

# **The Plover Study Guide**

## **The Plover**

(c)2016 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



# Contents

<a href="#">The Plover Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Chapters I – II.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Chapters III – IV.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapters V – VI.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter VII.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapter VIII.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Symbols and Symbolism.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Settings.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Themes and Motifs.....</a>	<a href="#">28</a>
<a href="#">Styles.....</a>	<a href="#">32</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>



## Plot Summary

“The Plover” is a contemporary fiction novel by Brian Doyle in which Declan O’Donnell takes to the Pacific Ocean in his small fishing boat, the Plover, intending to live away from people but ultimately ends up surrounded by them instead. For reasons never fully revealed, apart from a genetic predisposition to alcoholism, Declan has had a difficult life and so takes to the water from Oregon to be his own man on board the Plover, a boat he purchased used many years ago when he was seventeen. Having outfitted the boat with supplies, spare parts, and several books about Irish Member of British Parliament and conservative philosopher Edmund Burke, Declan takes to the water.

At first, his only company is a herring gull. Initially Declan enjoys being on his own and seeing nothing around him but open ocean, yet this enchantment quickly fades. However, Declan manages to overcome his loneliness and to appreciate the emptiness of the ocean. While Declan is skirting Hawaii, a message is carried to his boat by canoe. The message is from Declan’s friend, Piko, who has come to Hawaii with his disabled daughter, Pipa, following the death of Piko’s wife. Piko has been trying to sort out his life. Piko explains in the message that he had a feeling Declan would be heading in his direction, so he asks to accompany Declan for part of his voyage. Declan readily agrees and takes on Piko and Pipa. It was not what he had planned, Declan thinks, but it is important as a matter of friendship and kindness.

However, disaster soon strikes. An old Russian trawler, the Tanets, run by a man known only as Enrique, bears down on the Plover and kidnaps Piko to force him to become the pilot of the Tanets after the previous pilot, Danilo, was washed overboard in a storm. Declan pursues the Tanets, and under the cover of night Piko makes his escape to the Plover. The next morning, Declan, Piko, and Pipa are stunned to discover a massive Pacific Islander woman on board the Plover named Taromauri. She explains very briefly that she worked for Enrique, but that part of her life is over now. She goes on to explain that following the death of her daughter and the distance of her husband she worked on whatever ships she could find in order to move on.

Declan is wary of Taromauri at first, but agrees to let her stay on. Taromauri quickly bonds with Pipa, who became disabled after being hit by a bus. Through her love and gentleness, and through her speaking with the herring gull who Taromauri recognizes as one of the Thirteen Servants, Pipa, who has been unable to verbalize, begins to speak. Everyone on the boat is thrilled. Over the next few weeks, a warbler, two rats, a government minister, and Danilo all become passengers on board the Plover. Declan is elated and frustrated with the little society that has grown organically on his boat, but he takes refuge in the work of Edmund Burke and finds advice in his words. Meanwhile, Enrique, seeking revenge, bears down on the Plover once more.

Confronted by the rifle-wielding Enrique, Declan sails the Plover past the Tanets, during which time Piko throws a flaming stick into the smokestack of the Tanets, causing it to explode. Enrique, badly burned and in serious need of medical help, is fished from the water. By now, everyone on the Plover except Declan is ready to return to their regular



lives. Declan agrees to bring them all back to Hawaii, from which they will make their own ways home. Pipa begs Declan to come with them, but he refuses, saying he must remain on the water. As the journey toward Hawaii gets underway, the herring gull dies, and is ceremonially burned and buried at sea. After dropping everyone off in Hawaii, Declan begins sailing around the islands to head back to open water and feeling elated to be free once more but saddened to be without loved ones. Yet as he heads past a cove he notes with happiness and hope that a green canoe is paddling out to meet the Plover.



# Chapters I – II

## Summary

Chapter I – Declan O'Donnell sails his small boat, a trawler called the Plover, last registered in Depoe Bay, Oregon, out west into the Pacific Ocean. He has no end destination. His only company is a herring gull. Declan lightheartedly wonders what on earth the bird could be doing on the voyage and explains to the bird that they are an island and will be living a simple life. He explains to the bird that he has renamed his ship "The Plover" because the Pacific Golden Plover is a wandering bird, overlooked and slight but strong and capable of traveling large distances. The Plover has a long history including a small wreck, time being used as a whalewatching boat, and an owner who presumably faked his death.

The boat carries two-hundred gallons of extra fuel and assorted supplies, including one-hundred pounds of rice, boxes of cookies, fresh fruit, emergency gear, a medical kit, spare parts for the engines and sails, a collection of philosopher Edmund Burke's speeches, and so on. Burke's writings are especially important to Declan because he knows Burke is far deeper than most give him credit for, or care to find out. Declan considers the broad reach and extent of the Pacific, including that it is on average two miles deep and that he intends to sail by way of underwater mountain ranges. He calls the Pacific "Pacifica" as though it were its own country.

Declan has wanted a Pacific adventure ever since reading "Kon-Tiki: Across the Pacific in a Raft" by Thor Heyerdahl as a child, a book which in turn led to Declan reading similar books. Declan has owned the Plover since he bought it used at the age of seventeen and has dedicated himself to learning how to sail. During his first four days at sea, Declan discovers a surprising amount of trash and other debris in the water. On the seventh day, a storm hits. In the morning, the gull is gone, causing Declan to cry and feel alone. Still, he carries on, knowing that the hunger for story is man's greatest yearning and greatest terror and that he is living a story.

On the twelfth day, Declan and a large, old, rusty Russian fishing ship called the "Tanets" encounter each other. A man named Enrique says hello to Declan, asking Declan if he is an American, and whether or not he has any drugs or fish to sell. Declan says he does not. Enrique cannot understand why Declan is so far out at sea alone and writes him off as crazy. Declan, meanwhile, is beginning to tire of his own situation, for the sight of gray ocean is getting boring, and his books are beginning to swell from moisture. Declan thinks about an old friend named Piko whose daughter was hit by a bu, and how everyone always gave the guy different names. He realizes he must change his course or he will run straight into the Pacific's stormy winter season. He understands that he will have to sail south, into the Hawaiian Islands. He blames it on the ocean.



Chapter II – As the islands of the South Sea appear in view, Declan feels wary of them. He decides to sail north around the islands and reads Burke, specifically Burke's defense of the American Revolution through the idea that authority must be earned, not assumed. As Declan travels around the islands he realizes he will need to put in for fuel and supplies. A canoe called the "Ili'ili" appears bearing a letter for Declan from Piko, who is on Makana Mountain on Hawaii's Kaua'i Island. Piko's letter explains his wife, Elly, has finally died of cancer after a long battle with it and that he and his daughter, Pipa, have traveled to the islands in hopes that Declan would end up their way. They wish to accompany him on his boat, and Piko says he really needs to be on the boat.

Declan then goes ashore to get Piko and Pipa. They then sail through the islands, taking time to swim, snorkel, catch and store fish, and refit the boat. Pipa especially enjoys herself until a bad storm sets in. Declan races and hopes they can outrun it. Pipa is washed overboard, causing Piko to dive in and save her while Declan helps save Piko. In the following days of calm, Declan and Piko work to repair and refit the boat. Piko explains that since the bus accident, Pipa is not altogether there mentally, though she still manages to function. Declan tells Piko he is happy to have Piko and Pipa along, and he hopes the trip will do Pipa some good.

Piko reveals that he has learned how to juggle and throw fire, which is a skill called "Oahi." Declan admits how much he has come to love Edmund Burke's writings, explaining that nobody reads him anymore but everyone still thinks they know what he thought. Declan explains that he wanted to read Burke to truly understand him and keep him alive. Declan says that one of the fascinating things about Burke is that Burke would give a speech from the heart and then try to remember it all later and write it down. Secretly, Declan begins to wonder about his voyage now and contemplates questions ranging from what he'll do when Piko decides it is time for him and his daughter to go home to what they'll do for money and medicine in case Pipa needs help. He also realizes that with other people on board now there will be new expectations and other people's opinions.

At last, Declan speaks to Piko about Piko's situation. Piko explains he is simply trying to sort his life out, that Elly died with Pipa in her arms and that he doesn't know what to do without Elly. Pipa, meanwhile, though she isn't able to verbalize things, has a keen understanding of things that go on around her. The sounds she makes, which her father cannot figure out, are her attempts at calling birds. When they are near islands with birds, Declan and Piko are amazed to see the birds responding to Pipa's calls. The Tanets also survives the storm, though the ship's pilot is lost overboard. This leaves Enrique alone aboard the ship with Taro, a massive and quiet man. The Tanets, it is revealed, has been registered under different names in different countries so Enrique can use his boat to transport whatever cargo needs to be transported whenever to wherever. He now realizes he will need a pilot who can actually read maritime charts and navigate the water well. That night, Piko is forced off the Plover at gunpoint by two men in the dark while Declan is left behind with Pipa. The men (Enrique and Taro) and Piko head south. Declan determines to head south after them, promising Pipa that everything will be alright.



## Analysis

“The Plover” is a contemporary fiction novel by Brian Doyle in which Declan O’Donnell takes to the Pacific Ocean in his small fishing boat, the Plover, to live a life away from people but ends up surrounded by them instead. Although the reasons behind Declan’s decision to depart from Oregon for the Pacific Ocean are never fully or clearly revealed in the novel, what is clear is that he longs to be alone, to be his own man and his own country. He is doing what he can to escape society, to escape life as it had been. Here, the reader should note that it is no accident nor is it insignificant that Declan has brought along works by and about Edmund Burke to read, especially because Society will become an immensely important theme in the novel.

Edmund Burke, an Irish Member of British Parliament who served in the latter half of the eighteenth century, was deeply conservative politically and is considered the founder of modern conservatism. Burke was among the British Members of Parliament who supported and applauded the American Revolution, for Burke rightfully saw that the rights of the American colonists had been violated. The separation of the American colonies from British society to form their own society is reflective of Declan leaving American society to form his own society aboard the Plover. While the Americans drew upon their British experience in the founding of the United States, Declan draws upon his experience as an American to seek his own freedom in the world. That freedom is symbolized by the appearance of the herring gull, who will also come to symbolize good fortune in the future.

Yet, as Burke argues, society is an organic thing, that it arises naturally. So it is not without importance that Declan hears word from his buddy, Piko, who has come to Hawaii hoping that Declan would come his way. Declan takes on Piko and Piko’s daughter, Pipa. The society of one on the Plover has become a society of three. The adventure that Declan has set out upon by heading into the Pacific has now become an adventure shared by Piko and Pipa as well. The theme of adventure herein becomes utterly important to the plot of the novel as Enrique kidnaps Piko, and Declan resolves to get him back.

Pipa is especially worried for her father, for he is the only family that she has left. By the end of the novel, however, she will come to see Declan as family as well, something Declan lacks in his own life as well. Through Piko and Pipa, the theme of Family becomes important to the plot, for it is the appearance of this father and the daughter and the kidnapping of Piko that radically alters the trajectory Declan had intended for his voyage of adventure. Likewise, the loss of family—and the injury sustained by Pipa—propels Piko into a search for finding himself in his life, altering what he thought was a stable trajectory. Following his wife’s death, Piko essentially has a crisis of identity that sends him to Hawaii on the chance that Declan will come along, and he hopes that he and Pipa can join him.

Life in general has not worked out the way anyone in the novel has expected so far. Life becomes an important theme in the novel, for the people that come to form a floating



society on board the Plover have all had their lives altered in some radical way. Pipa went from being a normal, healthy child to being disabled by an accident which cost her the ability to speak. Piko lost his wife to cancer and believes he has effectively lost who his daughter was before the accident. Declan, for reasons unknown, has broken off from what his former life. And even then, Declan's planned new life of solitude and sailing has not come out as expected with the arrival of Piko, Pipa, and the kidnapping of Pipa. Early in the novel, the reader should note that Declan ironically criticizes Thomas Dunne for once arguing that no man is an island, that his life invariably touches other lives.

## Discussion Question 1

What reasons are given for Declan's decision to take to the seas? What does he hope to achieve by becoming his own island on the Plover?

## Discussion Question 2

Although Declan longs to be his own man, his own country, and to be alone, he agrees to take on Piko and Pipa. Why? What does their arrival on the Plover mean for Declan's plans?

## Discussion Question 3

Why is Declan so upset by the sudden departure of the gull from his boat? How does Declan overcome this sense of loss following the gull's departure?

## Vocabulary

gratuitous, incontrovertible, ignominiously, assiduously, declinations, azimuth, bedraggled, maundering, idiosyncratically, obdurate, recriminations, ruminations, aspersions, inundated, capacious, salinity, hove, flouting, meticulously, redolent, egregiously, nomenclatural, inchoate, archipelago, leery, audible, detritus, inordinate, plethora





## Chapters III – IV

### Summary

Chapter III – Declan calls the Tunganu Police Service, the Coast Guard, and everyone he can to report what has happened to Piko. He is told the problem in rescuing Piko is one of jurisdiction and geography but that sooner or later the ship will be sighted. Meanwhile, Piko is put to work on board the Tanets as the pilot, being told to learn fast or the others on the Plover will die. Piko does his best to stay calm, watching, waiting, and determining his situation. Piko's primary goal is to return to Pipa alive and well. Meanwhile, Declan suddenly finds himself an uncle, forced to care for a child when he has never cared for a child before at all, let alone one with special needs. He quickly becomes used to it, however. The bus driver responsible for the accident which injured Pipa, a man named Kinch, has since quit and has been struggling to get hold of his life.

In the morning, Pipa discovers a gull on board and speaks to her. Declan, believing it is the same gull from before, is amazed that it has returned. Declan fills the gull in on everything she has missed. Word comes from the Minister for Fisheries and Marine Resources that the Tanets has been sighted near the Anewetak atolls and islets. The Minister sends along maps and ten shillings as a gift for Pipa. Declan sets sail for the area in the pitch black of the night. The Tanets, meanwhile, has stopped for the night. Enrique thinks of the loss of his pilot and the gaining of Piko. He considers that in this world there are fish and sharks and that Enrique is a shark. He believes that there are no laws, and so he does as he wishes and takes what he likes. Meanwhile, Piko quietly slips overboard and swims to the safety of the Plover, which pulls away. Declan drives the boat on all night, and is happy to see the gull still on the ship in the light of dawn.

Chapter IV – Tunganu Minister for Fisheries and Maritime Resources announces his candidacy for First Minister to the media. The Minister explains he wishes to transform the island into a real republic, dependent on no one and where poverty does not exist. This is all heard by Enrique, who has come ashore to find out if anyone has seen the Plover. He imagines there must be a great deal of money behind the Minister's plans and decides to find out. Meanwhile, Pipa is thrilled to be reunited with Piko, who dreams of Elly being an osprey on the river. In the morning, Pipa wakes Piko and Declan, alerting them to Taro on the Plover's stern. Declan and Piko confront Taro with the bow and arrow, and she reveals that she is a woman and that her name is not Taro, but Taromauri. Declan and Piko are stunned.

Taromauri explains that she, too, ditched the Tanets and has spent the night on the boat because she was finished with the Tanets. The woman explains that her daughter drowned some years before, and that she has since taken on work on ships in whatever capacity she could to try to move on. That time in her life, she explains, is now finished. Declan once again considers his situation and how it has changed, trying his best to make sense of things. He agrees to allow Taromauri to remain, and she quickly sets to work helping out with tasks and caring for Pipa in particular. She bathes Pipa and braids



her hair. This excites Pipa. The adults exchange stories, which includes Taromauri speaking about her ex-husband, Kekunu. Kekunu, she says, would write letters for their drowned daughter and leave them on the shore for the ocean waves to deliver. Slowly, she explains, his goodness died away until he became unkind and drifted away, and Taromauri believed the time she had with him was finished. The gull listens and gives her own thoughts, about how saints are sometimes awakened criminals. Meanwhile, the Minister for Fisheries goes missing. Assumed dead, he is mourned by the public.

## Analysis

Life continues to get in the way of Declan's plans for a solitary existence on the open seas. Piko's kidnapping forces Declan to alter the new course for his life that he has plotted. Adventure also continues to be an important theme in this part of the novel because of this change in his plans. Declan first goes to the authorities for their assistance in tracking down Piko, but when problems of jurisdiction and geography get in the way, Declan realizes that he will have no better option—and no other choice—than going after Piko himself. Ensuring Piko's rescue by sneaking up on the Tanets is something Declan had never imagined he would do. A life of peace has become a matter of survival and self-defense against the Tanets.

Burke once again provides important relevance to Declan's efforts, as Declan comes to realize. Burke wrote that good men must of society band together to oppose evil men when they associate. Declan thus comes to the defense of his friend Piko against Enrique. In a broader sense, Declan is defending his society and his way of life, very much the way the American colonials sought to defend their society, way of life, and rights against the British government. The taking of Piko to be a forced laborer on board the Tanets amounts to the actions which triggered the War of 1812 in which the British Navy kidnapped American sailors and forced them to work on their ships. Declan's Plover represents a society of laws, while Enrique represents the evil of the world that obeys no laws, moral or legal.

For Pipa, it is especially important that her father is rescued because she has for so long already been without her mother. She could not bear to lose her father. Declan realizes this. In true conservative form as elaborated on by Burke, those with the power to help others have the responsibility to help others. For Declan, this responsibility becomes reuniting a family and essentially being accepted into that family as well. This matters greatly to Burke and many in the United States who believe that the family is the core foundational unit of society. Pipa quickly comes to view Declan as family as a result.

The arrival of Taromauri expands the family-based, Burkean society that has naturally grown on the Plover. Taromauri is reeling from her own family losses, the death of her daughter and the drifting away of her husband. She finds in Pipa, Piko, and Declan an extended family of sorts. It is a very unconventional family in some ways, but the family very much behaves in the traditional sense of the family in which all look out for each other and care for one another. Pipa quickly begins to warm up to Taromauri, who



provides the gentle touch of a mother that Pipa has not had in so long. As the gull explains, saints often begin as sinners. Taromauri strayed in life to become involved with someone like Enrique but quickly has returned to be a normal and moral member of society on the Plover.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Taromauri become involved with Enrique in the first place? Why did she decide her time with him was finished in the end?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does Declan consent to Taromauri's being onboard the Plover? How does her presence change the dynamics of life and society on the boat? Is it for the better or for the worst? Explain.

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Declan realize he must rescue Piko? Why, for that matter, does Declan determine that he himself must carry out the rescue? What does this mean for the society on board the Plover?

## Vocabulary

jurisdiction, budgetary, ostensibly, eradicate, evanescent, elephantine, vagaries, iota, inimitable, vociferous, sojourn, intimations, intuitions, premonitions, infinitesimal, peripatetic, elegies



# Chapters V – VI

## Summary

Chapter V – Declan charts a course for islands that are American territories, for these islands have small populations and are often unoccupied except for occasional scientific expeditions. Both Piko and Declan talk about how they are amazed at Pipa's ability to commune with birds. Two young island rats, called kiore, are discovered on board and become the fifth and sixth passengers of the Plover. An injured warbler becomes the seventh, and a few snails and some screw pine seeds become additional passengers. As they sail, they encounter a patch of garbage a mile long and a mile wide, which has become a false reef to all kinds of wildlife. Everyone spends a day making flags and pennants for the Plover, including Taromauri, who says she hopes her island home will one day become its own proud country. The Plover is also given an official flag of a Golden Plover against a gray sea.

Over time, Pipa and Taromauri grow very close and very friendly. Taromauri encourages Piko to speak more to Pipa, saying she may not be able to hear her own daughter's voice, but that she can hear Pipa's. Declan selects an island that has a different name to all who visit. The island has a few small villages, an airport, modern amenities, and seems like it would be a good place to put in for a while. Taromauri says her people call the island Maraia, or dangerous.

Meanwhile, Enrique refits the Tanets. He takes on two new quiet crew members, one a Rapanuian and the other a Rungarungawan. The new crew makes Enrique think of his brothers, all of whom died or fled home and their mother, who lost her mind in grief when their father was imprisoned. As the Tanets returns to sea, the new crewmembers ask who they are hunting. Enrique tells them that they are not hunting anyone, but are merely transporting cargo.

Meanwhile, Declan and Piko are amazed by how the gull seems to want to talk every so often. The gull insists that there is a boat following the Plover, and the island to which the Plover is headed is indeed dangerous. The gull explains that gulls haven't even set foot on the island in years. As they head toward the island, they find a young native man on a small raft in bad health from exposure. They anchor at the island. While everyone goes inland, Declan remains on board to tend to some chores and watch over the young man. The gull stays behind as well. In the island's second-largest village there is a chapel run by the Reverend Mister, who welcomes a new guest in the congregation named Danilo, the pilot from the Tanets who was believed to have drowned. Taromauri, meanwhile, tells Pipa she very much wishes she could see her husband again.

Piko finds a doctor, who comes for the young man. Piko also brings fresh supplies to the boat. Piko encourages Declan to come ashore, but still Declan refuses. This causes Piko to get angry, asking if Declan intends to spend the rest of his life on a boat. Declan



argues that Piko has a home and a daughter, while Declan himself has nothing to return to back home. Declan tells Piko that he and his daughter are always welcome on board, but Piko should not give him a hard time since he has been having a hard time for the past twenty years. Piko declares that he and Pipa will be leaving. Declan then gets drunk and falls off the boat into shallow water.

Chapter VI – In his drunken stupor, Declan sees visions of his dead mother and his dead, drunkard father. Declan scrambles through the shallow water to touch his boat, and believes his arm is broken. Piko helps Declan ashore and wonders why Declan has gotten drunk after swearing never to drink again some years before. Meanwhile, it turns out the man rescued from the raft, unrecognizable due to his exposure, is the missing Minister. The Minister explains he was attacked on the street, and when he woke up he was on the raft. The Minister is believed only to be babbling, and is to be labeled as “indigent” and “impecunious.” In the morning, Declan is feeling better after his arm has been set, and berates himself for drinking again, knowing that his body is like a country of many parts that he has put in danger. He cannot stop thinking about how he and his siblings grew up in fear under their father.

Declan is now anxious to get underway. Piko, meanwhile, purchases and slaughters a pig for food to share with local villagers. At the same time, Taromauri paints the cabin of the boat and bonds with the bird. Taromauri recognizes that the bird is one of the Thirteen Servants who cannot change what is, but can remove obstacles and open things now closed. She asks the gull to remove the obstacles to Pipa. The gull consents. Pipa, looking to shore, says “Papa.” The warbler recovers and is able to fly again. Meanwhile, Enrique continues to track the Plover, giving all sorts of stories as to why he is searching for it, from news of the birth of a new baby to wanting to pay a debt. Enrique’s new crew members realize that Enrique is up to no good, and they want no part in it.

## Analysis

Declan and the Plover society find temporary peace and rest in islands owned by the United States before continuing on their way. Their society increases as a warbler and two rats come to inhabit the boat as well, sensing it as a safe and stable place to be. Taromauri says at one point that she hopes her own home will become a proud and independent republic. In a poignant act, the members of the Plover come together to create a flag for the boat and their society. This is poignant because the society of travelers has effectively made official their family-based society through the representation of the plover. They are a small, overlooked society, but they are strong and far-reaching, just like the actual bird.

And it is by the family incorporating Taromauri and the gull in their society that makes a difference like no one could have ever imagined. While there is a certain spirituality in Taromauri’s consultation of the gull as one of the Thirteen Servants, there is also a tenderness on the part of Taromauri towards Pipa. Whatever the true cause is behind Pipa’s regaining of her ability to speak, it can indeed be considered a wondrous and



miraculous thing made possible by Declan's decision to allow Piko and Pipa aboard the Plover. It is clear that, between the gull, the warbler, the rats, Piko, and Pipa, in the very essence of Burke, Declan has attracted and been the catalyst for a society of good people. At the same time, the reader will note that Danilo, the pilot of the Tanets, is still alive, and the reader will also note that the Minister has survived as well.

However, no society is always harmonious. Disagreements will arise among members of a society. In this case, Piko clashes with Declan about Declan's refusal to come ashore. Piko is frustrated by Declan's seeming unwillingness to live normally, but his concern comes out as anger. Declan, who has always been overwhelmingly patient and kind, responds that Piko has no right to give him any trouble for what he wishes to do with his life, especially because he is harming no one, and he went out of his way to ensure that Piko and Pipa could be a part of the Plover's travels. To Declan, the island represents something to which he is not yet ready to return. Piko has begun to find what he is looking for in life, but Declan has not yet been so lucky.

The danger that the gull warns about seems to be a confrontation with society, the soul, and the self. Declan's confrontation with Piko is a confrontation of the society. His decision to get drunk is a confrontation with himself and his soul. As the reader comes to learn, Declan has a genetic predisposition toward alcoholism, something his father also suffered from. Here, the reasoning for Declan's adventure on the Pacific is partially revealed. It is clear that Declan had a traumatic childhood because of his father's alcoholism, and for whatever reason, stumbled into alcoholism himself. When Declan sobers up, the reader should note with interest that Declan recognizes his body as an organic Burkean society that he has endangered, and this in turn can be extrapolated to the society of the Plover as a whole: Declan has endangered the society—and the family—for which he now bears such responsibility by his recklessness.

## Discussion Question 1

Why does Declan refuse to disembark from the Plover to head ashore with Piko and the others? Why does Piko become so angered at Declan's refusal to disembark? Do you believe Piko is justifiable in his anger? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Do you believe there is any merit in Piko's argument that Declan needs to get off the boat and return to life? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does the gull try to warn Declan and the others on the Plover of the dangers of the island to which they anchor? Do the gull's warnings play out? Why or why not?



## Vocabulary

imperialist, becalming, arabesque, bilious, discombobulated, predicament, proximate, exquisite, tenuous, somnolent, implacable, impecunious, insurmountable, scabrous, chortled, copiously



# Chapter VII

## Summary

Chapter VII - Though Pipa is still crippled overall, she feels hopeful and excited. She begins shouting her love for her father, saying she can talk, while Piko, Declan, and Taromauri watch and listen in amazement. Taromauri credits the bird and explains what has happened. Declan says the gull is now promoted. Declan and Piko also consider that they should be armed in case Enrique returns. Both suspect he is still after them. As the Plover prepares to cast off, a group of locals arrive on the dock. In lieu of payment for the arm, Declan is asked to take on the Minister and Danilo. Declan, although at first opposed to this, eventually relents. The next morning, Declan finds Pipa awake early. She says she is listening to the terns talking, then asks Declan a thousand questions about the world ranging from why her father has a beard to whether her mother's ospreys died when she died. On the Tanets, Enrique is enraged because his new two crew members have abandoned ship. He is exhausted, his head hurts horribly, and his left hand has curled up and is refusing to open.

Declan calls a meeting, explaining the situation with the Tanets. Jobs are also assigned and volunteered for, with Danilo handling cooking, the Minister handling fishing, and Pipa being assistant coffee maker and musician-at-arms. She enlists Danilo to sing with her. Danilo has an amazing voice. As time passes, everyone becomes friendly and life aboard the Plover is pleasant. Declan continues to read about Burke, who was sometimes considered impatient and ill-tempered by those who knew him. This makes Declan sympathize with Burke and like him all the more. Taromauri and Pipa befriend the warbler. Pipa goes to speak with Declan, asking him why he is afraid of going on land for too long. Declan says he doesn't know, but he knows he needs to be on his boat. Pipa asks about Declan's family. Declan explains his mom left, his dad died, and that he hasn't seen his brothers and sisters in years. Pipa then asks if her mother will come back to see her. Declan says yes, but that Pipa will not see her. Pipa hugs Declan and begins to cry. Pipa later confesses that she believes it is her fault that her mother died because she danced out into the road in front of the bus.

That night, Declan goes to speak to the gull on the roof of the wheelhouse, but ends up having a conversation with Death. Death explains he was merely passing through the area, and simply wanted to get to know Declan better. Death asks Declan about heartache from lost love. Declan says he wouldn't know because he doesn't love anymore. Death then asks Declan if he loves the little girl on board. Declan worries this means Death may have come for Pipa, so he tells Death that she is no longer on board. Death departs, telling Declan to consider his experience a dream.

In the morning, the Tanets is on the horizon. On the Tanets, Enrique vows revenge. He seems seriously sick and is suddenly stunned to see flaming sticks being thrown at his boat from the Plover as it turns about and sails past. Enrique fires a rifle at the Plover. The Plover passes out of sight. Declan and Piko know they must now circle about and





attack Enrique under cover of darkness or there will be more danger from Enrique ahead. Enrique, meanwhile, gets sicker and sicker as night comes on. The Plover passes by silently in the dark, wherein Piko launches firesticks at the Tanets. One disappears into the smokestack. Enrique fires a rifle at the Plover's cabin at the same time that his ship explodes. Enrique's bullet barely misses Declan. Everyone on the Plover is alright. They decide to check the water for any survivors. Enrique is found unconscious and badly burned. He is pulled aboard and watched over by Taromauri and Danilo.

## Analysis

Pipa's ability to speak—a physical and transformational healing—brings about an emotional, transformational social and familial healing between Piko and Declan. Piko and Declan are amazed that Pipa is able to speak again, and this quickly puts to rest any animosity between both men. Her ability to speak adds a new, positive dimension to the society and the family. As Taromauri has encouraged Piko all along, Pipa has always been inside, and has always been who she was before the accident. Pipa's ability to speak confirms that Taromauri was correct, proving as well that Taromauri has been an indispensable member of the family and the society.

For Piko, Pipa's ability to speak is almost as if he has regained a lost part of his family. Pipa's ability to speak means that Piko can understand whether or not he is doing well as a father, can understand firsthand and directly what his daughter needs or wants, and can establish a relationship with his daughter that he did not (erroneously) think possible. Piko herein rededicates himself to being a good father, and this is the new path in life he has been searching for all along.

Enrique, meanwhile, continues searching for the Plover. Enrique's quest has become obsessive, much like Captain Ahab's quest to kill the great white whale in Herman Melville's classic novel, "Moby Dick." Enrique's evil obsession becomes physically manifested through his malfunctioning hand and his illness. Evil is an illness that is plaguing his body through scurvy. Similarly, his obsessions and inability to alter what he perceives to be his course against the Plover are symbolized by his hand which can only be changed and used with extreme difficulty.

At the same time, the Minister and Danilo become the newest members of the Plover society. Declan is once again a little miffed about taking on more people, but ultimately consents. He has a good heart, and the goodness of the Plover's society has attracted other good people. And as in any conservative, Burkean society, people do what they are able to do to be productive, to help themselves, and to help others. For example, Danilo takes on the role of cook because he knows how to cook well, and because he knows it will help the Plover society at large. In a conservative society, each person has a place and roles for which they are applauded and valued and in which they are crucially important. This extends to cultural areas, in which Danilo and Pipa are cherished for their musical talents.



It is also in this section of the novel that the narrator directly address the question of love, both generally, and specifically through Declan and Pipa. There are all kinds of love in the novel, the narrator explains (see the Quotes section of this study guide), and each is important. Declan, who claims to want to be away from other people, has clearly come to love them. For Pipa, this is a familial love which causes Declan to become defensive and protective of her during the encounter he has with Death. For Piko, love is something that has been lost through his wife but found through his daughter. For Taromauri, love is something which she has lost with her daughter, but wishes to find again through her husband.

## Discussion Question 1

What does Pipa's renewed ability to speak mean for the members of the society on board the Plover, especially for Piko, Declan, and Pipa herself?

## Discussion Question 2

In what ways does the society of the Plover come to reflect a conservative, Burkean society? How do these things strengthen the society of the Plover?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does Enrique continue to pursue the Plover? Why has it become such an obsessive quest for him?

## Vocabulary

fulminations, railleries, rationalization, reverence, musings, petulance, intractability, intemperate, saturnine, reprehensibly, sonorous, enthralling, charlatans, diminution, derision, shimmied, obliterated



# Chapter VIII

## Summary

Chapter VIII - Declan sets the Plover east. The Minister asks to be returned to his home. The Minister hopes that a real country comprising all islands and nations in the Pacific will emerge one day and will be called Pacifica. Taromauri believes she is a new person after witnessing the gull heal Pipa, and that she should seek to find her husband. Declan confronts Enrique, who has gained consciousness. Declan says he will bring Enrique to a hospital to live if Enrique agrees to stay away from the him and the Plover. Enrique agrees. Declan calls a meeting, telling his shipmates that they are low on money, in need of repairs and restocking, and that Enrique needs a hospital. He opens up the floor for discussion, inspired by Edmund Burke's belief that all government is founded on compromise and barter. Danilo wants to help the Minister with his project for a Pacific republic. Piko, Pipa, and Taromauri will go back to Makana to earn money to get Taromauri to be able to return home. They will bring Enrique with them. Pipa asks Declan to come with them, but Declan says he will be on the boat a while longer.

As the Plover continues on, it is discovered that the gull is dying. The gull is thanked and praised for her love, companionship, and special healing abilities. When she dies, she is ceremonially burned and buried at sea. That night, Enrique apologizes to Declan for everything that has happened. He also thanks Declan for having rescued him. Declan converses with the Minister in the morning over coffee, surprised to learn that the Minister is very serious about Pacifica. They rest for a day at a quiet little atoll, a day which Pipa, now a married teacher, later describes to the Hawaiian students she teaches as the greatest day of all days. Everyone, she reveals, enjoyed themselves on the island because they were at peace and with each other. She also reveals that when Declan was out of sight, everyone asked Piko about his friendship with Declan. Piko explained then that Declan had a rough childhood, and that, despite what he says, he does indeed like people and is merely searching for peace at the moment.

The last few hours when everyone is aboard the Plover is rushed and hurried, for everyone will be let off in Hawaii. From there, they will make their own ways. The warbler goes ashore with Taromauri. Supplies are taken on, and Declan sets sail once more. He has mixed feelings, at first feeling free and happy, then feeling a little sad at seeing Pipa and the others go. Yet not long into his journey around Hawaii, a bright green canoe comes out to meet him, and his hopes are raised.

## Analysis

As the novel draws to a close, Declan, Piko, and the members of the Plover band together to fight back against Enrique and the Tanets. In a final showdown, the Tanets is destroyed by Piko's firestick-throwing skills, and Enrique is mercifully fished from the water and saved. In true Burkean conservative fashion, the moral good wins over the



selfish evil. In literary form, allusions to "Moby Dick" are also clear: just as Ahab succumbed and died due to his obsession with the whale, so too does Enrique nearly die in battle against his own white whale—the Plover—and himself. At the end of the day, it is Enrique's corrupt soul that he loses a battle against. By promising to leave Declan alone, Declan readily agrees to bring Enrique to a hospital.

At last, the current phases of Declan's adventure on board the Plover comes to a close as he deposits everyone in Hawaii. Just as no one is forced to remain in a Burkean society, no one is forced to remain on the Plover. Likewise, the reader should note the Minister's dreams of forming a Pacific-wide republic of voluntary members determined to do good in the world. During the final journey to Hawaii, Piko confirms that much of Declan's life is a mystery to him, and probably never will be known. Piko has come to understand that, although Declan professes no love for his fellow man, he definitely has a love of humankind. This is clear in the social collection of unique individuals that have come to call the Plover home for a specific amount of time. As Piko tells Pipa, he hopes that one day Declan will come off the water for good.

The departure of everyone on board the Plover is a bittersweet experience for Declan. Declan again feels free and excited as he steams past Hawaii on his own, but also feels saddened and lonely, for his society—his family—is gone. Yet, in the final lines of the novel, Declan's heart swells with hope and possibility as he sees a green canoe coming out to meet him. Who is in the canoe or why the canoe is coming out to meet him is never revealed except in a very vague sense: promise and possibility. It is clear that the Plover's next adventure is only just beginning.

## Discussion Question 1

Why do you believe Declan and the others onboard the Plover decide to look for survivors from the Tanets? Why do you believe they decide to save Enrique?

## Discussion Question 2

While everyone else departs the Plover to return to their lives, Declan decides to head back out to sea. Why? Do you believe that Declan will ever come in from the water? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 3

Why does the green canoe coming toward the Plover that appears at the end of the novel give Declan such hope and happiness?

## Vocabulary

truncated, companionably, adjourned, orthodox, harried, irrevocable, doldrums



# Characters

## Declan O'Donnell

Declan O'Donnell is the main character and sometimes-narrator of the novel "The Plover" by Brian Doyle. Declan appears to be in his mid-to-late thirties, is a native of Oregon, a recovering alcoholic, and the owner and captain of the fishing boat the "Plover," which he purchased used at the age of seventeen. Declan has dreamed of an ocean adventure since reading "Kon-Tiki" as a child. After a difficult childhood due to a drunkard father and for unknown reasons in his adult life, Declan has combined his desire for an ocean adventure with his desire to get away from people in general.

He is surprised when, in Hawaii, Piko and Pipa ask to board. Declan knows the dynamics of his journey will change, as he had hoped to be alone, but still welcomes Piko and Pipa on board. Over the next several weeks, Declan has a series of encounters with Enrique, and takes on several more passengers, none of whom he was expecting. Likewise, Declan was not expecting to fall in love with the people around him, for he comes to see them as family. When Declan drops off all passengers aboard the Plover in Hawaii, it is a bittersweet experience for him. He is happy to be alone again, but is immediately lonely.

## The herring gull

The herring gull accompanies Declan and the people aboard the Plover for most of the boat's journey. The gull represents freedom and good luck (see "The herring gull" under the Symbols/Objects section of this study guide) and becomes Declan's first companion. The gull is gentle, kind, and very chatty, often relating her own stories and advice to the others, though they cannot understand her. In a sense of magical realism, in which magical things happen in an otherwise non-magical world, this gull can talk. The gull is finally able to commune with Taromauri, who recognizes the gull as one of the Thirteen Servants, spiritual beings that do good in the world. Taromauri prevails upon the gull to restore Pipa's voice, which she does. The gull remains a companion to the Plover through the rest of its voyages, warning it about the pursuit of Enrique and warning it away from the dangerous island. Ultimately, her purpose fulfilled, the gull dies en route to Hawaii and is cremated and buried at sea.

## Piko

Piko is a friend of Declan's and the father of Pipa. Piko is reeling following the death of his wife and Pipa's accident and has brought Pipa with him to Hawaii to await the chance that Declan may head his way following Declan's committing to his boat adventure. Piko is grateful that he and Pipa are allowed aboard the Plover and explains that he is searching for who he is and who he is meant to be. Piko is kidnapped from the Plover at gunpoint by Enrique, and later escapes by abandoning ship and swimming to



the Plover. Piko slowly comes to realize that he can be a better father to Pipa than he has been, especially once Pipa begins to speak again. Piko later becomes angry with Declan for wanting to remain on board the Plover rather than returning to life on land, but decides that Declan has every right to stay out as long as he needs to.

## Pipa

Pipa is Piko's daughter and becomes something of an adopted daughter to all other adults on the Plover. She seems to be somewhere around five or six years old, and is initially selectively non-verbal and is slightly paralyzed following an accident where, dancing into the street, she was hit by a bus. Pipa blames her accident on the death of her mother, for her mother only became ill after Pipa was injured. Everyone assures her this is not so. Pipa miraculously begins speaking during the journey when the gull removes the obstacle of verbal inability and is saddened to learn that Declan will not be returning with them to land. As an adult, Pipa fully regains control of her body and marries, ultimately becoming a schoolteacher.

## Taromauri

Taromauri is a large, Pacific Islander woman who is immensely kind and deeply spiritual. Following the death of her daughter and the drifting of her husband, she takes odd jobs on various ships, ultimately coming to work for Enrique. Disgusted with his cruelty, she abandons the Tanets for the Plover, where she becomes something of a surrogate mother for Pipa and urges the gull to remove the obstacle of non-verbalization for Pipa. Taromauri ultimately decides to disembark at Hawaii in order to find her husband again.

## Enrique

Enrique is the villain of the novel. Having grown up in bad circumstances, he has turned to a life of crime out of choice. He likens himself to a shark for whom laws do not apply and do not exist. Enrique captains the old Russian trawler Tanets and smuggles legal and illegal goods. He kidnaps Piko to serve as the new pilot for the Tanets, is part of a scheme to kidnap the Minister, and is later enraged when every crew member he takes on abandons ship. Defied by the Plover, he obsesses over destroying the little boat and its community, becoming something of a Captain Ahab to a Moby Dick with the Plover being his white whale. Enrique's evil nature and obsession become manifested in the physical illness that plagues him, and in his scurvy-ridden, barely-usable hand. Enrique is stunned when, after his ship is blown up, Declan and the others are willing to save his life and bring him to a hospital. He apologizes to them for all that he has done.



## The Minister

The Minister for Fisheries, Marine Resources, and Foreign Affairs of the Island of Tuarua is first encountered by Declan in his search for Piko's kidnappers. The Minister himself is kidnapped following his announcing his First Minister candidacy. The Minister is set adrift at sea where he is horribly and temporarily disfigured by exposure to the elements. He is unrecognizable when he is saved by Declan and the Plover. The Minister recovers and joins the crew of the Plover, declaring that he one day hopes all the islands in the Pacific will band together in a nation called Pacifica. The Minister ultimately disembarks the Plover in Hawaii.

## Danilo

Danilo is a young Russian man who has spent his teenager years traveling throughout the world, taking on odd jobs and eventually coming to pilot the Tanets for Enrique. Danilo is swept overboard during a storm, where he later comes to the island of Maraia. There, he gains passage on board the Plover, coming to be a cook and singer on the little boat, and helping in the fight against the Tanets. Danilo ultimately disembarks in Hawaii.

## The Warbler

The warbler is a tiny, gentle little bird who accidentally injures herself when she flies into the mast of the Plover. She hides under the boat's water tank, slowly coming to trust the other beings on board. Eventually, her wing heals and she is able to fly, but decides to remain with the Plover until she disembarks with Taromauri in Hawaii.

## Edmund Burke

Edmund Burke was an eighteenth century politician, philosopher, and political theorist. A native of Ireland, Burke served in the British Parliament where he wrote extensively on the philosophy of political conservatism and came to be regarded as the father of modern conservatism. Among his most notable positions, Burke is now famous for fully supporting the American Revolution and believing that society is a natural and beautiful thing where all people are vitally important in the roles they play in society. Declan reads his writings throughout the voyage of the Plover, and they relate and provide perspective on the events unfolding on the Plover.

# Symbols and Symbolism

## The Plover (boat)

The Plover is a small, green fishing trawler with red sails that is purchased used by Declan at the age of seventeen. The Plover is a small but sturdy craft with a storied history, including a small wreck, time as a whalewatching boat, and an owner who presumably faked his death. The plover is the vehicle by which Declan seeks to escape human society, but ultimately comes to foster it instead. The Plover is named after the Pacific Golden Plover and also comes to serve as a setting for the novel (see the section “Settings” in this study guide).

## The Pacific Golden Plover (bird)

The Pacific Golden Plover is the namesake of Declan’s ship. The plover is a small, slight, overlooked bird that is nevertheless capable of traveling great distances and is incredibly strong for its size. It is only natural that Declan should consider his ship, the Plover, to be like its namesake as he believes the boat's purpose—to help him travel great distances while being overlooked—matches that of the plover.

## The herring gull

The herring gull on the Plover symbolically represents freedom and good luck. The gull appears a short time after Declan takes off from Oregon, where she spends most of its time hanging out on the wheelhouse cabin roof. Here, she represents Declan's newfound freedom as he sails west from Oregon. The herring gull also later serves as good luck and good tidings when she removes the obstacle blocking Pipa from being able to speak. With the closure of the trip and the return to Hawaii at the end of the novel, the gull dies, a death which symbolizes the end of the first series of adventures on board the Plover.

## Books by and about Edmund Burke

Books by and about Edmund Burke are hungrily read by Declan throughout his travels. Declan considers Burke a brilliant man whose beliefs and ideas must be kept alive, and so he reads Burke to do just that. The works of Edmund Burke come to be both relatable to explanatory of social events that transpire on board the Plover.

## "Kon-Tiki"

“Kon-Tiki: Across the Pacific in a Raft” is a book about a Pacific journey by Thor Heyerdahl which Declan read as a child. It is a book which in turn led to Declan reading





other similar books. Declan has wanted a Pacific adventure ever since reading “Kon-Tiki,” and is now thrilled to be following in the footsteps of the novel in his own life.

## Fresh fruit

Fresh fruit, including lemons, limes, and oranges, are carefully kept and consumed by Declan and the other passengers on board the Plover. These fruits are significant sources of vitamin C, which is often in short supply out on ships in the water due to limited diets. The vitamin C provided by the fresh fruits fight off sicknesses and illnesses such as scurvy. While the crew of the Plover remains healthy due to a surplus of such fruits, Enrique grows ill from a lack of such fruits.

## Firesticks

Firesticks are small, flaming torches that are used in juggling and throwing in Pacific Island cultures. Piko becomes skilled at handling firesticks during his time on the Hawaiian Island. When Enrique attempts to attack the Plover, it is Piko, wielding firesticks, who stops Enrique. Piko manages to throw a firestick down the smokestack of the Tanets, causing the ship to explode and sink.

## Maritime charts

Maritime charts are maps of the ocean gauging both distance and depth. These charts are used by captains, sailors, and boat pilots to navigate the waters of the earth. Declan, Danilo, and Enrique all consult maritime charts throughout the novel in order to determine where they are, and where they are going.

## Fuel

Fuel, in the form of gasoline, is incredibly important to the ability of the Plover to sail. While wind serves as the primary source of power to move the Plover along by sailing, sometimes there is not enough wind to do this. In such circumstances, fuel and the ship's motors must be relied upon. Two hundred gallons of fuel are on board the Plover at the beginning of the journey. Whenever Declan runs low on fuel, he is forced to head to land to fill up. These runs form the limited contact he has with people on land.

## Green canoe

A green canoe paddles out to meet the Plover at the very end of the novel. Who is in the canoe and why the canoe is coming out to meet Declan and the Plover are questions both left unsaid. As such, the green canoe comes to represent new hope and possibilities. Green, a color associated with spring and summer, comes to signify that hope and new possibilities always spring eternal.

# Settings

## The Plover

The Plover is the small, green fishing trawler that Declan purchases at the age of seventeen and about two decades later uses to journey out into the Pacific. In addition to being an important object and symbol in the novel (see the Symbols and Symbolism section), the Plover proves to be an important setting for the novel. The Plover is moved by wind and motor, has a bathroom and shower, a kitchen (called a galley), a wheelhouse for steering, a cabin and bunk for sleeping, a small common area, storage areas, and a main deck. The Plover becomes home to Declan, Piko, Pipa, and several other people who come to inhabit the ship. It is where they end up spending most of their time, doing everything from sleeping to cooking to sailing to attempting to figure out their lives. The Plover becomes a temporary home for Declan's passengers as it becomes Declan's actual home.

## Hawaii

Hawaii is one of the fifty states of the United States of America, and is the most western state in the union. It is a beautiful, tropical set of islands to which Piko and Pipa travel after the death of Piko's wife. Piko heads to Hawaii on the chance that Declan will end up there, and because Piko is having an identity crisis, trying to figure out who he is and what he'll do next in lieu of his wife's death and his daughter's disability. Declan picks up Piko and Pipa from Hawaii early in the novel, and later drops off all of his passengers, including the birds and animals, in Hawaii at the very end of the novel. Hawaii is where Declan's first phase of adventure ends with the disembarkation of his passengers, and it is in Hawaii where Declan's second adventure begins as a green canoe comes out to meet him as he leaves.

## The Tungaru Islands

Tungaru, also known as the Gilbert Islands, are located in the Pacific Ocean and form part of the Republic of Kiribati. Tungaru is a largely impoverished set of islands which the Minister hopes to improve and make independent as their own republic, reliant on absolutely no one for anything. Declan sails to Tungaru to seek help in getting Piko back from Enrique, and it is later to Tungaru that Enrique travels to try to track down the Plover. It is also where Enrique becomes part of a plot to kidnap the Minister, though the extent of Enrique's involvement is largely unknown.

## Maraia

Maraia is a small island to which Declan and the Plover put in after taking on the Minister and being in need of food, fuel, and other supplies. The island has a few small



villages, an airport, modern amenities, and seems to be the best to go. However, Taromauri and the gull oppose this idea, noting that Maraia is a bad place to go. Their warnings serve as an ill-omen as Maraia is the place where Declan and Piko finally have an argument and where Declan gets drunk, recalling horrible moments with his parents from his childhood.

## **The Pacific Ocean**

The Pacific Ocean is the largest ocean in the world with an average depth of two miles. The Pacific is teeming with fish and wildlife, and its great expanse make it ideal for Declan to sail out on. It touches dozens of countries, including the United States, Japan, and Canada, and several continents including North and South America, Asia, and Australia. The Pacific plays host to numerous islands and tiny countries as well, ranging from Tungaru to Maraia. Traveling the Pacific, Declan sails the Plover from Oregon seeking an adventure and the ability to be his own country. It is on the high seas of the Pacific that Declan and the Plover, and Enrique and the Tanets, engage in a brutal fight in which Enrique seeks to destroy the Plover.



# Themes and Motifs

## Life

Life is an important theme in the novel “The Plover” by Brian Doyle. Life, thematically, involves the ups, downs, good things, bad things, successes, failures, triumphs, defeats, and the unexpected in a human's lifespan of human existence. A human life is composed of many things, and the lives of those on board the Plover all converge, intersect, and then diverge in the end.

Life doesn't always turn out the way that people intend it to, and life often shifts in unexpected ways. Piko never imagined that his wife would die of cancer, that his daughter would become disabled, or that he himself would have a crisis of purpose. Pipa never expected that her mother would die, or that she herself would end up in an accident that leaves her disabled. Taromauri never expected that her daughter would accidentally drown or that her husband would grow distant, leaving her to conclude that a new stage in life was necessary. The Minister never expected to be kidnapped, while Danilo never expected to be swept overseas in a storm.

Declan himself proves to be the most enigmatic of the passengers on board the Plover in terms of his life. Declan's past, Piko later explains to the others, is largely unknown. What is known is that Declan had a difficult childhood due to the drunkenness of his father and the constant arguments of his parents. In adulthood, Declan himself became an alcoholic, ultimately hitting rock-bottom at some point and swearing off alcohol for good. Whatever has occurred in Declan's life sends him sailing away from human contact. Ironically, Declan's attempts to get away from people result in people being drawn to him because, despite his slightly rough nature sometimes, he is a good person and genuinely cares for others. That the Plover should become a floating society is not something Declan had anticipated in life having wanted to live life alone on the Plover.

The lives of the passengers all change aboard the Plover. Declan himself comes to love everyone as family and is sad to see them go. Piko realizes he must redouble his efforts as a father and return home. Pipa miraculously comes to be able to speak again, and her adventures on the Plover ultimately lead her to becoming a teacher. Taromauri decides that she will return home to seek out her husband. Danilo decides he will better his own life, while the Minister dreams of a trans-Pacific republic that he returns home to begin advocating.

## Family

Family is an important theme in the novel “The Plover” by Brian Doyle. Family, thematically, involves the love, compassion, loyalty, encouragement, and support of and between individuals who may or may not be blood-related, but who act in accord with



the traditional family unit. In the novel, the absence of family actually leads to the establishment of family.

When the novel begins, Declan has headed out to sea aboard the Plover, alone. Having had a difficult childhood and knowing that his brothers and sisters live scattered throughout the country, Declan does not have a family in any sense of the word. As such, he takes to the Pacific to be an island and a nation of one. Meanwhile, Piko and Pipa lose an essential member of their own family—Elly, Piko's wife and Pipa's mother. Piko is crushed by the loss and, reeling from this and Pipa's disability, stakes the Plover to figure out his life. Pipa, likewise, is hurt deeply by the death of her mother. Knowing they are suffering, Declan willingly allows them to take passage on board the Plover.

Within a few days, Pipa begins to warm up to Declan, sensing a goodness in him. When Piko is kidnapped, Declan steps up as something of a surrogate father, during which time Pipa truly begins to bond with Declan and to consider him family. Declan's desire to save Piko is not just a question of Piko's life being at stake, but Pipa's sense of family being at stake. When Taromauri comes aboard, she becomes something of a surrogate mother to Pipa, while Pipa becomes something of a surrogate child to Taromauri. Taromauri herself has lost her daughter to drowning and her husband to distance. Taromauri provides Pipa with something she has been in desperate need of, a mother's gentle touch.

The unconventional but conventionally-behaving family comes to care for one another and to support one another emotionally, enjoying spending time with one another, and joining together in times of trouble, including Declan protecting Pipa against the appearance of Death. This family grows to briefly include Danilo and the Minister before they, along with everyone else depart. Pipa has grown so close to Declan by the end of the journey that she begs Declan to come along with them, and it breaks both of their hearts when Declan refuses to leave the Plover.

## Love

Love is an important theme in the novel "The Plover" by Brian Doyle. Love appears in unexpected ways and forms in the novel to the point where in Chapter VII, the narrator rhetorically asks why love has not been more present in the novel. The narrator then quickly explains that love can be found throughout the novel in various ways not as the steamy, romantic love people often think of. Indeed, love can be found in many ways, including in absence. All forms of love deeply affect the plot of the novel, and the people that it touches.

When the novel begins, Declan has sworn of all kinds of love and takes to the sea, alone. He wants nothing to do with anyone, claiming he has a major distaste for people. Yet, his willingness to bring aboard Piko and Pipa in their time of emotional distress signifies that Declan has a love of humankind in general, for he cannot abide the suffering of friends. It also demonstrates a love of friendship that Declan has with Piko, and a love of family which ultimately grows between Declan, Pipa, and Pika together.



There is indeed romantic love in the novel as well, but it appears in absent form. For Piko, the romantic love that he has felt for his late wife has hurt him deeply with her death, but as the narrator explains, perhaps his time on the Plover will encourage him to love romantically again. Taromauri as well has felt the pain of lost love, both in terms of the death of her daughter and the distance of her husband. By the end of the novel, out of love, Taromauri seeks to find her husband once more. Her time with Pipa has given her a renewed motherly love, especially as it comes to encouraging the gull to allow Pipa to speak once more.

Pipa herself comes to experience love in a very full and deep sense, for she comes to love all those adults around her that have come to care for her like a daughter. She especially feels closely connected to Declan, who risked everything to save her father and who allowed them aboard his boat. Pipa and Declan are both heartbroken when Declan explains he will not be leaving the Plover to return to normal life.

## Adventure

Adventure is an important theme in the novel “The Plover” by Brian Doyle. Adventures—defined as unusual, exciting, and even dangerous situations, experiences, and endeavors—come to heavily influence the plot of the novel, beginning with the primary adventure that Declan sets out on. The adventures had by Declan and his passengers come not only to influence the course of the novel, but the course of their own lives as well. The reader should note that the freedom afforded by adventure is represented by the appearance of the gull on the Plover early in the novel.

When the novel begins, Declan has taken to the Pacific Ocean on an adventure he has dreamt of since he read “Kon-Tiki” as a child. Declan seeks to be his own man and his own floating nation, something he has never done before, and something which not many people have attempted. Declan’s adventure takes on an added dimension when he takes Piko and Pipa on board. While Declan is a little thrown off by their arrival, he is nevertheless happy to have them.

Their arrival in turn leads to visiting numerous islands and places around the Pacific, another kind of adventure. Yet, Piko’s kidnapping at gunpoint by Enrique adds a new dimension to the adventure as well. The Pacific adventure actually becomes dangerous when Declan must rescue Piko from the Tanets and when Enrique begins to chase the Plover obsessively. The adventure is furthered when Declan takes on Taromauri, the Minister, and Danilo, all of whom throw in their lots with Declan and the Plover against Enrique.

The adventure reaches its crescendo when Enrique and the Tanets catch up to Declan and the Plover. Enrique is obsessed with destroying the Plover and does his best to attack the ship. His attempts to shoot and kill Declan fail when Piko causes the Tanets to explode by way of a firestick thrown into the smokestack of the Tanets. The duel with the Tanets, and the rescue of Enrique, are parts of the adventure that Declan never



anticipated or expected. As the adventure winds down with the return to Hawaii, the gull dies, its death being symbolic of the end of the adventure.

## Society

Society is an important theme in the novel “The Plover” by Brian Doyle. Society is essentially as collection of people who have come together to create a community, usually voluntarily and organically. The society that comes to exist in the Plover is just such a society, and as the Plover’s society grows and changes the dynamics of the novel’s plot, the thoughts and writings of Edmund Burke provide relevance and explanation for what is occurring.

Burke, a deeply conservative political theorist and Member of British Parliament in the eighteenth century, applauded the American Revolution because he knew the rights of the American Colonists had been violated. They had every right to break off and form their own country. Declan’s decision to leave Oregon and become his own country is his right, as his life has not worked out as he had hoped it would. Declan sarcastically (and ironically, as it later turns out) spurns writer John Donne, who said that no man could ever be an island.

When Declan begins taking on passengers, including the gull, Piko, Pipa, Taromauri, the Minister, and Danilo, Burke’s organic, voluntary society is achieved. Each person aboard the Plover brings their own strengths and individuality to participate in the whole. Each person ends up playing an important role, from Declan as captain to Danilo as cook. In true conservative social fashion, as Burke notes, those with the ability to help others have the responsibility to help others in their society. Examples of this are numerous, from Declan rescuing Pico to Taromauri interceding on behalf of Pipa to the gull for her voice.

Likewise, societies exist best by the consent and compromise of the governed. Each time Declan seeks a new course of action, he always consults the other passengers on board the Plover to see what they have to say about things, for the Plover has become their society, too. In true conservative fashion, Burke once noted that those on the side of good must always associate with one another against evil, in this case, everyone on board the Plover against Enrique and the Tanets. And as societies come together voluntarily, so too do they depart voluntarily. This occurs when everyone but Declan departs the Plover for their former lives.

# Styles

## Point of View

“The Plover” by Brian Doyle is written in a stream of consciousness language that alternates between first person and third person points of view. The two often intermix with one another. The majority of the first person narrative sections are told by Declan himself, while the smaller portion of the first person narrative sections are told by Pipa. Because the adventure is mostly Declan’s, and because Declan does not speak freely about his thoughts and feelings with others, the first-person narrative relating to Declan gives readers an intimate look at how he operates. Pipa’s first-person sections are important because they allow readers a close look at her thoughts and feelings at first because she physically cannot verbalize such things and later because she is telling her students about her life as a child. The third person narrative sections of the novel allow the author to more fully develop the plot and characters by alternating between characters, situations, and events. For example, while Declan is out at sea, Doyle reveals to the reader that Enrique is in port at Tungara seeking to track down the Plover.

## Language and Meaning

Brian Doyle writes his novel “The Plover” in language that is flowing and educated. Much of the novel is told from the perspective and point-of-view of Declan, who reads eighteenth century political philosophy for fun. It is clear that Declan has the ability to easily understand, absorb, and relay such knowledge, meaning that he himself is naturally intelligent, or has been well-educated despite his circumstances growing up. It is only fitting that the language Declan himself uses should then be educated in nature. Likewise, the language moves quickly and flows naturally in Declan’s first person passages, reflecting his intelligence and giving the reader an inside look at his mind since he is generally reserved around the other characters. This results in many run-on sentences as one thought leads to another in the stream-of-consciousness in Declan’s mind.

## Structure

Bryan Doyle divides his novel “The Plover” into eight major chapters bearing Roman numerals I through VIII. Each chapter is further divided into vignettes and small sections, often comprising one long, individual paragraph (with most of these being Declan’s stream-of-consciousness). The simple and straightforward structure of the novel allows the reader to remain focused on the plot, as the plot, its events, and the narrators jump around. In each chapter, sections are told in the first, third, and a mix of both first and third-person narrative modes. The fragmented nature of the chapters stands in contrast to the stream-of-consciousness of the prose, breaking up the stream-of-consciousness and allowing the reader to remain focused on the events at hand.





## Quotes

A lifetime of lifetimes. On the continent of the sea.

-- Narrator (Chapter I paragraph 1)

**Importance:** As Declan sails out into the Pacific Ocean from Oregon, he considers just how vast the ocean is, and just how small a human life is. He considers that countless lifetimes could be lived on the vast ocean, which is like a continent itself. What he does not realize, however, is that his idea of a lifetime of lifetimes will actually include other human life, by the way of the people who come to inhabit his boat alongside him.

The golden plover of the Pacific, the Pacific Golden Plover, is a serious traveler. It waders, it wends where it will.

-- Declan (Chapter I paragraph 12)

**Importance:** Declan explains to the herring gull why he named his ship “The Plover.” The plover, a small, slight, and easily overlooked bird, is very strong and capable of traveling great distances. The name “Plover” thus has great symbolic meaning for Declan.

Authority cannot be assumed, it must be earned, and earned by example, not by force... better that a man sail alone than that he sail in tumult and confusion, subject to the various winds of others...

-- Declan (Chapter II paragraph 1)

**Importance:** As Declan sails north of the South Sea Islands, he continues to read Edmund Burke's writings. Burke, though a British Member of Parliament, fiercely defended the American Revolution, saying that the authority of the British Crown had to be earned honestly, not assumed and forced. Declan is the Crown on his own boat, and does not have to worry about the winds, or beliefs, ideas, and presence of others. Yet this will change soon enough, and Burke will be more than mere study, but a crucial guide for Declan.

But he did worry, in his bunk, at night. How was this going to work?

-- Narrator (Chapter II paragraph 62)

**Importance:** While Declan is happy to have Piko and Pipa along on the boat, he now realizes his voyage has changed radically. Rather than being an island and country of one, there are other people with him now. He begins to wonder about everything from money to medical care for Pipa to how he'll get along with others to what will happen when Piko decides to go home. As it turns out, these are the least of his troubles.

Days of epic rain.

-- Narrator (Chapter III paragraph 1)

**Importance:** As Declan puts into the nearest island to report the kidnapping of Piko, a



period of rainy weather sets in. The rain is symbolic of the stormy situation—the kidnapping, and the seeming inability of local authorities to do anything about it. The rain continues for days as Declan contacts everyone he can in order to have Piko rescued, but there is no luck.

The world is a beast. You make your way... I made my way. I have a boat. I go where I want. The laws do not apply to me... I take what I like... I am the shark now. I go where I want. I take what I want. They think the law will protect them but there is no law. There are only people who believe in law...  
-- Enrique (Chapter III paragraph 25)

**Importance:** As Enrique and the Tanets rest for the night, he considers his current situation and his life. Enrique demonstrates just how dangerous he is by noting that he does not believe in laws, that he makes his own laws, and that he does whatever he wants out on the ocean. He likens himself to a shark, a dangerous predator, which in turn means that Declan and Pipa are in far greater peril than previously considered.

So he listened carefully to the minister for fisheries and marine resources and foreign affairs announcing his candidacy for first minister, and did not believe a word he heard... and he concluded that there must be a very great deal of money hidden behind all of this, which he resolved to find.  
-- Narrator (Chapter IV paragraph 3)

**Importance:** As Enrique heads to shore to find out if anyone has seen the Plover, he learns of the Minister's plans to make the island of Tugaru its own republic. This is not an isolated incident. Burke, who wrote positively of the American Revolution and the new republic, the United States, has strong relevance here (in terms of Tugaru being a republic and in terms of the Plover being something of its own country). Likewise, in terms of the physical plot, Enrique's decision to worm his way into events on Tugaru will have important consequences.

Sometimes saints are criminals who were awakened.  
-- The Gull (Chapter IV paragraph 61)

**Importance:** Here, the Gull gives some of her thoughts to Declan, Piko, Pipa, and Taromauri. She explains that some of the best people in the world, saints, may have once been sinners and criminals. This is certainly the case with Taromauri, who took on sometimes criminal jobs following the death of her daughter in order to get by. This includes working for Enrique before fleeing his ship to be with the Plover.

I lost a daughter too. I can't hear her voice anymore. But I hear this one.  
-- Taromauri (Chapter V paragraph 63)

**Importance:** As time passes on the Plover, Taromauri and Pipa become much closer. Taromauri sees in Pipa the daughter she lost, and while Piko thinks he may have lost Pipa because Pipa is no longer the girl she was before the accident, Taromauri assures Piko that Pipa still speaks. It is only a question of Piko listening, and speaking to Pipa in



turn. This is stunning to Piko, who has long worried about his role as a father. It causes him to rethink how he has been keeping his daughter close, but also at arm's length by way of communicating with her.

Why are there no love stories on this boat? What kind of voyage is this, with male and female in it, over the course of many pages and miles, with no adamant and steamy love stories? But—there are love stories here...

-- Narrator (Chapter VII paragraph 39)

**Importance:** The narrator stops to ask a question of the reader and the story about love, and why no romantic love has blossomed on the boat. The narrator explains that there is love in the story, but not in the way expected. There is the kind of love between father and daughter, the love Taromauri has for her lost husband, and the exploration of whether Declan can love anyone at all. There are numerous such examples of human love and connection in the story, and they all matter.

I see you. You cannot hide... I know where you are. I know where you are going.

-- Enrique (Chapter VII paragraph 230)

**Importance:** Enrique becomes obsessed with hunting down the Plover. Enrique is enraged that his entire world has been turned upside down by the first encounter with the Plover, ranging from the kidnapping of Piko to the abandonment of Taromauri to the abandonment of the newest crew members. Enrique obeys no laws and feels as if he has lost control, and will now do anything and everything to regain his sense of control.

I don't know, Pip.

-- Declan (Chapter VIII paragraph 81)

**Importance:** In the final chapter of the novel, everyone aboard the Plover, except Declan, prepares to disembark for land. Pipa asks Declan to come along with them back to the world, but Declan says he doesn't know. As her father later explains, much of Declan's life is a mystery. He had a difficult childhood, and his desire to be away from people doesn't line up with his apparent love and care for people. It can only be hoped that one day, Declan will come in to land and be among them.