not be afraid to look at it.



On the first day of class, the narrator has the students talk about what they saw on their way to class. During the class, he son calls to say that he is lost. He cannot find his way to school. She gives him directions and continues the class. Everyone participates with the exception of one girl who is silent during the entire class. When she speaks she says that she is going to complain about the class and she calls the narrator a lousy teacher.

The Greek man calls and asks whether she would like to go out on the boat again. She goes and this time he tells her that he is attracted to her and tries to kiss her. She avoids the kiss and tries to let him down gently.

The narrator appears again in the next chapter with Ryan and a friend of hers, Elena. The two of them are going to meet a famous Greek writer, Melete, later. Ryan does not plan to go out with them and leaves to talk to his son when he calls. Before going, he shows them his son's picture which appears on the phone.

The narrator and Elena go to the restaurant where they are to meet Melete. They have problems getting a table and when they do, Elena is not happy with its location, but when the narrator agrees to sit next to the wall, she agrees to stay. Melete arrives and they talk about the relationship between men and women.

On the last day of class, the students are to write a story that includes an animal. Not everyone completes the assignment because they had all gone out the night before, but those that do share their stories and the students discuss the role of the artist and the role animals play in the lives of humans. Faye gets a call from her loan officer during class telling her that they have denied her request to increase her loan. The news upsets her and her students realize that something is wrong, even though she does not say anything about the call to anyone.

When she returns to the apartment, the woman who is going to take her place, Anne, is already there. She tells the narrator about her flight, her writing, and shares the fact that she was mugged. This was a traumatic experience for her, just as the narrator's divorce was a traumatic experience for her. However, unlike the narrator, Anne has created an outline of herself and is ready to start living again.

The narrator agrees to take her sightseeing before she leaves. The Greek man calls to see whether she has time to go out on the boat again. She declines his invitation. When he says that he will spend the day thinking about her, she corrects him and says that he will spend the day alone.



## Section 1: Chapters 1 - 2

### Summary

Outline by Rachel Cusks opens with Faye, the narrator, having lunch with a billionaire. He wants to talk to Faye about a literary magazine he plans to start. However, the literary magazine never comes up in their conversation. Instead, the man proceeds to give Faye an outline of his life story. He tells her about the grand life-changing projects that he has either already implemented or wants to start. He also talks about his family. When it is time for Faye to go to the airport, the man wishes her a nice trip to Athens, even though she does not remember telling him that Athens is her destination. Faye's conversation with the man had been very one-sided.

Once on the plane, a Greek man sitting next to Faye starts a conversation with her. He tells her about his childhood and his marriages. His first marriage had ended after an argument. Looking back, he realizes it was the most harmonious relationship in his life. He describes it as being authentic. Once it was over, he went to live on his yacht and gave up his share of the couple's shared assets, thinking that he could make the same money all over again. The Greek man found out, however, that starting over and amassing a new fortune is not so easy to do. When he finds out that the narrator (Faye) is a writer, he hides the book that he has been reading. Actually, Faye does not care what he is reading. For her, reading is no longer a form of snobbery or self-definition. He also tells her about his second wife who was beautiful. According to him, she was not smart and was only attracted to him because she thought he had money. Her parents were also bland. The Greek man and Faye part ways once they arrive in Athens.

In the second chapter, Faye is at a cafe with a fellow teacher named Ryan. Ryan talks about his youth, his time in the States, where he studied, the book he wrote, and his brother. According to Ryan, he and his brother took different paths. Ryan flirts with the waitress, and this bothers Faye. Ryan says that he and his wife have an arrangement that they can look at the opposite sex.

While Faye and Ryan are at the cafe, the Greek man from the plane calls and invites Faye out on his boat. She agrees to go. Before Faye leaves, Ryan asks her about her current writing project.

### Analysis

The novel's opening scene unfolds much as a Greek tragedy in which an actor comes on stage and foreshadows what is to come. After reading the first two paragraphs, readers have insight into how the rest of the novel will progress. In this opening scene, the narrator (Faye) meets a businessman for lunch, finishes the lunch, and catches her flight. The time spent with the billionaire consists of him telling his story - what Faye



calls an outline of his life. She describes the billionaire by saying, 'He was easily distracted, like a child with too many Christmas presents' (4).

Faye does not engage in the conversation. Though the billionaire pays her fare to the airport, she never tells him where she is going. As the narrator, Faye does not divulge to the reader that she is a writer. However, there are three clues that link Faye to her job. First, she is meeting the man to talk about a literary magazine. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that she is connected to writing or publishing in some way. Next, she describes the man's one way conversation as an outline of his life. A writer would think in terms of an "outline." Finally, Faye uses simile when she compares the man's distraction to a child with too many Christmas presents. As a writer, using simile to compare would be natural.

Faye listens and makes judgements. She sees the billionaire as buying his way into things. After she tells readers that that the man is expecting his eleventh child, she chooses to include the detail that he and his wife had adopted four of their children. It is as if she is trying to manipulate the reader by a shocking revelation. As a listener, Faye filters the stories. As a storyteller, she chooses what to tell, when to tell it, and what to leave out.

After the book begins with a one way conversation, there is no surprise when Faye's narration continues to focus on the stories of others. In each case, Faye is talking to men. As the Greek man on the plane and Ryan talk about their family histories and their marriages, family and marital relationships became important motifs. Both men, unlike the billionaire who seems to be happily expecting another child, have or have had marriages that do not reflect the romantic view of marital bliss. The Greek man's parents fought, and he has had two failed marriages of his own. Ryan said that he and his wife had a good partnership. "There's a business aspect to running a household. It's best if everyone's honest right at the start about what they're going to need, to be able to stay in it" (46).

This section reveals why the narrator shows more interest in these topics than the ones the billionaire speaks about which was all a bit too much for her. She is unhappily divorced. "I said that I lived in London, having very recently moved from the house in the countryside where I had lived alone with my children for the past three years, and where...we had lived with their father. It had been, in other words, our family home, and I had stayed to watch it become the gave of something I could not longer definitively call either a reality or an illusion." (10) When the Greek man on the plane asks her why her marriage had ended, she cannot tell him, "...among other things a marriage is a system of belief, a story, and though it manifests itself in things that are real enough, the impulse that drives it is ultimately mysterious." (11) She says that the house had become the representation of things that were absent that she hoped might return one day. By moving, she had declared that she had stopped waiting, but even though she could not be found at the house any more, she dies not say where she can be found. This is because she cannot be found. She, herself, does not even know where she is.



She also tells the Greek man that she is going to Athens to teach a writing class. As she is taking a journey after no longer being able to be found at her previous address, readers realize that she is really on a search for find answers. What is real and what is an illusion?

Another theme that appears in this section is that of people having periods in their lives that allow them to do something great that they cannot repeat. The Greek man says that "...his first marriage had been authentic in a way that nothing had been again" (15). Ryan talks about the writing of his book. "...all he knows is that he doesn't recognize himself in those stories any more, though he remembers the bursting feeling of writing them, something in himself massing and pushing irresistibly to be born. He hasn't had that feeling since..." (44). He goes on to compare his experience to writing to a marriage. "I suppose it's a bit like marriage, he said. You build a whole structure on a period of intensity that's never repeated" (44). Even though both men feel this way, they are still living their lives. They do not hide behind silence as the narrator does. The message they are sending is something that she needs to accept in order to emerge from the pain of her divorce. She will not be able to create whatever it is that she is holding onto, but that does not mean her life is over.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the billionaire never talks about the literary magazine?

## Discussion Question 2

Faye, the narrator, does not talk much in Chapters 1-2. How does the reader learn about her life? What does the reader learn?

## Discussion Question 3

How do you view Ryan's perception of what it takes to make a marriage work? Explain your answer.

## Vocabulary

credentials, scheme, eradicate, incidentally, assimilate, bestowed, monotonous, juddering, milieu, prolixity, proximity, peripheries, intransigence, aggrieved, pondered, cynicism, incomprehensibly, destiny, perennial, contaminated, tantalisingly



## Section 2: Chapter 3 - 4

### Summary

In Chapter 3, Faye is in Athens. The narrator is staying in an apartment that belongs to a woman named Clelia. Faye narrates that Clelia's personality is reflected in the apartment and it is the perfect place to stay while in Athens. There are items in, and near, the apartment that create an illusion. The narrator includes these in her description.

In Chapter 4, Faye meets the Greek man from the plane. He looks different than he did when they were on the plane. He leads her to the car. He talks about worrying that she would be disappointed by the car and the fact that the boat was moored so far away. The Greek man's erratic driving makes Faye nervous. As they are on their way to the boat, the man admits that he has been married three times and divorced three times. He also tells Faye that his son, who is on an island, might call while they are on the boat. He says that his son suffers from schizophrenia. The son's mother, who was the Greek man's first wife, had put their son in the hospital (after he had developed a drug habit). She had gone on with her life, but his father had gotten him out and brought the son into his home.

Faye comments that this does not sound like the woman the Greek man had first described. He says that she has changed. Faye tells him that people do not change that dramatically, unless the characteristic was dormant. The Greek man says he never saw it. His first wife had been a good mother and their daughter had graduated from Harvard and worked in Silicon Valley.

The Greek man talks about his first wife's second marriage and how her husband treated the children. According to those who asked her, she was attracted to her second husband because he was the opposite of the Greek man.

They arrive at the marina. While Faye waits for the man to get supplies, she tries to reach her loan officer. He does not answer. For the first time, she leaves a message.

Faye and the Greek man board the boat and head out to sea. She does not care what people would think about her being on the boat with him. She has left the confines of those structures, just as she does not care what people read.

The Greek man gets a phone call as they approach an island. The call turns out to be from someone who has finally heard of the Greek man's brother's death. Then, the man gets a business call. After the boat is anchored, Faye goes swimming. She thinks about how free it is to be in the ocean. When she returns, the Greek man comments that he does not like people to swim out so far.

Faye and the Greek man watch a family on a neighboring boat. Though the family seems happy, the narrator is not comfortable with appearances. For this reason, she is





doubtful about the family's happiness. This line of thought leads the Greek man to talk about his uncle who had mistresses, but remained married. He talks about what happened after his aunt and his father had died. He then talks about the ordeal of burying all of the family members. His parents had always fought. For the Greek man, his children were his mainstay. He tries to be grateful for his son, but his son has been in a lot of trouble.

Faye goes swimming again, but not as far from the shore as the first time. As the narrator, Faye continues to observe the family. Faye and the Greek man return to the harbor, and he mentions a place to eat if she is hungry. He secures the boat before taking her back to Athens.

## Analysis

The study of what is real versus what is an illusion is at the focus of the narrator's psyche as she is trying to come to terms with the end of her marriage. In this section, she lingers on items that create illusions. In describing the apartment, Faye refers to multiple illusions. The first illusion occurs before even walking into the apartment building. According to her, the first thing one notices when they come out of the building is the photograph at the restaurant that causes one to believe that "people were bugger and happier and more beautiful than you remembered them to be" (51). It is interesting that she says "people" as if speaking about people in general, not just the ones in the photograph. She is referencing her beliefs by extending the illusion of additional people being at the cafe to how one views mankind in general.

Inside the apartment, the narrator finds what she sees as a metaphor that "Clelia had intended to illustrate the relationship between illusion and reality" (52). She is referring to the sails on the boat models on the wall that look as though the wind is blowing them. The metaphor mesmerizes the narrator. She goes even farther than the average person might by getting closer to the sails to see what creates the effect. She actually touches the sails, only to discover another illusion. What she thought was cloth is really paper. The paper is even drier than she expected it to be, yet another illusion.

It is interesting to note that she does not view the illusions she sees as a simple trick of the eye. The illusions are actually letdowns because reality never lives up to an illusion. This reflects her feelings about her life. The illusion of her happy family life was better than the reality. This generates a sad, bordering on a more bitter reaction when she sees the family on the neighboring boat at sea. "I said that I found appearances more bewildering and tormenting now than at any previous point in my life" (74). She goes on to say, "When I looked at the family on the boat, I saw a vision of what I no longer had; I saw something, in other words that wasn't there" (74). She was looking at an illusion. She asks a question about which is more real -- those living in the moment or outside it.

Faye's thoughts cause the Greek man to talk about illusions in his family. Men were married, but had mistresses. Given his knowledge of these marriages, he wonders if his idea of a marriage is an illusion.



This section also highlights another illusion. One might think they know someone through their stories, but that is not always true. The Greek man admits that he neglected to tell the narrator about his third marriage and divorce. He also made it sound as if his first wife was a good mother, but his son has mental problems and she had him committed. The Greek man takes care of him while she lives her life. The narrator notes that this does not sound like the Greek man's earlier comments about the woman. When he says that he had never seen that side of her, Faye states that it must have been there, just dormant. Thus, the personality he saw was an illusion. The reality of the woman's character manifests itself in the treatment of their son.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you think the narrator focuses so much on the illusions in Clelia's apartment?

## Discussion Question 2

How would you describe the narrator's emotional state when she goes on the boat with the Greek man? Is she being fair to him by accepting his offer? Is she being fair to herself? Explain.

## Discussion Question 3

Why do Faye and the Greek man pay so much attention to the family they see while on the boat? If Faye were happy, how would her narration about the family be different?

## Vocabulary

secluded, metaphor, esoteric, formidable, objectivity, converged, primitive, plinth, benediction, articulate, dimensions, immaterial, obliged, incarnation, customary, condemns, notorious, stowing, promontories, collisions



## Section 3: Chapter 5 - 6

### Summary

In Chapter 5, the narrator meets an old friend, Paniotis, along with a woman novelist that he knows. Faye does not know the woman. The restaurant where they meet is not fashionable. However, Paniotis chooses it because the three of them can talk there without being interrupted by anyone. He is less interested in socializing these days.

Faye had last met Paniotis three years ago when she was still married. Her husband and children had come along, too. After seeing Faye and her family, Paniotis had left feeling that his life was a failure and that Faye's family was perfect. He had taken a picture of them. He has it with him, but she does not want to look at it. Back then, he had hopes of starting a publishing house, but he lost faith in the idea. While they wait for Angeliki, Paniotis' friend, he tells Faye about Angeliki's fame, her character, and her book. He also tells her what happened to the publishing house. He was trying to help new authors, but he ended up getting into trouble because he could not pay them. He became disillusioned. In addition, Paniotis talks about his marriage and its end. Now he lives life simply. He is writing about his childhood, the time when he was happy.

Angeliki joins them. She is not happy with the restaurant choice. Once she starts talking, she describes her travels and her observations of the women she met, focusing on Berlin and a woman named Olga in Poland.

Faye likes her and remembers meeting her at a book signing. Paniotis tells Faye that was another person. He gives Faye the photo he had taken three years earlier of her and her family. He tells her not to be afraid to look at it.

In Chapter 6, Faye is at the school with her students. She has them recount what they saw on the way to to the class. During the class, her son calls. He is lost. He is trying to get to school. Everyone participates in the exercise with the exception of one woman. She is mad because she thinks that she has not learned anything. She is going to ask for her money back and tell the organizers about her bad experience in the class. She tells Faye that she is a lousy teacher.

### Analysis

Paniotis serves to give readers an insight into the narrator's disillusionment. When he last saw Faye, he had thought that she had the perfect family. Readers are able to measure just how perfect her family had seemed by the fact that Paniotis had felt like a failure in comparison. The narrator had thought that she was happily married as well. It was not long after this meeting, however, that she found herself divorced. The happy family was only an illusion. Behind it was the reality of a marriage that was falling apart. However, neither the narrator nor Paniotis could see it at the time.



If the story had come from the narrator's husband, however, there may have been a very different picture from the one that Paniotis took. The exercise the narrator uses on the first day of class emphasizes this point, Every life has a story. While one person sees an event and interprets it one way, another can see the identical event and tell a different story. One of her students sums up this point in telling her story. "It is surely not true,...that there is no story of life; that one's own existence doesn't have a distinct form that has begun and will one day end, that has its own themes and events and cast of characters" (137). After telling her story she says, "Certainly another person... passing the window and hearing the D minor fugue, would have felt something completely different" (137).

One of the women, whom the narrator does not name until she says something that resonates with her, describes how the author feels. "I would like...to see the world more innocently again, more impersonally, but I have no idea how to achieve this, other than by going somewhere completely unknown, where I have no identity and no associations" (157). This is indeed what the narrator is trying to do by coming to Athens. It really does not work though, because she knows people there and people from the past know her. Thus, she tries to achieve this goal by going on the yacht toward an unknown island with the Greek man from the plane, even though she does not find him physically attractive. This is not the journey that is going to allow her to emerge.

Angeliki serves to raise a discussion about the traditional role of women. She has feminist views. Like Ryan's wife, is a mother. Yet, she does not let the fact that she has a child suffocate her. She associates being a mother with the projection of the desire of her parents. The desire to be creative, however, comes from within her.

Olga and the women in Berlin move through life on their own terms. In fact, the women in Berlin do so much, that just watching it all makes Angeliki tired.

Olga's husband left her for some time due to her lack of sentimentality. Yet, even though this goes with Angeliki's feminist thoughts, she is happy to find that Olga "was guilty of sentimentality, was capable of romance..." (127). Angeliki also has a sentimental side and a vain side. She has even taken to wearing delicate shoes as an expression of these facets of her personality. Paniotis comments on her vanity several times in the chapter. After the meal, he explains that Angeliki is mad at him for leaving her work out of an anthology he is editing. "Vanity..is the curse of our culture..." (129). When Faye says that she likes Angeliki and remembers meeting her before, he tells her that that was another Angeliki. "Angeliki the famous writer, the feminist of international renown, has never met you before in her life" (129).

It is interesting to note that the narrator has also left her children in order to explore what comes from inside her, her creative side. This could explain why she likes Angeliki. Angeliki's views justify Faye's own feelings and actions.

Another theme that reappears in this section is the notion that one has a period in their life that is truly authentic and brings them happiness and one cannot recreate that time. Paniotis now leads a quiet life and writes about his childhood when he was happy. He,



like The Greek man and Ryan, sees this phenomenon and faces it. The narrator has had a happy period in her life, but she has not reached the point where she can remember it and move on as these men have. She wants to hide. She wants to find answers. She does not want to face this happiness because it is too painful to do so now that it is gone. She views it as an illusion, yet Paniotis tells her that it is something different. When he gives her the photo at the end of Chapter 5, he says, "It remains your truth...whatever has happened. Don't be afraid to look at it." (129)

He also gives the narrator his view of what causes a marriage to end. Progress had been the basis of his union with his wife. Once the journey had ended, so had their marriage because there was nothing else to achieve. Things were still and they interpret this to mean that their love is dead. He realizes now that a new, truer form of love could have evolved from that point, but they had acted too quickly and gotten divorced.

The end of Chapter 6 supports the claim that one says much by being silent. A student has remained silent throughout the entire class. Her silence and her body language tell that she is not happy with the class. "Each member of the group had now spoken, except for one...whose expression I had watched grow sourer and sourer as the hour passed" (157).

## Discussion Question 1

Do you agree with Paniotis's theory that interesting people are like islands? Explain your answer.

## Discussion Question 2

Why do you think the narrator does not want to look at the picture Paniotis took?

## Discussion Question 3

Is the narrator a lousy teacher? Explain your reasoning.

## Vocabulary

meticulously, labyrinth, bewildering, astonishment, immersed, infinite, proposition, interrogating, melancholy grimace, preoccupation, disqualified, ascertain, monasticism, languorous, prophetic, commensurate, cavernous, mockery



## Section 4: Chapter 7 - 8

### Summary

In Chapter 7, Faye joins the Greek man from the plane on his boat again. On the way, he finds out that this is not the narrator's first trip to Athens. He tells her about a job he had taken in London and what prompted him to come back to Athens. He talks about his third wife and what had prompted their divorce. When he asks Faye about her day, she tells him about the student who did not like her class. He says that he feels as if there is a connection between the two of them because just at that time during the day, he had felt as if something might have been wrong with her.

When they go out to sea, the Greek man talks about mixed messages. He asks Faye whether there had been anyone else in her life since her divorce and tries to kiss her. She resists and tries to let him down softly. The two go back to shore.

In Chapter 8, Faye is out with Ryan and Faye's beautiful friend, Elena. Later, Faye and Elena are to meet Melete, one of the preeminent lesbian poets in Greece. Ryan excuses himself. As he leaves he gets a call from his son. It is his son's bedtime.

The two women go to the restaurant where they are to meet Melete. They have problems getting a table, which bothers Elena. But, they finally succeed in getting one. While they are waiting for Melete to arrive, Elena notices that the narrator has sunburn, prompting the narrator to tell her about her encounter with the Greek man on the boat. Elena says that if Faye had been frank with him, she would have invited the Greek man to be frank with her as well.

Melete arrives. Like Faye, she is wearing dark clothes. Elena comments on the two ladies wearing similar colors. The discussion turns to an ex-student of Melete's whom she barely remembers. The student always comes to her lectures, sits in the front row, and makes faces. She says that she tries to love him as he is her most faithful follower. The discussion turns to the idea of loving your enemies. Elena argues that you have to be honest with men or else they will continue to live out their fantasies. Just then, the narrator receives a text from the Greek man saying that he misses her. Elena goes on to say that if a man has a nasty character, she wants to see it now, not later.

Melete does not agree, and Elena admits that her relationships tend to end quickly. She talks about the current man in her life. She had treated him differently. Things were fine until she overheard him say that he did not want any more children. She finally tells him what she heard, and he says that it was just something he had said at the time. It has caused a rift between them.



## Analysis

Many of the themes that appear in other sections reappear in these two chapters. One of these is the nature of the relationship between men and women involved in romantic relationships. In Chapter 7, the Greek man says that for him, "the story of men and women...was ultimately a story of war, to the extent that I wondered sometimes whether I had an actual horror of peace, whether I sought to stir things up out of a fear of boredom that was also, you might say, a fear of death itself" (165). Melete supports the notion of tension in the relationship between men and women when she tells Elena "...Your story of Konstantin is really a story about disgust, the disgust that exists indelibly between men and woman and that you are always trying to purge with what you call frankness" (196). According to both people, the romantic version of love is an illusion, The reality is that strife will exist. Perhaps, the way to survive the relationship is to admit that this is the reality as opposed to trying to make things perfect or running away when strife appears.

Elena's thinks that it is best to know a man's character from the beginning. This proves that Elena does not want to deal with illusions. She wants the full force of reality. Melete is different. When she is forced to "acknowledge imperfection" (196), she wants to run away and hide. This is exactly what Faye has done, too. When imperfection appears, she runs away and hides. It is interesting to note that Elena realizes that the two women who do not want to have anything to do with men, the narrator and Melete, hide from them by wearing black. She on the other hand, wears bright colors, making it possible for her to stand out and be noticed.

Even though the narrator is hiding, it seems as if she is trying to emerge by going to an island where no one knows her, as her student mentioned in the previous section. Faye is using the Greek man to do so. At the same time, she is afraid. Thus, she gives him mixed messages. She slowly creates the illusion that she may be interested in a relationship with him. She goes out with him, alone, on his boat. She lets him pay for their coffee. She listens to his confessions. At the same time however, she says that she may never have another relationship with a man and that she prefers to remain passive. For him, it is hard to distinguish between the illusion and the reality. So, the Greek man takes a chance. He tries to kiss her. Her polite refusal only fuels his personality and his belief in the conflict between men and women being their story. For him, the war creates interest. It creates a story. It gives him life.

The structure of Chapter 7 creates this push, pull setting. The Greek man questions Faye about her trip and her day. Then, he claims that there is a connection between the two of them because he had perceived something was wrong with Faye during the moment her student had told Faye that she was a lousy teacher. He confesses by giving more information about his failed marriages, letting her know more about his character. After all of this, she still goes out on the boat with him, even though her words do not indicate that she is interested in a relationship. When he tries to kiss her, she does not tell him the truth. Instead, she tries to let him down gently. Ironically, this treatment creates a battle. As they go back and forth, readers learn more about their characters.





Faye tries, but she is not ready to emerge. The Greek man needs conflict to feel alive in a relationship.

Elena's story about her relationship with her boyfriend continues the theme that there are highlights in one's life that cannot be recreated. Elena and her boyfriend had a happy relationship until the issue of children ruptures it. Her silence tells him that something is wrong. Now their frankness has caused a rift. The question is whether they will do the work necessary to stay together or run away from their relationship.

This section shows a contrast between how Faye and Ryan treat their children. It highlights the motif of the traditional role of women. When Faye's son calls her in Chapter 6, she acts annoyed. She tells him that she will call him back. When her son says that he is lost, she does not know the details yet, but she sees it as a "minor emergency" (150). As her conversation with him ends, she tells him that she hopes he has a nice day. She ends the call as if it were a business conversation.

In Chapter 8, Ryan takes his son's call right away even though he is out with Faye and the beautiful Elena. He shows the women the picture of his son that appears on his phone. His child is smiling. Ryan waves to Faye and Elena as he leaves while talking to his son. This raises the question as to whether women are natural mothers, or do children suffocate them as Angeliki suggests. The characteristics of a nurturing mother are defined by the outside world. They are an illusion, not always the reality of a nurturing mother.

One final point this chapter highlights is the importance of the setting to one's story. As Angeliki had wanted to do, Melete and Elena want to go to a popular restaurant. Elena gets upset when it looks as if they will not get a table. Then, she gets even more upset when they are seated in an undesirable location. The place to sit is so important to her that she considers whether or not to take the table. She only takes the offered table when Faye agrees to sit close to the wall.

## Discussion Question 1

Has the narrator been leading the Greek man on up to this point? Support your opinion.

## Discussion Question 2

The Greek man says that "for all the virtues of my third wife, I discovered that a life with no story was not, in the end, a life that I could live." (165) Can there be a life with no story? Explain your answer.





## Discussion Question 3

Why do you think that Elena is so bothered by Faye and Melete wearing the same color of clothes? Do you think Melete and Elena have chosen to wear dark colors for a reason? Explain your answer.

## Vocabulary

musingly, harness, pertinent, forestall, adversarial, resentment, clandestine, disenchantment, exquisitely, proposition, punctiliously, disinhibited, indistinguishable, frankness, lectern, neurosis, subjection, provocation



## Section 5: Chapter 9 - 10

### Summary

In Chapter 9, it is the last day of Faye's writing class. The assignment was to write a story involving an animal. Not everyone has done it because one of the students, Christos had invited the class out the night before. Even though it is hard for him to complete the assignment, he manages to do so. He did it that morning. Another student completed it as well. One student was thinking too much about writing and could not write anything.

During the class, Faye's phone rings. It is the lady from the mortgage company calling to tell her that she cannot get a loan increase. The news upsets the narrator, and the students can tell that something upsetting has occurred.

In Chapter 10, Faye goes back to the apartment and finds a woman sitting on the sofa. It is the woman who will be the new teacher, Anne, tells her about her taxi ride, her opinion of the apartment, and about speaking in a different language. She has come from Manchester because she had been there teaching another course, for the money. As a writer, she has had problems continuing when she gets to the point of summarizing. She even feels that she can sum up her life as simply Anne's life.

Anne shares that she had been mugged and that the mugger had attempted to kill her. After that, she had lost the ability to eat normally. Her ex had not been of help. However, after talking to her neighbor on the plane, she began to see herself as a shape, or an outline. After the mugging, she lost weight. She was fading away. After sitting next to her neighbor on the plane and listening to the outline of his life, she felt like she wanted to know herself again.

Anne's neighbor on the plane had told her about his family and life and the difficulty he had in learning Greek even though he spoke several other languages. Anne comments that it could be because this was the first time the family had been separated. The circumstances under which he had earned success were no longer there. After he does not agree with her, their conversation ends. He does not want to take responsibility. In his opinion, it is the fault of the Greek language because it is not a major world language.

Anne and Faye discuss sights to see, and the narrator agrees to sight seeing with Anne before Faye takes her flight. The Greek man calls to see if Faye has time to go out on the boat, but she declines the invitation. When he says that he will spend the day on solicitude, she says that he means solitude.



## Analysis

In this section, the students perform the role of the chorus in a Greek play once again. They continue to discuss creativity as they talk about their stories. They also raise the point of the role a silent listener plays to those who speak to him or her. Their discussion is about animals. On a figurative level though, it relates to what has been going on throughout the entire novel and creates a literary element, a simile. By remaining silent, Faye (the narrator) is like an animal, observing and validating the reality of those who tell her their respective stories. "In our interactions with them we - not they - are shown to be what we are. Surely - for human beings - the most important thing about an animal...is that it can't speak" (225). This quote also confirms the fact that the narrator uses silence to hide. She does not want to expose her vulnerable self.

The students also raise questions regarding the role of the artist. Is the role simply to record sequences as the narrator has done in this novel? She has retold other people's stories creating an outline of their lives for the readers. She has not taken anything from them to create something new. If this is all the artist does, then can it not be something a computer can be programmed to do in the future? Or, will this never be possible because one needs the element of seeing something through one's own eyes and interpreting it in a way that only that person/artist can do? When Georgeou (the student who raises this issues of computers taking on the role of the artists) talks about his story, he emphasizes that he came from his experiences. While his father had noted that the details are correct, he thinks that the lizard is "a nice touch" (206). The lizard is not part of the sequence of events. It is creativity.

Another comparison to the narrator occurs with the appearance of Anne. Anne is a writer like the narrator. She has suffered from a traumatic experience, like the narrator. She is also divorced, and it comes as a surprise to her when her ex-husband does not rush to her aid. She also talks to her neighbor on the plane.

While Faye and Anne share some similarities, Anne has made a major leap that the narrator has not managed to take. She has begun to emerge. While Faye searches for answers to her situation based on other people's thoughts and views on her life, Anne realizes that she and her neighbor on the plane are opposites. She cannot apply his life to hers. By seeing this, she is able to draw an outline of herself. This outline, in turn gives her a sense of identity. "This anti-description, for want of a better way of putting it, had made something clear to her by a reverse kind of exposition: while he talked she began to see herself as a shape, an outline...Yet this shape, even while its content remained unknown, gave her for the first time since the incident a sense of who she now was" (239).

Before the flight and after the mugging, Anne had been fading away, literally shown by her weight loss. Her neighbor on the plane helps her to know herself again. She even wonders what it would be like to have sex with him. This is the opposite reaction Faye has to her neighbor on the plane. Even though Anne concludes it is not an option, her mind runs in that direction because she has started to live again. Faye says that she



doubts that she will ever have another relationship with a man and ends any prospects of doing so with the Greek man by telling him that he will spend his day in solitude.

It is interesting to note that Anne's neighbor on the plane becomes silent when Anne suggests that he is behind his inability to learn Greek. "Yet all that had happened was that he had refused to take the blame for his own failure..." (243). He does not want to hear how the fault is his own, so he hides behind silence for the rest of the flight. It is possible that the narrator is using the same ploy. Yes, she is afraid to emerge, but she could also be unwilling to take the blame for her divorce. Frankness begets frankness. She would rather hide behind silence and have everyone view her as a victim.

There is another contrast between Faye and Anne. Anne takes on whatever work she needs to do to make money. Faye tries to take the easy way out by applying for a loan increase. Not getting the loan increase upsets her, yet she remains silent. She does not yell or scream, but her students can sense that she is upset through her attitude and body language. The phone call denying the loan increase provides a contrast to the phone call from her son. She does not act upset after receiving her son's call.

Anne gives an interesting reason as to why the narrator feels so lost. Her identity was intertwined with her marriage. Once that was gone, she had suffered from an identity crisis. "In a sense, he had created her...Her links to the life before him had been completely severed - that person no longer existed....so when the incident occurred it had been two kinds of crises, one of which was a crisis of identity" (236).

Who is Faye without her husband? This is what the narrator must discover. This quote could also explain why she is so aloof with her son. She had children because that is what society expects, not because she had an inner desire to do so. Angeliki impresses Faye because Angeliki has the courage to have only one child, even though her family tries to force her to have more. Angeliki moves freely, giving what comes from inside her soul room to blossom.

## Discussion Question 1

What do you think the point was of having the class write a story that includes an animal? Based on the two assignments that you read about, do you think that the narrator is a good teacher?. Explain your reasoning.

## Discussion Question 2

In your opinion, what is the role of the artist? Can computers replace artists? Explain your reasoning.

## Discussion Question 3

How do the narrator and Anne differ from one another?

## Vocabulary

hypocrisy, scandalous, obstruction, dilemma, internment, oblivious, submerged, enormous, enigmatically, infectious, obstructing, torment, colliding, discriminating, envisaged, transition, squawk, fanatical, indissoluble



# Characters

## Faye

Faye is the main character in the novel and the narrator. She is a divorced mother who works as a writer. Faye has gone to Athens to teach a writing class. During most of the novel, she listens to people tell her about their own lives. However, Faye does not openly share about her own life. The personal stories she shares through the narratives of other people deal with marriage, illusion versus reality, the role of women, and storytelling itself.

Faye is blunt, often questioning other people. She questions the Greek man about his views of his second wife. She later questions him about his portrayal of his first wife, who does not seem like a great mother after he tells how she treated their son who suffers from schizophrenia. She also questions the fact that he blames his first ex-wife for the argument they had that led to their divorce. According to him, it was not fair of her to ask him whether he was having an affair when his guard was down. The narrator does not agree and challenges his view.

Faye appears to be looking for answers as to why her marriage failed. She is also trying to find out who she is in her new role as a single mother. She uses the Greek man who has the means to take her away to an island where she can be innocent again. She never reaches it though. Instead she keeps going back to her reality.

Anne presents a foil to the narrator's character. She demonstrates someone who is successfully transitioning after a traumatic event. She learns from her neighbor on her flight and starts to move forward. She not only replaces Faye in the classroom, she also replaces her in the journey to find oneself.

## The Greek Man on the Plane

The Greek man whom Faye sits next to on the plane appears throughout the novel. He is three times divorced and tells her about much of his life while they are traveling to Athens. He is a businessman and is older than the narrator. She does not find him physically attractive. He does find her attractive, however, and invites her on his boat several times. Faye accepts the first two invitations. During the second trip, he tries to kiss her. She does not allow the kiss. They return to shore.

Before Faye leaves Athens, the Greek man invites her out one last time. When she refuses, he says that he will spend the day thinking about her. She tells him that there is no need to do that. He will just be spending the day alone - implying that she is not and will never be interested in him. Her comment also shows that she is not ready to emerge.



The Greek man serves to try to give Faye the clarification regarding the failure of her marriage. He has had three very different wives. In talking about the marriages, he also explains that he grew up as thinking the relationship between a man and a woman was one based on war. He explains what he is looking for in a relationship. At one point, he says he was looking for more and follows that by saying that he guessed he wanted more affection. Another time he said that one marriage was just too peaceful and compared it to death.

He also serves Faye well because he can take her away. She has no past with him. He can take her away to an island, where she knows no one and no one knows her. He has things that represent safety and stability, like the anchor of the boat. Yet, she is not able to surrender to a relationship with the Greek man. In the end, he does not take Faye to the point that Anne's neighbor on the plane took Anne.

## Ryan

Ryan is a fellow teacher and writer whom the narrator meets in Athens. They are alone at a cafe the first time they are together. This is when he narrates his story to her. During their conversation, he talks about what one needs in order to write, and he gives his view of what makes a marriage last. Faye does not approve of the fact that he flirts with women. Ryan tells her that his wife is okay with his flirting and that his wife looks at other men. When Ryan's son calls, Ryan is eager to talk to him.

## Paniotis

Paniotis the narrator's old friend. The last time that Faye and Paniotis were together, Faye was still married. Paniotis took a picture of her family. Faye's family looked so perfect to Paniotis that he felt like a failure. He has the picture with him when he meets Faye in Athens. Even though Faye does not want to see it, Paniotis gives the picture to her anyway and tells her that she should look at it because it is her truth. During the evening, he also tells her about his views of why his marriage failed.

## Anne

Anne is the writer who comes to Athens in the last chapter of the novel. She arrives on Faye's last day in Athens. Anne will be the next teacher of the writing class. Like Faye, she is suffering from the aftermath of a trauma. Unlike Faye, Anne talks about herself.

There is another difference between Faye and Anne. Faye never considered a lasting relationship with the Greek man whom she met on the plane to Athens. After Anne meets a man on her flight to Greece and the man outlines his life for her, Anne would like to fill in the outline by being a part of his life in the future.



## Students

Faye, the narrator, is in Athens to teach a writing class. The novel includes two chapters that take place in the classroom with her students. The students act like a chorus in a Greek play. They comment on the motifs of storytelling and silence. They also show that everyone's life is a story (or has one it) and that everyone has the ability to be creative as the stories they write come from their own lives.

## Angeliki

Angeliki is a friend of Paniotis, who is the narrator's friend. Angeliki is a feminist writer who likes to be seen. Paniotis' choice of a restaurant is a disappointment for her. She is also mad at Paniotis because he has not included her work in an anthology that he is editing. During the meal, Angeliki focuses on the role of women and talks about her interaction with women in Berlin and Poland. Faye likes Angeliki so much that Faye starts wearing dainty shoes. The shoes symbolize her wish to show that she can be sentimental and vain like Angeliki.

## Elena

Elena is one of the narrator's friends. She is beautiful, wears bright colors, and turns men's heads. She and the narrator meet Melete at a popular restaurant. Elena believes in being frank with men. Frankness helps to uncover things that will make them incompatible before it is too late. She and Melete disagree on this topic.

## Melete

The narrator has dinner with Elena and Melete at a popular restaurant. Melete is one of the lesbian poets in Greece. She wears dark colors like the narrator. She believes that disgust exists between men and women in the natural state of their relationships.

## The Billionaire

At the beginning of the novel, Faye meets the billionaire for lunch before she leaves for Athens. Even though they are supposed to be meeting to discuss a literary magazine that he wants to start, they never do. Instead, he gives her an outline of his life. Through him, the author foreshadows what Faye will be getting throughout the rest of the book, an outline of people's lives.

It is interesting that the billionaire may have already gotten an outline of Faye's life before meeting her, as he knows that she is going to Athens. She does not remember telling him that detail. This helps characterize Faye and introduces the idea of silence that runs throughout the novel. She is the listener, the one who soaks in all of the



information. However, she tends to be silent. Later, she asks questions that seem to be to help her find the reality she seeks. Faye does not ask the billionaire questions which indicates that he cannot offer answers to help Faye emerge from her current state.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## The Airplane

Taking a plane represents taking a journey. In Faye's case the journey is into self-exploration that will continue until she finds peace. Even though readers know that she is flying home, they do not see her on the plane because she still is on the journey, she has not yet found peace. She literally does not make the return journey that characters make in literature once they find themselves. Instead readers hear about Anne's journey, one in which she has begun to find peace through taking to her neighbor on the plane. Anne is not only continuing Anne's class, she is also continuing her journey.

## The Yacht's Anchor

An anchor as a symbol means hope, steadfastness, salvation, stability, and/or tranquility. It can also be a symbol of good luck, safety, and security. In this sense, it means trust and confidence. Faye is trying to find all of these things. However, the Greek man who owns the yacht with the anchor cannot help in her search.

## Narrator's Former House

A house provides structure. Without this structure, things are unreal. This is what the narrator feels now that she no longer lives in the family house. A house is also a symbol of shelter and security. The narrator feels that she does not have this now that she is divorced..

## Meals

Meals are a symbol of community. The author eats and drinks a lot with other people. While the meals go well, she does not participate in the social setting. She merely listens to others and responds to questions. She remains on the outskirts of the community.

## Angeliki's Dainty Shoes

Angeliki's dainty shoes represent her vanity and sentimental side.



## Marriage

Marriage represents a union between a man and a woman in which they become one. When one of the partners breaks this union, the other is left without a sense of self. Both the narrator and Anne feel lost because of their divorces.

## Stairs

Stairs represent transition, change, and personal growth. Stairs can also serve as a symbol of the obstacles between two planes of reality. Seeing the girl on the step machine encourages Ryan, and he achieves personal growth while he is in the United States. There remains the conflict of a place that is not his home and his actual home. The situation creates enough tension to help him write a successful book.

## The Sea

The sea or ocean symbolizes elements such as power, strength, life, mystery, hope, and truth. In this novel, it also represents the fluid life that flows from stability within one's self. It is that kind of life for which Faye yearns.

On another plane, the sea can be referred to as the tears or sorrow of God. This is an interesting interpretation as the narrator is sad due to her divorce, and she spends time with the Greek man at sea on his yacht. Also, the Greek man goes swimming after Faye's rejection of his kiss, which makes him sad. Ironically, in these instances the sea is the place where Faye and the Greek man try to emerge from personal sadness, yet it seems to intensify the feeling for both.

## The Yacht's New Engine

An engine is the heart of a machine. When the Greek man gets a new engine for his yacht, he has a new lease on life. He leaves his zombie job in London and goes back to the place he loves. The new engine symbolizes the start of the Greek man's new life.

## Animals

Animals represent a mirror of the human consciousness. They watch us, but they do not speak. Animals provide humans with a deep level of understanding and help us achieve a more fulfilling life.

## The Novel's Title

The novel's title symbolizes each person's story. A person's story is their reality, and it provides a sense of self. Anne is able to create an outline of herself after talking to her

neighbor on the plane. Faye narrates the outlines of others, but, she cannot create one for herself. Readers can create an outline for Faye based on what she narrates about others and what she does not reveal about herself.



# Settings

## A London Club

Readers first meet Faye in a London club. A billionaire invites her there and then proceeds to give her an outline of his life. People use a setting to support their own story, much as a writer does to create a story.

## The Airplane

The narrator takes a plane to Greece. On the plane ride, she meets an older, Greek man who commences to tell her his life story. The Greek man appears throughout the novel. The plane itself a symbol. It represents a journey. More specifically in this case, it represent a journey into self-exploration that continues until one finds peace. Anne also takes the same journey on a plane. Though, the vehicle for both Anne's and Faye's journey is the same, each has a different personal experience.

## Clelia's Apartment

Clelia's apartment is where the narrator stays during her time in Athens. It highlights the motif of illusion vs.reality. The cafe at the entrance has a photograph of people sitting that creates an optical illusion. There are boats on the wall of the apartment which give the illusion that the wind is blowing the sails.

## The Restaurants Faye Goes To

Setting plays a role in characterization and the characters in the novel know this. Characters who want to be seen and show off want to meet in places that match their showy persona. Thus the billionaire, Elena, Melete, and Angeliki, each wants to meet in popular restaurants.

Paniotis chooses a particular restaurant for meeting with Faye, Angeliki, and Elena because their conversation will not be disturbed by noise. However, as Paniotis had predicted, Angeliki is not happy with his choice of a restaurant. Elena is upset, too, because there is a long wait to be seated at an undesirable corner table. After Faye offers to sit in the worst seat, Elena agrees to stay.

Faye does not mind sitting in the worst seat as she does not want to stand out or let her personality emerge. She wants to remain hidden. In essence, she is like a wall flower sitting on the outskirts of life.



## The Classroom

Faye, the narrator, is in Athens to teach a writing class. So, one of the settings is a classroom. A classroom is a place for learning and creativity. Since the narrator is teaching a writing class, her students explore storytelling.

In addition, the classroom is the setting for the students who act like the chorus in a Greek play.

## The Yacht

Going out on a boat represents taking a journey. In literature, the journey tends to end in self-growth. In this case, however, the narrator goes out on the boat, but always comes back as the same person with no changes. Even though Faye would like to free herself of the pain she feels due to her divorce, she cannot do so.

# Themes and Motifs

## Silence

Silence is one of the major motifs that runs throughout the novel. Most of the time, it is Faye, the narrator, who imparts the novel's messages about silence by not divulging details about herself.

Faye wants to hide. She no longer wants to try to persuade anyone of anything. She no longer participates in literary discussions, as she has stopped judging people by the books they read. She fails to leave messages with her loan officer until the end of the novel. Faye does not even mention her name when she talks to the loan officer. The loan officer must confirm that it is Faye to whom she is speaking. By being silent, Faye serves a purpose for those who talk to her. She is like the animals she has her students include in their stories. It is hard for the students to write about the animals because animals do not speak to us and share their thoughts which could be helpful in creating an animal's life story. Similarly, it would be difficult for anyone, with the exception of the Greek man, to write about Faye because she does not tell anything about herself.

The Greek man is different from the other characters in the narrative because Faye uses him as a tool to emerge. The boat, the sea, the anchor all provide the stability and safety she seeks. However, she tends to be like a hamster. She runs around in circles, always returning to the Greek man and the sea. Yet, this does not help Faye to find the new identity she needs after a failed marriage. In the end, it is best for the Greek man to let her go if he really cares about her. Letting her go might force her to emerge on her own.

Animals do not speak, but "through them we access the story of ourselves" (224). Metaphorically speaking, the silence of animals and Faye's silence aptly support that one's life story can be ascertained through the silence of others. The story of Aris' hamster is an example. Ari loved his hamster, but as he watches it go around in circles every day getting nowhere, he realizes that he needs to let it go. The hamster never says a word, but its actions do. Likewise, Faye does not say much to the characters in the novel, but the Greek man knows that she is in pain. Paniotis, her friend can sense her pain, too. Her students know that something is wrong after she talks with her loan officer. Yet, Faye has never spoken about her problems with anyone.

Faye and Melete learn about people from their silence, too. Faye realizes that her student is not happy with Faye's writing class on the first day, even though the student does not say anything until the class is over. Melete's ex-student harasses her without saying a word. He simply makes faces.

The information that the narrator shares with readers also says a lot about her even though she never actually tells anyone what readers surmise about her. Readers learn



about her from what she shares about others. She focuses on the issues of others with which she currently grapples, too.

At the end of the novel, Anne presents the story of another person who hides behind silence. Her neighbor on the plane does so when he does not want her to blame him for his failure. The introduction of his story shows that people may not only hide because they are not ready to emerge. It is possible that they do not want to accept the blame for their own situations in life.

## Marriage and Relationships

What is love? What makes for a happy romantic relationship or a marriage? Do men and women share the same opinions when it comes to the answer(s) to these questions? Why do relationships end? The novel explores answers to each of these questions through the marriage motif.

Faye has a failed marriage. She is the partner who was left. She feels abandoned and lost. She left her house, the place where she could be found, because she does not want to be found. At the same time, however, she is trying to find answers as to why her marriage ended.

The characters in the novel give her various perspectives. The Greek man sums up his feelings regarding the relationship between a man and a woman by saying that, for him, it is like a war. In fact, for him, it is the conflict that makes life interesting. He spiced up his first marriage by having an affair. When he was married to a woman (his third wife), who he admits helped him prosper and is the best mother of his three wives, life was too peaceful for him. It felt like death, so he divorced her. He is never satisfied with what he has. He looks for more. Melete has similar opinions about the relationship between men and women.

Ryan, Olga, and Angeliki present the relationship between men and women more as one that is like a business partnership. The partners define the rules. According to them, this eliminates illusions. Olga says that her husband did leave for a while due to her lack of sentimentality, but he came back. Everyone was happy when he did because his return meant that he accepted the basis of the partnership.

According to Paniotis, the basis of his relationship with his wife was the acquisition of things. Once that was over, their marriage frizzled.

The narrator sums up the varying views by saying that perhaps love is a belief that the partners share that others might not see. It is only real to them as long as both of them believe it. As soon as one does not, the relationship collapses.





## Illusion versus Reality

The motif of what is real and what is an illusion runs throughout the novel as this is a question with which the narrator grapples. This arises from her belief that her life with a husband and children who created a family unit was real, but it ended in divorce. At the beginning of the novel, she says that her home had "become the grave of something I could no longer definitely call either a reality or an illusion" (11). She knows that the material things are real. She feels, however that the relationship was one big illusion. Paniotis suggests that it was real. He took a photo which he gives her as proof. The photo serves to document its reality. He urges her to look at the photo, telling her that it is her truth.

Faye cannot accept the reality that something has slipped from her reach without her being able to explain why it happened. She knows that it is not coming back. Thus, readers never see her opening the picture's envelope during the novel. Instead, she looks at other relationships, like the family she sees at sea as being an illusion. She feels better thinking this way. If these relationships are just illusions, not based on reality, then it is not anyone's fault that they end. She focuses on other illusions as well. She goes into detail describing the illusions in Clelia's apartment. She even goes as far as to touch the sails, running into another illusion once she finds out they are made of paper.

It is interesting to note that a grand illusion exists in the structure of the novel itself. The lack of conversations the narrator has with other characters gives the impression that she is silent. In reality, though, she is talking. She is talking to the reader as she relays the story of others. She is retelling the stories that people tell her. Thus, she is not silent. She is speaking through the story of others and presenting views that justify her story.

## The Role of Women

The narrator was a wife. She is a mother. Yet, she does not spend time talking about her children with the exception of relaying the lessons that she learns from them when they were young that apply to her life now. It is an analytical view, not one filled with emotion. Her son's phone call annoys her. She is quick to get him off the phone and get back to the class. The students do not realize that anything is wrong as they do after she talks to her loan officer. Her son calls her and says that he is lost and it does not phase her. Her child is lost both literally and figuratively. She cannot provide comfort to him because she is also lost. It is like the instructions on the plane. Adults have to help themselves before they help children.

Ryan's reaction to his son's phone call is the complete opposite. He beams and acts like a proud father. He lets the women know that it is his son who is on the phone and he leaves them to pay attention to his son. His son also calls for a completely different reason. He is not lost. He is participating in a family ritual.



The contrast of the two responses causes readers to question the traditional role of women. What makes a good mother? The Greek man talks about each of his wives' parenting abilities. Angeliki discusses this in her discussion about her travels to Berlin and Poland. She is happy to see that Olga has a sentimental side that manifests itself in the love for her child. Angeliki interprets this to mean that Olga is capable of everything. She, herself does not want anymore children and in fact, finds that having children suffocates her. Creativity comes from within while being a wife and mother is a projection of the desires of one's parents. A woman has to what is innate in her.

Yet, in spite of her feminists views, seeing the women in Berlin who do it all wears her out and now she wears delicate shows, representing the fact that she does have a soft, feminine side and is vain enough to want to display it. Thus, while women may not be natural mothers and want to work and travel, they are not hard people. They still have a delicate side which they want to honor.

## The Narrative

The narrative or storytelling is another major motif in the novel. After all, the characters are telling their stories to the narrator. The narrator is telling the characters' stories to the readers, and her students are learning how to tell stories. The motif examines storytelling from the view of the person telling the story, the listener, and the creative element of writing a story.

Why do people tell their life stories to others as the characters do in the novel? One of the reasons could be that they are trying to access the story of themselves. They create an outline of their life, just as the narrator says the billionaire does at the beginning of the novel. In telling their story which shows what they are, they will often tell the story in the light that makes them look good which may result in one-sided stories. This is especially true about stories involving divorce. The Greek man leaves out pertinent information about his ex-wives. He makes the second one sound worse than later information proves her to be. The narrator is quick to point out the discrepancy, something the Greek man does not like. He also makes his first wife sound like a better mother than she turns out to be. In addition, he tries to make himself sound like the victim when he finally divulges the argument that causes the split with his first wife.

As the narrator shows through her spotty dialogue, one can create an outline of someone based on what they do not say and what they do say in response to the stories they listen to. For example, readers know that the narrator is particular when it comes to the connotation of words as she corrects the Greek man several times when he says a word that she she thinks should be another. Her defense of his ex-wives when he blames them for causing the arguments that result in the end of the respective marriages shows that this is a soft spot for her. Her reaction to not getting the increase in her loan indicates that she needs, and was counting on, the money. When Anne asks her whether she is looking forward to going home, the narrator only says three words, "In a way." (248) That is enough, though for readers to know that she is not ready to emerge.



One can tell their story to others, but that does not mean it will come back the way you told it as listeners can filter information or even interpret it differently while you are speaking to them. Readers learn about what others say from the narrator. They have no way of knowing if this is all that was really said. She tells the story from her point of view and relays information related to her quest to find herself, information that will make her feel real. She even puts words in the Greek's man's mouth when she "corrects" his word usage.

This highlights another point about storytelling which is emphasized in the classroom. There is a story in everything and two people can see the exact same thing or have the exact same experience and will have a different story. The narrator moves throughout the novel as someone who was done wrong, but what would her sons' stories be. What about her ex-husbands? People do not often tell stories in which they shoulder the blame. The Greek man does not and neither does the man Anne talks to on the plane. In fact, when she suggests that maybe he is the reason behind the fact that he cannot learn Greek, he stops talking to her. He hides behind silence.

One final point the novel raises about storytelling is the need to have tension in order to be able to write. Ryan wrote when tension existed in his life. Now that he is settled, he does not write. Anne has not been able to write stories because she summarizes. There is no tension. It is what it is. The narrator herself does not seem to be writing anything. She is lost, but there is no tension in her life. She is just aimlessly floating. While readers have an outline of her life, she is trying to create one for herself.

# Styles

## Point of View

The novel is written as a narrative from the first-person perspective. This gives an interesting twist as silence, based on Faye's silence in the novel, is a motif that runs throughout it. Faye, the narrator, does not speak directly to the other characters. Ironically, however, she exposes herself to readers as she relates what the others have said to her. She uses reported speech and rarely uses quotation marks.

The point of view also supports the motif of illusion versus reality. The narrator gives the illusion of being silent. In reality she is talking all the time. She records a sequence of events, inserting other things to make it interesting.

It is important, though, to realize that the author is looking for answers and wants to validate her life. She does not want to take the blame for her divorce. Thus, it is possible that she may have filtered information and changed wording, as she does with the Greek man, resulting in new meanings. She may not be a reliable narrator.

## Language and Meaning

The novel's language is poetic in nature and draws the picture of a woman who is lost and suffering. The words are eloquent, which matches the demeanor of each character. They are all writers, so they know how to use words to create a scene that is not dramatic or sentimental. One does not have to speak to show emotion, which is what the narrator demonstrates. She does not speak out loud, but she creates vivid, intellectual characters in her narration.

The work of a writer is to choose the word that conveys the exact meaning for which one is searching. An example of this is when the narrator corrects the Greek man at the end of the book by using "solitude" instead of "solicitude." Previously in the narration, she corrected him because of words that he had just unintentionally misused. However, by changing his word to solitude, a word he meant to say, she is sending a powerful message. She wants him to know that she is not interested in a relationship with him. He should have used the word "solitude" because he will spend the day alone - not even with thoughts of her.

With the exception of knowing the difference between words like "prolixity" and "proximity" and "solicitude" and "solitude" none of the words are complex enough to leave readers wondering about the basic meaning of a scene.

## Structure

The book's structure is distinct for several reasons. First, it forms a complete circle, starting with the narrator's flight to Athens and ending on the day of her departure. Secondly, it functions much like a play in which the narrator is on stage with only one other character most of the time and each character, or set of characters as they sometimes have their own chapters. During their time on stage, the characters tell their respective stories to the narrator, who in turn tells it to the readers. With the exception of a few chapters in which a group of characters act as one (or a chorus), readers hear the stories through the narrator's voice. This last point notes one of the novel's motifs - that of storytelling and how the listener perceives and filters what happens based on their own experience.

The structure also has other thematic ramifications. Readers rarely hear the narrator's own voice. Yet, it is her silence that creates an outline of her life and personality. She hides behind her silence. When she does speak, she makes it known that she wants to keep silent. To emphasize what a non-person she is, readers do not even learn her name until Chapter 9, when she is about to leave Athens and the book is almost over. Even then she does not introduce herself. The caller is just confirming that it is her. In addition, the idea of hiding behind one's silence, reveals various observations about women, marriage, and motherhood. Many women silence their inner voice and heed society's definition for women's roles. For example, Faye has children though she might have preferred to remain childless. She silences her own desires and embraced society. However, Angelika has only one child because she will not allow her family's view about having more children take precedence over her own.

The structure represents an illusion itself as it is the narrator who is telling readers the stories she hears. She is not really silent. She is functioning as an artist painting with words as she reports a sequence of events.



## Quotes

...among other things a marriage is a system of belief, a story, and though it manifests itself in things that are real enough, the impulse that drives it is ultimately mysterious.”

-- Faye (chapter 1 paragraph 22)

**Importance:** This quote shows how lost the narrator is in explaining why her marriage ended. According to the system of belief of what makes a good marriage, everything was fine. It was the story of a middle class family with lovely children who lived in the English countryside. Later readers learn that her friend thought that her marriage was so perfect, her family so happy, that he felt like a failure when he saw them together. Yet, this story is not what keeps a marriage together. She is at a lost at trying to explain what does. It is a mystery. The answer would have saved her marriage. This quote also sets up the theme of illusion versus reality. Even though her marriage had all of the real elements that are part of the story of a happy marriage, it was only the illusion of happiness as she is now divorced. Thus, the reality of the marriage was something else entirely.

The memory of suffering had no effect whatever on what they elected to do: on the contrary, it compelled them to repeat it, for the suffering was the magic that caused the object to come back and allowed the delight in dropping it to become possible again.”

-- Faye (chapter 1 paragraph 30)

**Importance:** Faye says this when the Greek man asks her about her work while they are on the plane. She says that it is as if he had trained himself on how to recover objects that slip through his grasp. Indeed, it seems as if he has because he has been married three times and for him the relationship between men and women was an adversarial one. That is what made it exciting for him and created the story. Without it, he feels as if he is dead. Thus, even though there is suffering in each of his marriages, he continues to do it because it is the suffering that leads to the delight of doing it all over again.

What I knew personally to be true had come to seem unrelated to the process of persuading others. I did not, any longer, want to persuade anyone of anything.”

-- Faye (chapter 1 paragraph 32)

**Importance:** This quote shows the extent of Faye's disillusionment based on the failure of her marriage. With that failure, everything that she believed in came into question, including her knowledge of literature, which is her life's work.

I suppose, I said, it is one definition of love, the belief in something that only the two of you can see, and in this case, it proved to be an impermanent basis for living.

-- Faye (chapter 4 paragraph 26)

**Importance:** In this quote, the narrator continues to grapple with defining love. This time she does it in reference to the relationship between her sons, but it can be extended to



couples as well. In a relationship, both people have a shared vision that ties them together, but it is not real. It is only an illusion. When one of them no longer believes it, the relationship is over. This would help her explain why she thought everything was okay with her marriage. She still believed in the illusion, but her husband did not. His disbelief broke the bond.

There was no such thing as an unblemished childhood, though people will do everything they can to convince you otherwise. There was no such things as a life without pain.”  
-- The Greek Man Paraphrasing His Mother (chapter 4 paragraph 27)

**Importance:** The Greek man is talking about his children and his fear of what effect divorce would have on them. However, it is also a message to the narrator who has children and may worry about the effect of the divorce on them. It is a message to her. She is in pain now, but such feelings are part of life. She should not let it take over her existence.

Sometimes it has seemed to me that life is a series of punishments for such moments of unawareness, that one forges one’s destiny by what one doesn’t notice or feel compassion for; that what you don’t know and don’t make the effort to understand will become the vey thing you are forced into knowledge of.”  
-- Faye (chapter 5 paragraph 5)

**Importance:** The narrator references her failed marriage here. She feels that she is being punished because she has been lost in her own story and did not know that Paniotis had felt like a failure. Now, she feels like one.

The parts of life that are suffocating’, Angeliki said ‘are so often the parts that are the projection of our parents’ own desires.”  
-- Angeliki (chapter 5 paragraph 19)

**Importance:** This quote refers to the traditional role of women. It is a role that women fall into without question because their parents expect them to, but it is not their authentic selves. Thus, they feel as if they are suffocating under the pressure of trying to be something that they are not.

I would like,’ she resumed, ‘to see the world more innocently again, more impersonally, but I have no idea how to achieve this, other than by going somewhere completely unknown, where I have no identity and no associations.”  
-- Penelope (chapter 6 paragraph 46)

**Importance:** This quote expresses exactly what the narrator is trying to do. She has come to Athens, which is a first step. However, there, she knows people and has obligations. Escaping on the Greek man’s boat, perhaps going to an island, would accomplish the goal. This could explain why she goes on the boat with him even though she is not attracted to him.



There was a great difference, I said, between the things I wanted and the things I could apparently have, and until I had finally and forever made peace with that fact, I had decided to want nothing at all.”

-- Faye (chapter 7 paragraph 14)

**Importance:** This quote explains why the narrator chooses to hide instead of live her life. She wanted to stay married, but she is now divorced. She has not come to terms with the divorce.

It was through other people, some of them strangers, that the incident had to be unravelled.”

-- Anne (chapter 10 paragraph 34)

**Importance:** This quote serves to show the difference between the narrator and Anne. While the narrator has interacted with other people throughout the novel, her story has yet to unravel. Anne's story did come apart. Even though she still suffers from the effects, she is farther along in her recovery than Faye is in her own.

...While he talked she began to see herself as a shape, an outline, with all the detail filled in around it while the shape itself remained blank. Yet this shape, even while its content remained unknown, gave her, for the first time since the incident, a sense of who she now was.

-- Anne through the Voice of Faye (chapter 10 paragraph 37)

**Importance:** This quote brings together the metaphor of a person's life story being an outline of the person. By looking at the outline, one can figure out the reality of who they are. The narrator has yet to reach this point. She does not have an outline of her life, and she does not know who she is now. That is what she is still searching to find.

You mean solitude.

-- Faye (chapter 10 paragraph 63)

**Importance:** This quote shows that the narrator is not yet ready to emerge. The Greek man used the word that he wanted to use, but she corrected him to say that he will spend the afternoon alone. He should not waste his time thinking that there is, or will be, anything between them as the word "solitude" implies.