

The Portable Veblen Study Guide

The Portable Veblen by Elizabeth Mckenzie

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: McKenzie, Elizabeth. *The Portable Veblen*. Penguin, 2016.

The Portable Veblen is a novel centering around the newly engaged couple of Veblen Amundesn-Hovda and Paul Vreeland. Veblen and Paul both live in modern-day Palo Alto, California. Veblen works as an office temp and works as a volunteer translator for the Norwegian Diaspora Project, which is based in Oslo, Norway. Veblen's ancestors are from Norway, and she is named after Norwegian American economist Thorstein Veblen, whom both Veblen and her mother adore, and who was famous for criticizing consumerism and materialism. Paul Vreeland is a neurologist and medical research at Stanford Hospital. He is developing a new tool for performing emergency craniotomies, and the design has recently been licensed by a large pharmaceutical company called Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals.

The novel follows Veblen and Paul as they navigate the struggles of their engagement. Though in love with Paul and excited about the idea of marrying him, Veblen experiences an inexplicable sense of doom and trepidation. In addition, her neurotic and controlling mother, Melanie, appears to oppose the engagement because she does not want Veblen to be taken further out of her reach by the constraints of marriage. Veblen and Paul also experience friction in their relationship from the discovery of opposing values they hold. While Veblen admires strange and difficult lives and disdains materialism and consumerism, Paul is drawn to much more conventional methods of personality fulfillment, such as wealth and influence.

The actual plot of the novel is fairly simple and mostly revolves around two main plots: 1) Veblen and Paul's relationship, and 2) Paul working with Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals on his new medical device. With regards to Paul and Veblen's relationship, most of the development involves them meeting each other's families. Veblen's mother Melanie is married to Linus Duffy, a friendly and accommodating man who is not Veblen's stepfather. Veblen's mother and father divorced not long after marrying due to friction in their relationship. Veblen's father, Rudgear, suffers from PTSD due to fighting in the Vietnam War, and he also suffers from dementia due to his genetics and advancing age. At the time of the novel, he resides at Sunny Hill Psychiatric facility. Paul's parents are aging hippies whom Paul resents for their alternative lifestyle. He also resents that they always paid more attention to Justin, his mentally disabled older brother.

With regards to Paul's work with Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals, Paul is put in charge of a clinical trial of the device necessary to test and refine the device, as well as to submit the device for FDA approval. The trial is run in partnership with the United States Department of Defense, because the device may be used by medics in the military. The clinical trial is set to be performed on medical cadavers as well as live volunteers. These volunteers are wounded veterans. Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals attracts these volunteers by manipulating their false hopes that the trial may actually improve their conditions. Paul is reluctant to go along with this but ultimately does. However,



Hutmacher ends up using unethical means to get the device approved without the trial. They begin selling the device, which Paul knows to possess at least one major flaw. At the urging of Veblen, he reports Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals to the authorities.

The novel ends happily, with Paul having adopted Veblen's values and worldview after his recent experiences. Veblen and Paul go through with their wedding, and the dysfunctions of their respective families appear to have been more or less resolved. Veblen and Paul end up moving to Norway, where Veblen works as a translator, and Paul works as a physician and medical researcher at the University of Tromsø.



Chapters 1 - 4

Summary

Chapter 1: The novel opens with 30-year-old office worker Veblen Amundsen-Hovda walking down Tasso Street in Palo Alto, California with her boyfriend, 35-year-old neurologist Paul Vreeland. Paul proposes to Veblen, presenting a large diamond engagement ring, and Veblen says yes. Later, in Veblen's cottage on Tasso Street, they hear squirrels in the attic. In the morning, a squirrel greets Veblen in the window, which pleases Veblen. She calls her mother, tells her about the squirrel, and then about the engagement. Her mother is shocked and expresses worry, especially since she and Paul have never been introduced.

The narrative then presents a flashback of Veblen and Paul's first meeting. They meet in the Stanford Hospital, where Paul works as a neurologist and where Veblen works temporarily as an office worker. She delivers a piece of mail to him in his lab, where he is working on a new tool for craniotomies. They make conversation, decide to have dinner together, and soon form an attachment.

Chapter 2: The narrative returns to the day after Veblen and Paul's engagement. Paul arrives at Veblen's house with a trap for the squirrel in their attic. Veblen does not wish to trap the squirrel, as she views squirrels as beautiful and noble creatures. Paul, however, views them simply as pests. Veblen argues that Thorstein Veblen, the anti-materialist economist for whom she was named, would say that "people hate squirrels because that's the only way to motivate expenditures on them, such as buying traps or guns" (31). Paul puts the trap in the attic, but Veblen sabotages it by loading it with the repellent bait of sauerkraut and mace. They then discuss their wedding, and Veblen says they should visit her mother so she can be introduced to Paul.

Chapter 3: The narrative moves back to before Paul has met Veblen. Cloris Hutmacher, the heiress of Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals, visits Paul in his lab and asks about his new medical device. He says it can be used by medics and emergency medical technicians to deliver craniotomies in the field in order to prevent brain injury after trauma. Cloris contacts Paul later and says Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals is interested in licensing the design of the device and running a clinical trial, in order to gain FDA approval. They discuss business at Cloris' apartment and end up having sexual intercourse. Later, Cloris flies Paul to Washington, D.C., where they pitch the device to the Department of Defense (DOD). The DOD agrees to fund a clinical trial of the device, as it may be useful for army medics. Paul later meets Veblen, forms a romantic relationship with her, and moves out of his position at the Stanford Hospital to run the clinical trial of his device.

Chapter 4: The narrative then moves to the days leading up to Veblen and Paul's visit to Veblen's mother. Paul mentions that Cloris Hutmacher has offered the Hutmacher estate as a venue for their wedding. Veblen is not very fond of the idea. Veblen later



calls her best friend, Albertine Brooks, and confesses her feeling of doom, which is seemingly connected to her engagement with Paul. When Veblen and Paul finally do visit Veblen's mother and stepfather (Melanie Duffy and Linus Duffy respectively) it is at the Duffys' home in Cobb, California. The visit seems to go well, despite Melanie's neuroses and hypochondria. Paul says something innocuous that upsets Melanie, but he is able to redeem himself when Melanie asks him to haul up a large piece of scrap metal from the ravine by the house. Paul helps Linus to complete the chore, despite its excruciating difficulty.

Analysis

The opening of the novel presents a very rosy view of Veblen and Paul's relationship, with only Veblen's strange feeling of trepidation to disrupt this otherwise happy portrayal. In the opening scene, Veblen and Paul communicate with a bubbling sense of mutual admiration. Their dialogue is even comical in its overwhelming tone of love and euphoria. The one flaw in the proposal appears to be the ring, which is quite large. This later comes to symbolize a source of tension in their relationship. Veblen enjoys simple pleasure, while Paul values status symbols. Another disruption in the atmosphere of love and happiness is Veblen's neurotic and controlling mother. When Veblen calls her to tell her about the engagement, her mother actually seems opposed to the idea, not wanting her daughter to be taken from her by a husband. However, the flashback to Veblen and Paul's first meeting reinforces the rosy and happy portrayal of their relationship.

The first visible flaw in Veblen and Paul's relationship arises when Paul decides to set a trap for the squirrel in Veblen's attic. Veblen is demonstrated to have a peculiarly strong affinity for squirrels, even seeming to believe that she can communicate with them. Veblen is shown to have a childlike sense of wonder, imagination, and fascination with the world. Meanwhile, Paul appears to have a very blunt and insensitive worldview, designating the squirrel as a pest. This argument represents a source of tension in their relationship and represents certain fundamental differences between them. Thorstein is willing to look at the world in unconventional ways, while Paul is more steeped in convention and mainstream utilitarianism. This tension underlies their relationship, both concerning the squirrel and other matters throughout the novel.

Chapter 3 helps provide both necessary backstory for Paul's character and insights into his personality and ambitions. Paul is quite excited by the prospect of working for the large and influential Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals, and on page 48, he imagines lofty fantasies of become a rich and famous physician, vindicating himself in the eyes of those who knew him in his youth. These fantasies paint Paul as a somewhat insecure man with highly conventional ideas of success and fulfillment. This characterization is further developed by his pride at being flown to Washington to meet with the Department of Defense. Paul appears to believe that happiness and self-worth are derived from money, power, and fame. However, Cloris, as the embodiment of these supposed ideals does not seem to present a very positive image of the benefits that come with money and power. She is divorced from her husband, has a turbulent



relationship with her seven-year-old son, and seems obsessed only with expanding the wealth and power of the Hutmacher brand.

Paul and Veblen's visit to Melanie and Linus develops another source of tension in their relationship. Melanie's opinion of Paul is highly precarious and subject to rapid degeneration at the slightest provocation. Even though Paul goes to extremes to be civil, Melanie seems to search for reasons to oppose the engagement. She becomes deeply saddened and offended by a completely innocuous comment from Paul, and then after he goes to the extreme of fetching a heavy piece of scrap metal from a deep ravine for her, she once again despairs over Paul's character after she sees that Paul has left a wet towel on the floor. Paul does not wish to say anything bad about Melanie to Veblen, but his disapproval of Melanie's neuroses becomes more apparent over the course of the novel.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the relationship between Veblen and Paul as it is presented in Chapter 1-4. What are their differences? What appear to be the strengths and weaknesses of their relationship?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the significance of the squirrel. What does it represent to Veblen? What does it represent as a narrative symbol?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Veblen's relationship with her mother. What appear to be the positive and negative aspects of the relationship? How does their relationship reflect on the personalities and values of Veblen and her mother?

Vocabulary

escarpment, retch, filament, pique, juncture, conspicuous, quantum, adorn, filigree, despotic, magpie, hackneyed, snide, kowtow, caveat, abjure, primordial, pragmatic, abysmal, dissociate, espouse, ossify, jettison, ambivalent, fixate, guffaw, cornice, linseed, truculent, myoclonic



Chapters 5 - 9

Summary

Chapter 5: The narrative describes Veblen's childhood, living with her mother and stepfather most of the year, but spending two weeks each summer at her father's house for a court-appointed visit. Her parents are divorced. Her father, Rudgear Amundsen-Hovda, was a veteran of the Vietnam War and was later diagnosed with severe PTSD, accounting for his bizarre and erratic behavior. The chapter includes a series of letters between Veblen's mother and father. In his letters, Veblen's father complains that Veblen acts strangely and is otherwise too reserved. He blames Melanie for this. In her replies, Melanie says that Veblen is fine at home, but her visits to Rudgear make Veblen nervous. Melanie accuses Rudgear of being unfit to take care of Veblen for any period of time.

Chapter 6: The narrative returns to the day after Veblen and Paul visited Melanie. Veblen encounters the squirrel again, believing it to be the same squirrel as before. She also believes she saw it in Cobb and asks the squirrel if it stowed away in the car. Melanie calls Veblen and asks if she took the old typewriter from her childhood bedroom at the house in Cobb. Veblen admits that she did, and this upsets Melanie. Veblen apologizes but argues that the typewriter really belonged to her when she was a child. Veblen later uses the typewriter to write an ode to Thorstein Veblen and his life, praising him for his idealism, his love of animals, and his hatred for the commodification of natural resources.

Chapter 7: At the VA Hospital in Menlo Park, Paul is working on preparations for his clinical trial. Paul meets with the clinical trial volunteers (who are wounded veterans) and their families. They ask if the clinical trial will help improve the effects of the volunteers' brain trauma. Paul knows that such an improvement is basically impossible, but at signals from the Hutmacher employees, he reluctantly says that the trial could, in fact, be beneficial for the volunteers' health. Later, Paul receives a phone call from his father, Bill Vreeland. Bill says that Justin, Paul's 38-year-old mentally disabled brother, seems to think that Justin will be the one marrying Veblen. Paul believes that this is a purposeful attempt by Justin to sabotage him, and Paul tells Justin that if Justin disrupts the wedding, Paul will "tell everyone about your special little connection with Caddie Fladboe" (155).

Chapter 8: The narrative flashes back to when Veblen and Paul meet Pauls' parents in San Francisco. This is before Veblen and Paul are engaged. Veblen and Paul go out to eat with Paul's parents (Bill and Marion Vreeland) and his brother (Justin.) Bill and Marion are very friendly and outgoing, but Paul seems to deeply resent his family, disapproving of his parents' hippy lifestyle and his brother's behavior, seeing it as a way of getting attention and sabotaging Paul. Bill warns Paul to be wary not to sacrifice his morals when working with Hutmacher.



Chapter 9: Soon after the events of Chapter 8, Melanie calls Veblen, and Veblen fills her in on the details of Paul's family. That night, Paul's family comes to visit Paul and Veblen at Veblen's cottage. The dynamics are similar to those in Chapter 8, although they are a little more agreeable overall. Veblen observes the interactions of the Vreelands and wonders if she is ready to have a family of her own, feeling again a sense of trepidation with regards to her engagement.

Analysis

Chapter 5 provides further insight regarding the type of environment in which Veblen was raised. Her mother and father appear to have nothing but animosity for each other, disagreeing widely on how Veblen should be raised. However, while Melanie is neurotic and needy, Rudgear's PTSD and rather harsh parenting methods present him as an even more dysfunctional parent than Melanie. This chapter discusses Veblen's childhood through the point-of-view of Melanie and Rudgear, leaving the reader to imagine for themselves how Veblen viewed these dynamics. However, Veblen's ability to stay positive through adversity, as well as her affinity for handling other people's problems, appears to be a result of navigating the needs of these two somewhat inept parents. On the other hand, Veblen's personality as an adult may have far more to do with her relationship with Melanie than with Rudgear, as Rudgear only took care of her for a short period of time each year.

Chapter 6, although somewhat brief, helps to further develop Veblen's personality and values. First, the recurrence of the squirrel helps to reinforce her sense of childlike belief. She seems to believe that the squirrel is following her everywhere she goes, and while this is rather odd, it appears charming and innocent when considered alongside Veblen's personality traits of general optimism and innocence. During the phone call with her mother, Veblen takes a somewhat surprising stand, defending her right to ownership of the old typewriter. This helps develop Veblen's desire for independence. Finally, her elegy to Thorstein Veblen illuminates her own values of creativity and nonconformity by showing how she admires those traits in Veblen.

The episode of Paul preparing for the clinical trial helps to establish another area of significant drama in the plot, namely between Paul's scruples and the demands of Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals. Earlier in the novel, Paul's interactions with Cloris Hutmacher establish the sense that Cloris is focused only on making fast, large profits. That sense is extended to the corporation at large in Chapter 7 when Paul experiences the myriad questionable ways in which the company seeks to expedite the clinical trial. Most shocking of these methods is their willingness to utilize the false hopes of the volunteers to gain their unquestioning cooperation. Paul clearly feels that this is morally questionable, as he almost tells the volunteers the truth that the trial will almost certainly help none of their symptoms. However, due to the social and economic pressures of Hutmacher, he is dissuaded from saying this.

Chapters 8 and 9 help to develop the dysfunctional relationship that Paul has with his family, which seems as dysfunctional as Veblen's family relationships, but in opposite



ways. While Veblen experiences friction with her parents due to their negative attitudes and behaviors, Paul seems to dislike his own family in spite of the general friendliness and good cheer of his parents. Paul is portrayed as shockingly insensitive with regards to his brother's mental disabilities, apparently believing that Justin exaggerates his helplessness out of hatred for Paul and a desire to sabotage him. Meanwhile, Paul hates his parents because they represent the opposite of his own ideals, living lives of little wealth and keeping company among people Paul views as vagrants and derelicts.

Discussion Question 1

How does Chapter 5 present the relationship between Melanie and Rudgear? In what ways may this relationship have affected Veblen?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss the thematic tensions between the worldviews of Bill Vreeland, Veblen, and Paul. How do they differ, and how do they each shape the themes of the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Paul's relationship with his family. How does Paul's attitude towards his family reflect upon both himself and them?

Vocabulary

acacia, russet, snit, reverie, commodity, pecuniary, martinet, carbuncle, tourniquet, cosset, finesse, sanction, abscess, prospectus, larynx, rancor, procure, esoteric, dote, aubergine, gout, decant, derelict, mandible, megalomania, vitreous, frisson, prostrate, cupule, pericarp



Chapters 10 - 14

Summary

Chapter 10: In this brief chapter, Paul visits Sergeant Major Warren Smith, one of the volunteers in the clinical study. Smith's two daughters have asked Paul to take good care of Smith and give him special attention. Paul reads through Smith's file, which details his gruesome injuries, and attempts to converse with Smith. However, Smith simply thinks about his wife's ideas of supporting the family by renting out the garage to boarders and selling the family's boat. Smith has a manic episode and has to be sedated by the orderlies.

Chapter 11: In Palo Alto, Paul helps Veblen film a video for the Norwegian Diaspora project. In the video, Veblen talks about when Thorstein Veblen lived in Palo Alto. She praises his difficult and unconventional life. After they record the video, Paul comments that Veblen seems to "admire strange and difficult lives more than upright, successful ones" (214), and this seems slightly disconcerting to Paul. Paul also mentions that he thinks Veblen's mother has several problematic psychological issues, such as extreme hypochondria. He later apologizes and says he was simply trying to express his concerns, but a small amount of tension seems to remain between Paul and Veblen.

Chapter 12: Veblen considers her relationship with her mother, the way she was always overly protective of Veblen as a child and constantly stated that no one truly loved Veblen but her. On a phone call between Veblen and Melanie, Melanie says that Paul believes Melanie's adrenal glands are the cause of her health issues and has set her up for a clinical trial. Veblen sees this further entanglement between Paul and her mother as dangerous to the relationship between the three of them. In a subsequent conversation with Paul, he says that he wishes to buy the Smiths' boat for the relatively low price they are offering. This upsets Melanie because she sees boats as unnecessary status symbols, and it appears to her that Paul is taking advantage of the Smiths' desperate situation.

Chapter 13: Paul travels to a medical technology convention, having been invited by Hutmacher to promote his device. However, upon arriving, Paul sees that the device has already been packaged and is being sold. Paul finds Cloris and tells her that the device cannot be sold yet, as the trials have not been completed, and the device contains at least one major flaw that he knows about. Cloris waves him off, saying they were able to get FDA approval by utilizing a personal connection and a legal loophole. Cloris then leaves with her son Morris, who has obtained one of Paul's dangerous craniotomy devices and is brandishing it about.

Chapter 14: Veblen arrives at a motel in Paso Robles, where she plans on visiting her father in the psychiatric facility where he resides. Having encountered the squirrel again, she places him in a cage for portability and brings the cage into the motel room with her. She unknowingly accepts an incoming call from Paul, who then overhears Veblen



speaking to the squirrel. Veblen expresses her doubts about her engagement and even speaks to the squirrel in a somewhat flirtatious tone. Paul, however, is unaware that she is speaking to a squirrel and not a human. Veblen then leaves her motel room to go visit her father.

Analysis

Chapter 10 provides an interesting look at one of the volunteers in Paul's study, helping to deepen the tragedy of the way in which Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals is taking care of desperate people in bad situations. Warren Smith has not only suffered permanent injuries to his brain and body, but his family is now undergoing financial stressors due to his medical costs and inability to work. His wife does her best to make ends meet, but the means she proposes are rather upsetting to Warren. Paul becomes further complicit in this suffering when he later considers to buy their boat from them, which would not only deprive Warren of one of his most prized possessions, it would also be an instance of taking advantage of the family's desperation.

Veblen and Paul's conversations in Chapter 11 serve to further emphasize their personal differences and the sources of tension in their relationship. First, Veblen's admiration of Thorstein Veblen represents an admiration of values opposite to Paul's own personal values. Thorstein Veblen did not care for mainstream ideas of success, and he actually treated all mainstream ideas with suspicion. Thorstein Veblen chose strange and difficult paths in life rather than live comfortably with convention. Paul appears to regard this as unnecessary and even somewhat repugnant. His characterization of good, successful lives appears to lie more in the domain of mainstream comfort. In addition, Paul's admission that he believes Melanie to be a somewhat troubled woman creates lasting negative effects in his and Veblen's rapport.

Chapter 12 develops these two sources of tension even further, namely the discord between Paul and Melanie, and the disparity between Paul and Veblen's ideas of success. Paul attempts to improve his rapport with Melanie by exercising his medical influence in favor of her hypochondria, but Veblen sees Melanie and Paul's relationship as quite precarious and prone to disaster if Paul attempts to do anything. Then, Paul nonchalantly brings up the idea of buying a boat, as if he does not seem to understand how serious Veblen is about her anti-consumerist philosophies. Paul admits that he has wanted a boat for a long time, but Veblen sees it as a needless status symbol. This projects both a lack of communication and a lack of compatibility between Paul and Veblen.

Paul's episode at the medical technology convention represents a major turning point in the plot of Paul and Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals. When Paul sees that his device has been packaged and is being sold, it sparks panic and a crisis of conscience within him. He knows that the device has not been fully tested and contains at least one major flaw, and he urgently tries to argue with Cloris that the device needs to be recalled immediately. However, Cloris appears completely unbothered with his valid concerns, arguing that bringing the product to market as quickly as possible was the most



profitable thing to do. This brings the conflict between ethics and business interests into full and urgent view, as Paul knows the device is dangerous and incomplete.

Veblen's motel room conversation with the squirrel represents a return to the book's earlier humor while also functioning as a crisis point for her relationship with Paul. Firstly, Veblen unknowingly articulates all her doubts and fears so that Paul can hear, and secondly, Paul comes under the misapprehension that Veblen may be cheating on him with another person. This comical scenario doubles as an articulation of the gulf of understanding that has steadily grown between the couple ever since they became engaged.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the philosophies of Thorstein Veblen as presented in the novel. What significance do these philosophies have in relation to how a person should live one's life? How do these philosophies interact with the narrative and themes of the novel?

Discussion Question 2

What is the apparent narrative function of Sergeant Major Warren Smith? How do Warren and his family help to shape the narrative and themes?

Discussion Question 3

In what way does Cloris Hutmacher serve the narrative? In what ways is she a foil or a complement for other characters? What is significant about the way in which she is portrayed?

Vocabulary

lability, gait, mayhem, antiseptic, forage, rupture, equilibrium, bouillon, repugnant, burnish, spinster, ridicule, replete, insolent, fatuous, idiosyncrasy, molder, maudlin, adrenal, exude, extraneous, trove, lionize, continuum, gusto, pathogen, vivacity, versatile, pneumatic, arid



Chapters 15 - 19

Summary

Chapter 15: After overhearing Veblen's conversation with the squirrel and thinking it was with another man, Paul goes to a bar and consumes several alcoholic drinks in a fit of sadness and desperation. He then goes to Veblen's cottage on Tasso Street, looks through her things for incriminating evidence, and finds none. After angrily punching her framed picture of Thorstein Veblen, Paul leaves.

The narrative then flashes back to an episode from Paul's youth, specifically in tenth grade, age 16. Paul enters the school science fair at the encouragement of his science teacher. At the science fair, he interacts with Millie Cuthbertson, on whom he has a crush. Though Paul does not win the science fair, he is pleased to be able to spend time with Millie afterwards. They drive to his house, but they discover many of Paul's parents' guests having sex in various rooms. Paul is further disgusted to find one of the guests, Caddie Fladboe, performing oral sex on Justin. However, Millie is not scared by the guests, and she even admits to having a crush on Paul. They begin a relationship, and two months later, Millie confides to Paul that she thinks she is pregnant with his baby. Paul says he wishes to marry Millie and raise the child with her, but Millie's mother forbids the idea, saying Millie is too young Paul comes from an undesirable family.

Chapter 16: Veblen visits her father in the Sunny Hill Psychiatric Facility, which is in Paso Robles, California. She tells her father that she is getting married, and she is able to talk him into attending. However, as she is leaving, it becomes clear that he has immediately forgotten Veblen's visit. Veblen consults the staff about arranging transportation for her father on the wedding day, and then she calls her mother to let her know that she has invited Rudgear to the wedding. Melanie expresses extreme displeasure with this, saying that she does not know if she can face Rudgear. Veblen calms her mother down and assures her that everything will be alright.

Chapter 17: After Veblen returns to her home, Paul arrives there at 1:30 in the morning and demands to know who she was with at the motel. Veblen tells him that she was only talking to the squirrel, and they realize the misunderstanding. Paul then tells Veblen about Hutmacher releasing his device before it is ready. Veblen urges Paul to report it to the authorities, but Paul says he cannot do that. He and Veblen argue, and Veblen runs out of the house distressed.

Chapters 18 and 19: Paul receives a call from the manager of the clinical trial, who informs him that Hutmacher has canceled the trial but appears to be giving no further information. Paul drives down to the VA Hospital in Menlo Park to see for himself. He attempts to use the computer in his office to write an e-mail to authorities regarding Hutmacher's unethical activities. However the corporation appears to use spyware to delete his e-mail as soon as he writes it. He then writes the message by hand and makes copies, but when he goes out into the parking lot, Cloris Hutmacher hits him with



her car. Later, while Veblen agonizes over the decision of whether or not she should marry Paul, she receives a call from Susan Hinks, the overseer of the clinical trial. Hinks informs Veblen of Paul's letter and says that Cloris Hutmacher hit Paul with her car. Hinks seems to be under the impression that Cloris knew about the letter. Hinks says that Paul is in the hospital.

Analysis

The extended episode detailing the circumstances surrounding Paul's relationship with Millie give some key insights and heavy drama regarding Paul's character. As a 16-year-old boy, Paul is presented as fairly insecure. He struggles to overcome a sense of alienation at home, and he wishes to determine his passion in life. His interest in science is presented as nascent, yet his achievements in his biology class bring him a precious sense of pride. Moreover, Paul appears somewhat lonely and socially alienated, but he still harbors an intense crush on Millie Cuthbertson. Paul's failure to win a medal at the science fair represents a cutting failure on Paul's part, but he sees a silver lining in the time he spends with Millie afterwards. His subsequent relationship with Millie becomes his foremost passion in life, but he receives a devastating personal blow when her mother ends the relationship, saying Paul and his family are undesirable people. She even adds that the judges thought his science fair project was ridiculous, further wounding Paul's pride. This episode is cemented as a moment of great shame for Paul, as well as a possible motivator for his future ambitions. Paul's wishes to become a great success seem partially motivated to disprove the opinions of those who knew him as a youth.

Chapter 15 also provides a compelling look into Paul's family life during his boyhood, providing possible motivators for Paul's chronic resentment of his family. First, the reader is made aware that his family was very poor. His parents' primary source of income is implied to be the cultivation and sale of drugs like marijuana. His parents also appear to spend a lot of time hosting various wandering hippies. For these reasons, the Vreelands seem to have a very low social standing in their hometown of Garberville. Paul is clearly ashamed of this, and the shame is only deepened when Millie's mother cites these circumstances as reasons why Paul is not worthy of being with Millie. In addition, the glimpse inside Paul's house provides further illustration of the dysfunction between Paul and Justin. Paul is left to care for himself much of the time, while Bill and Marion lavish attention on Justin much of the time. Justin is even incorporated into the social gatherings that their parents organize, and while Paul is repulsed by these gatherings and by his parents' friends, Paul still seems to feel alienated and left out.

With regards to Paul's character arc as an adult, Chapters 17 and 18 present a dramatic and significant shift in his view of the world. Paul is distraught after realizing that his device is being sold before it is complete and fully tested, but he experiences reluctance to act. When Veblen urges him to go to the authorities, he says he cannot do that. This reluctance seems to be due in part to the debt of gratitude he owes to Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals for elevating his professional and economic position. However, Paul's conscience wins out in a dramatic and sudden sequence of action. Paul's quick decision



to report Hutmacher by any means represents a victory of conscience over his ambitions. He realizes that his father's warnings about the evil and danger of corporations was correct in this case, and he seeks to act in favor of justice. This turn of events also acts as a vindication of Bill and Veblen's anti-corporate and anti-consumerist philosophies because Cloris Hutmacher and Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals are illustrated as antagonistic forces.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the episode concerning Paul in high school. In what ways is this episode significant for Paul's character and the overall narrative?

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Veblen's meeting with Rudgear at the Sunny Hill Psychiatric Facility. What purposes does this scene serve? How does it develop both Veblen and Rudgear's characters?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss Paul's actions following his discoveries at DeviceCon. What different phases of thought does Paul go through, and what motivates him? How do his actions reflect upon him and the themes of the novel?

Vocabulary

archipelago, redundant, coccyx, velour, lithograph, contessa, fecund, primrose, officious, facetious, derisive, chivalrous, empirical, arrhythmia, iota, pallid, vindictive, vitriol, picaresque, rivulet, ignominious, petulant, surplus, extrude, calibrate, accommodate, emulate, allegiance, capacious, amplitude



Chapters 20 - 27 and Appendices

Summary

Chapter 20: Veblen, Bill, Marion, and Melanie go to see Paul in the intensive care unit of the hospital, where Paul is unconscious but stable. They learn that an eyewitness report stated that Cloris Hutmacher's car sped up just before hitting Paul. Bill believes this to be intentional foul play in response to Paul's incriminating letter against Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals, and he swears vengeance against the company. Melanie and the Vreelands get along surprisingly well, and Veblen sits by Paul's bedside for a long time, speaking to him to try to wake him up. Eventually, he responds and emerges from his unconscious state.

Chapters 21-24: Warren Smith comes to visit Paul in his hospital room, and he apologizes for his violent outburst the last time he and Paul spoke. After Smith leaves, Paul and Veblen have a conversation in which Paul's personality seems to have changed somewhat. He declares that he does not care about the future of his medical device, and he even shows joy at the sight of a squirrel by the window. Paul is discharged from the hospital within the week, and Veblen receives a phone call from her mother. Melanie says that the attorney she hired thinks Cloris probably will not receive any criminal charges, but the attorney will still help Paul pursue a case against Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals for their unethical business actions. The next time Veblen visits Bill and Marion Vreeland, Bill and Marion express regrets about not giving Paul more attention as a boy.

Chapter 25: In her home office, Cloris Hutmacher speaks to her ex-husband over the phone about recent events. She says that she hit Paul with her car by accident. As they continue their phone conversation, Morris plays make-believe, using Paul's medical device as a toy. He pretends that Cloris is an evil cyborg, and he uses the device as a weapon against her, accidentally giving her a craniotomy. Cloris collapses on the floor.

Chapters 26-27: Veblen, Paul, and their families make final preparations on the day of Veblen and Paul's wedding. Rudgear arrives in transportation arranged by the Sunny Hill Psychiatric Facility, and Bill converses with him, saying his brother fought in the Vietnam War just like Rudgear. Finally, everything is set, and the ceremony proceeds. It is interrupted once by the arrival of the squirrel, whom Veblen believes has come to watch the ceremony and wish her well. It is then interrupted a second time by Justin, who asks if Paul understands him, and Paul, responding calmly, says that he does.

Appendices: The novel ends with a series of appendices that provide information as to the characters' situations following the wedding. Veblen and Paul move to Norway, where Veblen works as a translator and Paul works as a physician at the University of Tromsø. Cloris Hutmacher works with the international charity UNICEF, despite having suffered brain damage due to her accidental craniotomy. Melanie is still a



hypochondriac, and she keeps in touch with Veblen, taking great interest in her life living in Norway.

Analysis

These final chapters provide a surprisingly happy and optimistic ending to the novel, subverting the consistent foreshadowing regarding the likely doom of Veblen and Paul's relationship. The novel begins with the description of a feeling of doom by Veblen, and this feeling appears to be related to her relationship with Paul, since the onset of the feeling is essentially simultaneous with their engagement. In addition, so much of the action of the book involves Paul and Veblen discovering things about each other that appear to indicate that they are incompatible as a couple. However, after Paul decides to report Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals to the authorities, and after he is hit by Cloris Hutmacher's car, he appears to experience a fundamental shift in his character. He is more sensitive and understanding, and he is able to let go of flashy, lofty ambitions in favor of more unconventional methods of achieving fulfillment. The novel humorously implies that this change in Paul may be due in part to brain damage received when he was hit by Cloris' car, but these changes may validly be viewed as a result of his experiences and Veblen's positive influences. Because of these changes, Veblen and Paul are able to live happily together as a married couple.

Because the changes in Paul's character seem to bring him into alignment with Veblen's own personal philosophies, and because these changes result in a happy ending for Paul and Veblen, the narrative seems to vindicate Veblen's philosophies as the most valid ones presented in the book. Earlier in the novel, Paul is a generally unhappy person, holding animosity towards his family and obsessed with his ambitions of conventional forms of success. However, when his personality softens in the wake of his personal tribulations, he appears to be a far happier and more serene person, able to peacefully coexist with his family and find fulfillment doing work in Norway that he had never before imagined for himself. Veblen, as the original embodiment of the ideals that Paul now embraces, is therefore vindicated in her commitment to those ideals. The narrative's ending validates her unwavering fidelity to the ideas that one should remain optimistic, support one's friends and family, and embrace unconventional paths to happiness and fulfillment.

The end of Cloris Hutmacher's arc, both dark and humorous, also functions as a way of advocating for Veblen's ideals. It is unclear whether Cloris intentionally hit Paul with her car, but regardless, she has demonstrated a pattern of putting profit ahead of safety and concern for her fellow humans. This lack of ethics appears to aptly contribute to her comeuppance, when her son plays with Paul's medical device and accidentally gives Cloris brain damage. Cloris is then shown in the appendices to be working for UNICEF, which is a cause based specifically around compassion and regard for humanity. This represents a complete change in Cloris' personality and values, and the narrative appears to put forth the dark yet humorous implication that Cloris' changes are due to her brain damage. Thus, the end of Cloris' character arc serves to both punish her for her misdeeds and bring her over to the side of goodness and compassion.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the events of Paul and Veblen's wedding day. How do the interactions between characters compare and contrast with the rest of the novel. In what ways do these interactions contribute to the novel's themes?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Paul's exchange with Justin during the wedding ceremony? How does this exchange reflect upon Paul and Justin's characters?

Discussion Question 3

In what ways do each of the appendices contribute to the novel? Why are they presented in different formats from the rest of the novel?

Vocabulary

meristem, erode, gild, fathom, euphemism, abreact, pilfer, intubate, deviation, hematoma, incongruous, seersucker, monograph, burlesque, induce, carouse, alchemical, evoke, periphery, allegation, cohort, effete, solidarity, indulge, sedation, communal, atone, cascade, varnish, arroyo



Characters

Veblen Amundsen-Hovda

Veblen Amundsen-Hovda is the novel's central character, as well as one of the two characters through whose perspective the story is told. Veblen is a 30-year-old woman engaged to neurologist Paul Vreeland. Veblen lives in Palo Alto, California, where she works as a temp, employed by an agency in various temporary employment positions around the city. She also spends time doing translation work for the Norwegian Diaspora Project, as she has learned Norwegian as a second language and is very interested in her Norwegian heritage, despite never having been to Norway. She is named after famous economist Thorstein Veblen, and she admires the economist's anti-consumerist philosophies. Veblen is highly optimistic and generally cheerful and patient. She was raised by two very needy parents and is therefore quite accustomed to taking on the burdens of other people's problems. Veblen is also a great lover of animals, especially squirrels. Throughout the story, she must juggle the needs of those around her and fight oncoming doubts about her engagement to Paul.

Paul Vreeland

Paul Vreeland is a 35-year-old neurologist living in Palo Alto, California. Paul serves as the novel's other primary point-of-view character. He becomes engaged to Veblen at the beginning of the novel. As a boy, he was raised by somewhat inattentive parents who led a rather carefree, hippy-inspired lifestyle. He resents his parents for the way they raised him, and he resents his mentally disabled brother for always receiving more attention from their mother and father. As an adult, Paul aspires to lead a more conventional life and become a financial success.

Paul invents a tool to help military medics perform field craniotomies, and he licenses the design to Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals. In terms of personality, Paul is rather insensitive and does not share Veblen's anti-consumerist sensibilities. He also has no affection or compassion for animals, while Veblen is an animal lover. Throughout the novel, he occasionally struggles with doubts concerning his engagement to Veblen. He also struggles with his conscience with regards to his partnership with Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals, as their practices are revealed to be increasingly unethical.

Melanie Duffy

Melanie Duffy is Veblen's mother. She is divorced from Veblen's father and is now married to a kind and patient man named Linus Duffy. Melanie is a hypochondriac as well as extremely insecure and emotionally needy. She relies heavily on Veblen for emotional support. She is unhappy about Veblen's engagement, as she worries that Veblen will have less time for her mother once she is married. Melanie does not have a good relationship with her ex-husband (Veblen's father) as they often argued over how



to raise Veblen. For this reason, as well as the fact that Veblen's father is now in a mental institution, Melanie keeps her distance from her ex-husband and does not approve when Veblen goes to see him.

Rudgear Amundesen-Hovda

Rudgear "Rudge" Amundesen-Hovda is Veblen's birth father. He was a soldier in the Vietnam War and began to suffer from dementia later in life, although these two facts are not necessarily connected. Rudgear and Veblen's mother become divorced not long after they marry, although the book does not state if they become divorced before or after Veblen's birth. Veblen's biological father, Rudgear, was granted visitation rights, thus Veblen was sent to live with her father for two weeks during the summers of her youth. Her relationship with her father was fairly uneasy, partially due to his father and mother's animosity towards one another. When Rudgear's dementia becomes fairly severe, he is transferred to the Sunny Hill Psychiatric Facility in Paso Robles, California. Veblen invites him to her wedding, despite her mother's objections.

Linus Duffy

Linus Duffy is Veblen's stepfather and her mother's second husband. Very little of Linus' backstory is given in the novel, but he is portrayed as a very friendly, kind, and patient man, and thus he is well-suited in disposition to handle Veblen's neurotic and mercurial mother. He acts as a peacekeeper between characters and attempts to help out whenever he witnesses his friends and family undergoing an emotional or personal crisis.

Albertine Brooks

Albertine Brooks is Veblen's closest friend. They met in the sixth grade when Albertine transferred to Veblen's school, and they remained friends ever since. As an adult, Albertine is a professional psychologist and has a fascination with the psychologist Carl Jung. Although she does not appear in the novel very often, she remains a close confidant of Veblen. Veblen's fiancé Paul dislikes Albertine after first meeting her, and this becomes a point of tension between Paul and Veblen.

Bill and Marion Vreeland

Bill and Marion Vreeland are the parents of Veblen's fiancé Paul Vreeland. They live in a relatively low-rent neighborhood near San Francisco and enjoy an alternative lifestyle. It is implied that, during Paul's youth, they made a living growing and selling marijuana. They also allowed many meandering people with similar values to live in and around their house. They are a little more conservative as adults, making a living selling clothes and belts, but they maintain a relatively alternative lifestyle. Their relationship with Paul is strained because he dislikes the environment he was raised in. They are also



suspicious of corporations and thus are somewhat worried for Paul when he goes into business with Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals.

Justin Vreeland

Justin Vreeland is Paul's 38-year-old brother. Justin is mentally disabled due to strangulation during his birth. Due to his disabilities, his parents take care of him and he resides in their home. Paul dislikes Justin because Paul is jealous of the attention that Justin has always received from their parents, leaving Paul relatively ignored by his parents in his youth and adulthood. Paul is convinced that Justin, out of hatred for Paul, willingly tries to sabotage Paul throughout his life. However, by the end of the novel, Paul is able to overcome this irrational paranoia and accept Justin for who he is.

Cloris Hutmacher

Cloris Hutmacher is the daughter of Boris Hutmacher, the founder of Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals. She is divorced and has a son named Morris. She meets Paul Vreeland in the Stanford Hospital, where he works as a medical researcher testing his new device for use in craniotomies. Cloris convinces Paul to license the design to Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals. She helps oversee the device's clinical trials, and she utilizes connections and unethical loopholes to begin selling the device before it has been fully tested. When Paul tries to report this, Cloris hits him with her car, injuring but not killing him. She later claims to be an accident.

Millie Cuthbertson

Millie Cuthbertson was Paul Vreeland's high school girlfriend. They began dating when they were 16 years old, and after two months, she tells Paul she thinks she is pregnant. Paul wishes to marry Millie and raise the child with her, but Millie's mother forbids it because Millie is too young and because Paul lives in a bad part of town and does not come from a wealthy family. This rebuke from Millie's mother appears to be a motivating factor in Paul's goal to achieve a great deal of success and financial prosperity in his life.



Symbols and Symbolism

Squirrels

Squirrels symbolize the tension in Veblen and Paul's relationship. Veblen is an animal-lover who especially has an affinity for squirrels. She finds them fascinating and complex, and she even partially believes that she can communicate with them. Meanwhile, Paul sees them as a pest and a mindless, vile nuisance. When a squirrel invades the attic of Veblen's cottage, Paul wishes to trap it, viewing it as a pest, but Veblen wishes to leave it alone, seeing it as a noble and intelligent creature. This dispute remains festering for the rest of the novel, until Paul finally experiences a significant shift in his personality and point of view, finally accepting Veblen, his family, and the squirrel.

Marketing

Marketing symbolizes deceit and lack of compassion. In keeping with her personal morals and philosophies, Veblen is quite wary of marketing, viewing it as a tool to create unnecessary desires and take advantage of people. Paul does not share this view a first, but in his work with Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals, Paul gradually becomes more aware of this dynamic. First, Hutmacher takes advantage of the false hopes of the families of injured veterans in order to get volunteers for the clinical trial of Paul's device. Then, Hutmacher bypasses certain necessary tests and regulations in order to get the device to market faster. Paul realizes that marketing truly can be used as a tool to take advantage of people in dangerous ways, and he begins to reject corporations and their manipulations.

Consumerism

Consumerism symbolizes empty and unnecessary desires. Veblen's favorite economist and philosopher, Thorstein Veblen, views consumerism as a repugnant form of social conformity, encouraging people to pine after things they do not really need. In light of this, Thorstein Veblen lived his life in unconventional ways outside of mainstream culture. Veblen admires this and aspires to do the same, enjoying simple and profound things that do not have a price tag, such as relationships and the history of her Norwegian heritage. Paul, on the other hand, views consumerism as a form of self-fulfillment, seeing value in the ability to buy status symbols such as a boat. By the end of the novel, he comes around to Veblen's point of view, thus vindicating Veblen in the eyes of the narrative.



Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals

Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals symbolizes the evil of corporate greed and manipulation through marketing. When Paul enters a business relationship with Hutmacher, several characters express concerns. Paul's father says he is worried the corporation will take advantage of Paul or force him to compromise his morality. As a corporate entity, Hutmacher engages in various forms of marketing and manipulation, both things that Veblen disapproves of and views as negative forces in the world. By the end of the novel, Hutmacher is revealed to, in fact, embody all the worst aspects of corporatism, manipulating consumers and medical patients in dangerous ways. Even Paul is a victim of manipulation at the hands of Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals and its heiress, Cloris Hutmacher.

Paul's Medical Device

Paul's innovative new medical device symbolizes all of Paul's dreams and aspirations. Much of Paul's character motivation comes from insecurity and the desire to prove himself to be a successful person. His main method of pursuing this is researching and developing a new tool to help with emergency craniotomies. When Cloris Hutmacher of Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals expresses interest in licensing the design, Paul becomes very excited and begins to imagine his rise to fame and fortune, disproving the opinions of all who doubted him. However, after he sees that Hutmacher is employing dangerous and unethical business practices, he is willing to let go of this dream in order to pursue a happier and more humble life with Veblen.

The Veterans

The veterans who volunteer for the clinical trial of Paul's device symbolize innocence and vulnerability. In order to acquire volunteers for the clinical trial of Paul's new medical device, Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals leads veterans and their families to believe that the trial may actually improve the injured veterans' condition. Paul knows this to be untrue, but he is unable to tell that to the veterans, as he is manipulated and coerced by the employees of Hutmacher. Thus, the veterans are helpless in the face of Hutmacher's duplicity and their own desperate hope. The veterans and their families wish only for a chance to improve the veterans' quality of life, and Hutmacher willfully takes advantage of this desperate hope.

Brain Trauma/Deterioration

In the novel, brains symbolize the self and the constant risk of change that the self may undergo due to trauma. Several of the novel's characters, including Justin, Rudgear, and the veterans in Paul's clinical trial have experienced brain trauma or deterioration and struggle daily with its effects. Justin struggles with mental disabilities due to strangulation at birth; Rudgear suffers with worsening dementia; and the veterans all



struggle with the ongoing effects of traumatic brain injuries received in combat. Meanwhile, Veblen fears she may suffer mental deterioration due to genes inherited from her father. In this way, the novel repeatedly reiterates the idea that the self is subject to change through trauma, but that one should not be judged badly for it.

Norway

To Veblen, Norway symbolizes profound meaning and the value of things that money cannot buy. Veblen works for the Norwegian Diaspora Project as a volunteer translator. When other characters say that she should be paid for her work, she always says that simply doing the work and contributing to the study of her heritage is reward enough. This presents the idea that money and value are not inextricable from one another. Veblen values her Norwegian heritage and the interesting opportunities for study that it provides. At the end of the novel, when Veblen and Paul move to Norway, it symbolizes their shared agreement that finding value in non-monetary things is more important than conventional ideas of success. This is reinforced by Paul's willingness to abandon more lucrative medical opportunities in order to tend to the medical Norwegian cattle herders.

Thorstein Veblen

Thorstein Veblen represents the embodiment of all of Veblen's personal ideals, which also seem to be the ideals for which the narrative advocates. As an economist and a philosopher, Veblen argued against unnecessary consumerism. As a private individual, Thorstein Veblen was content to live in unconventional ways, outside the spheres of mainstream academia, professionalism, consumerism, and society. Veblen the character values these ideas because they provide alternate routes to happiness and fulfillment outside of conventional ideas of success. Thorstein Veblen represents a thematic foil to the greedy and manipulative Hutmacher Corporation, as well as to Paul's original values of wealth and influence.

Wobb

The imaginary world of Wobb symbolizes Veblen's childlike wonder and optimism. Veblen's vivid imagination and unusually strong sense of optimism often confuse other characters and make them concerned, but the novel presents these traits as valuable and positive. These ideas are concretized in the concept of Wobb, an imaginary world that Veblen created as a child, and which she still invests with a strong sense of importance. In Wobb, societies of squirrels struggle optimistically against oppressive forces, such as predators like owls. This functions as an expression of Veblen's innocent optimism in the face of real dangers and fears. Due to personality traits that led to the creation and maintenance of Wobb, Veblen is able to bravely and optimistically face the personal challenges that the narrative presents.



Settings

Palo Alto, California

Palo Alto a city in the San Francisco Bay Area of California, provides the main setting for the novel. In the past decade, the economic landscape of Palo Alto has shifted as it has become the location for many large technology companies. The presence of these companies has raised the cost of living in the area, thus forcing many lower-income residents to relocate. This provides the geographical and economic backdrop of the novel. Veblen and her fiancé Paul live in Palo Alto, although they maintain separate residences until their wedding. Veblen, as an employee of a temp agency, represents Palo Alto's lower income residents, while Paul, a neurologist and inventor, represents Palo Alto's wealthier residents. Palo Alto was also once the residence of economist and proponent of anti-consumerism, Thorstein Veblen, after whom Veblen is named.

San Francisco, California

San Francisco, California is a highly populous city in California's San Francisco bay Area. San Francisco has undergone similar economic changes to Palo Alto, with increased commerce causing a rise in the cost of living. San Francisco is the home of Paul's parents, who live in a low-rent neighborhood in San Francisco. Much like Veblen, Paul's parents dislike consumerism and capitalism. This creates an ironic juxtaposition between them and the city where they reside. Not many of the novel's scenes take place in San Francisco, but the few scenes that do take place there are relatively important. These scenes include Veblen's introduction to Paul's parents, and various flashbacks to Paul's childhood.

Greenslopes Hospital

Greenslopes Hospital in California is a fiction hospital in which Paul and Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals perform a clinical trial of Paul's new medical device. The hospital is located in Menlo Park, a city in California's San Francisco Bay Area. The scientific aspects of the clinical trial are overseen by Paul, while the business, administrative, and legal aspects are run by employees of Hutmacher. Greenslopes is the setting of Paul's work for Hutmacher, with Paul bending to the corporations' increasingly unethical will before finally rebelling. Paul attempts to report Hutmacher's unethical practices and is hit in the parking lot of Greenslopes by Cloris driving her car.

Cobb, California

Cobb is a city in California about 90 miles north of San Francisco. Veblen's mother and stepfather, Melanie Duffy and Linus Duffy, reside in Cobb. While in Palo Alto, Veblen often receives phone calls from her mother in Cobb, but the only scene of the novel that



actually takes place in Cobb is Paul's introduction to Linus and Melanie. This occurs after Paul and Veblen become engaged. Paul attempts to make a good impression, but Melanie becomes very upset at one point due to an innocuous comment Paul makes. Paul is able to redeem himself by helping Linus bring up an old (and very heavy) piece of scrap metal from the nearby ravine.

Sunny Hill Psychiatric Facility

The Sunny Hill Psychiatric Facility is located in Paso Robles, California. It is the facility in which Rudgear, Veblen's birth father, is taken care of and treated for dementia. Veblen goes to visit her father there to ask him to attend her wedding. Communication is difficult due to her father's psychiatric and neurological issues, but she manages to convince him to come. As Veblen leaves, it appears that her father has immediately forgotten the conversation, but on the day of Veblen's wedding, the caretakers at Sunny Hill manage to arrange transportation for Rudgear.

Norway

Norway is a country whose territory comprises the western half of the Scandinavian Peninsula. Many of Veblen's ancestors are from Norway, and she is very interested in Norwegian history and culture. From her home in Palo Alto, Veblen volunteers as a translator for the Norwegian Diaspora Project, which seeks to record the history of Norwegian emigrants throughout the world. Veblen expresses regret that she was never able to visit Norway, for her mother made her stay home instead of doing a study abroad program there. After Veblen becomes engaged, her mother tries to convince her to take a trip to Norway; this appears to be a thinly veiled attempt to disrupt Veblen's engagement. After Veblen and Paul get married, they move to Norway, where Veblen works for the Norwegian Diaspora Project, and Paul works as a doctor tending to the health of Norwegian cattle herders.

Cottage on Tasso Street

In Palo Alto, Veblen resides in a cottage on Tasso Street. She comes to reside in this cottage after striking an agreement with its owner and working for free to repair and restore it. During their courtship and engagement, Veblen and Paul spend most of their nights at the cottage. Towards the beginning of the novel, a squirrel takes up residence in the cottages attic. This causes tension between Veblen and Paul, since Paul wishes to trap the squirrel, and Veblen wishes to leave it alone.



Themes and Motifs

Consumerism and Materialism

The novel uses the themes of consumerism and materialism to explore and deconstruct mainstream ideas of success and happiness. Veblen Amundsen-Hovda adores Thorstein Veblen, the antimaterialist philosopher after whom she was named. Thorstein Veblen espoused ideals contrary to popular consumerist conventions, saying that much of human activity in the modern era appears to be governed by arbitrary rules and habits. Thorstein Veblen, as presented in the novel, saw consumerism as an expression and exercise of these conventions, and Veblen Amundsen-Hovda happily shares Thorstein Veblen's skepticism of conventional methods of searching for happiness. Veblen does not place much value in money and only performs enough paid work to support herself. She spends the rest of her time in unpaid pursuits that she finds meaningful to her, such as volunteering as a translator for the Norwegian Diaspora Project. Through the happy and optimistic character of Veblen, the novel makes a case for the fulfillment that one can find in unconventional ways.

The novel furthers this stance by demonstrating the negative effects of consumer fixation, such as in the novel's portrayal of characters like Paul Vreeland and Cloris Hutmacher. One of the major sources of tension in Paul and Veblen's relationship is due to the fact that Paul subscribes heavily to mainstream ideas of success and fulfillment, while Veblen firmly rejects them. Paul sees things as money and consumerist status symbols as the best way of finding and expressing happiness. Paul focuses so much of his energy and attention on the pursuit of money and influence, as well as the acquisition of status symbols, such as the boat he wishes to purchase. However, Paul's pursuit of such things is motivated by pain and insecurity. Paul still suffers from the pain of the embarrassments of his youth, such as the excoriating rebuke he received from the mother of his high school girlfriend. Paul wishes to succeed in conventional ways as a method of covering these scars and insecurities, but he does not seem to find true happiness until he lets go of these single-minded goals. The same can be said of Cloris Hutmacher, who in her monomaniacal pursuit of profit hurts those around her and destroys her personal relationships.

The end of the novel appears to vindicate Veblen's philosophies, because Paul does not find happiness until he yields to her way of thinking and lets go of his arbitrary goals of money and power. Once Paul sees in Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals how ideals of consumerism and personal gain can corrupt a person, he rejects that way of thinking and embraces the unconventional. Thereafter, not only do his relationships with Veblen and his family improve, but he is able to find a true sense of meaning and fulfillment in simply helping others. He agrees to move to remote Norway, and there he enjoys a fairly obscure and simple life of tending to the medical needs of the humble nearby residents.



Optimism vs. Pessimism

The Portable Veblen demonstrates ongoing struggles between optimism and pessimism within its characters, and in the end, it seeks to advocate for the benefit and value of optimism over pessimism. Veblen Amundsen-Hovda is a consistently patient and optimistic person, but she struggles throughout the novel with an amorphous sense of doom that comes to her once she and Paul become engaged. The novel seems to validate this feeling of doom by revealing more and more ways in which Veblen and Paul are incompatible. Veblen even finds herself nearly succumbing to this pessimism and ending her engagement with Paul. However, her optimism and sense of love for Paul remain strong enough to bear her through her doubts, and in the end, Paul's ultimate character is revealed as one quite compatible with Veblen. The two become married and live happily together in Norway. This subversion of negative foreshadowing helps to make the reader aware of their own possible tendencies towards pessimism and show how those tendencies can be productively reversed.

The novel also advocates for an attitude of optimism when it comes to the area of family relationships. Veblen and Paul both deal with quite challenging dysfunction in their families, and while Paul views his family with a generally pessimistic attitude, Veblen always tries to approach hers with patience and optimism. The novel ultimately vindicates Veblen in this area as well, showing how her habit of supporting her neurotic mother during many challenging neurotic episodes ultimately strengthens their relationship and benefits both of them. Her mother has the benefit of Veblen's calm support and rationality, and Veblen finds that she is stronger and more patient for being able to remain calm around her mother. Paul, meanwhile, thinks very ill of his parents and his brother, living in constant hatred and paranoia of them. However, only once he is able to let go of his hatred and view them charitably is he able to find inner peace and eliminate the dysfunction from his relationship with his family.

The novel ends happily with regards to just about every character arc, and in this way, the novel is able to recontextualizes the trials and tribulations of the narrative as simply representing the challenges that everyone must face in life. In the moment, many of the negative experiences that the characters face during the narrative seem like the portent of some great doom, such as the one that Veblen seems to vaguely sense. However, when the characters all come out from these challenges in a happy and peaceful state, the moments of strife are diminished in their sense of fear and sadness. Thus, the novel reframes its moments of pessimism as temporary and less significant than they originally seemed.

Love and Marriage

Much of the novel centers around the hopes and doubts of Veblen and Paul regarding their relationship, and through this lens, the novel examines what it means to truly love and be compatible with someone. When Veblen and Paul first become engaged, they are free of doubts concerning whether or not they are a good match for each other.



However, over time, they begin to see more possible signs of incompatibility. There are certain values they do not share, and some of their personality traits seem to be discordant. Veblen and Paul begin to doubt their relationship and wonder whether the love they have is true or not. Ultimately, Paul's apparent change of heart regarding many of his values indicates that their true attraction to one another was between their true selves, which they could sense innately, and that the moments of friction were simply superficial wrinkles that they smoothed out during their engagement.

The novel also appears to advocate for the idea that a major part of a successful loving relationship is simply the desire within each person to make the relationship work. Regardless of whether Veblen and Paul's original attraction was based on valid reasons, Paul and Veblen each decide that they love the other, and they make a commitment to loving that person. This commitment may be symbolized in the engagement ring that Paul gives Veblen, which is rather large and showy and uncomfortable for Veblen. However, despite the awkwardness in the relationship that it represents, Veblen and Paul are willing to work to overcome their differences because of the innate sense of love they feel for one another. In this way, the narrative acknowledges that no relationship is perfect, and that true love in many ways comes from hard work and compromise between the people in the relationship.

The novel ultimately extolls interpersonal love as the highest form of fulfillment, as Veblen and Paul, for all their enthusiasm for Norwegian history or neuroscience, ultimately find that their love for one another is the deepest form of fulfillment that they have found in life. Conversely, the novel portrays the negative affects of neglecting love as a form of fulfillment. For example, Cloris Hutmacher neglects her interpersonal relationships in favor of focusing on her business endeavors, and her relationship with her son and husband suffer greatly for it. She and her husband become divorced and retain an ongoing animosity for one another, and the relationship she has with her son is one of general dysfunction and neglect. Cloris Hutmacher appears to be the unhappiest character in the novel, while the characters who are able to commit themselves to loving relationships seem very fulfilled and at peace with the world.

Family

Veblen and Paul's family relationship[s] are vital to the story of their engagement as well as their own personal histories. Long before Veblen and Paul became engaged or even met, their family relationships played a large part in shaping who they each became as adults. Veblen's patience and willingness to take on the emotional problems of others is demonstrated to be an effect of growing up with two very needy parents. Meanwhile, Paul's insecurities and obsession with success are demonstrated to be in response to the aimlessness and neglect he saw in his parents as a child. While these upbringings appear to have both positive and negative effects on Veblen, they are shown to be integrally important to each of their characters.

In addition, the obstacles that the narrative presents are largely challenges created by family dysfunction and the scars that that dysfunction has placed upon Veblen and Paul.



For Veblen, one of the biggest challenges that she perceives with regards to her engagement is her mother's neurotic and controlling nature. Veblen's mother seems inclined to dislike Paul because she does not want anyone to create more distance between her and her daughter. Moreover, Veblen appears very eager to obtain her mother's approval, because she has grown so close to her mother over the years of taking care of her mother's emotional needs. Thus, when Paul and Melanie express any dislike for each other, Veblen sees it as discord within her engagement, because she views her mother almost as a part of herself. Meanwhile, Paul's family dysfunction presents an obstacle in that it appears to reveal the worse aspects of his character. His antipathy towards Justin seems to indicate paranoia and a lack of sensitivity, and his dislike for his parents' alternative lifestyle is an aspect of Paul's obsession with mainstream ideas of success. The novel uses these obstacles as a way of exploring the interactions between family relationships and romantic ones, as well as examining how family relationships can shape a person and the way they interact with both romantic partners and the very idea of love.

However, despite the dysfunction present in both families, the novel remains optimistic about the value of maintaining and nurturing family relationships. By the end of the novel, the worst areas of dysfunction within the families appear to be largely fixed. Veblen's mother, while still very much invested in Veblen's life, is able to take a step back and allow her daughter to be independent without hassling her so vigorously. Paul, meanwhile, is able to overcome his antipathy towards his family, gaining a new understanding for his parents and brother. This creates an optimistic message with regards to family dysfunction. Where other stories may portray dysfunction as often fatal or irreversible, *The Portable Veblen* chooses to demonstrate instances of dysfunctional families that ultimately overcome their problems and reap the emotional benefits of positive coexistence among the family members.

Internal vs. External Success

A significant portion of the novel's narrative is dedicated to deconstructing the idea of success and exploring what types of success are really worth pursuing. Veblen represents the idea of internal success, striving for things that are fulfilling in their own right. Meanwhile, Paul represents the idea of external success, or striving for goals due to the results they will produce rather than the feelings that the activities themselves will induce. Veblen does not lead a very flashy or opulent life, choosing to work as an office temp and pursue the things that are meaningful to her in her spare time. Paul, on the other hand, works as a neurologist and spends much of his time attempting to invent a new medical advice that will bring him money and notoriety. It is important to note, however, that Paul does enjoy the pursuit of science for its own sake, and that that enjoyment is ultimately what prevails over Paul's shallower desires for fame and fortune. The novel thus advocates for the value of personal success over external success as a means of finding true personal fulfillment.

The novel also explores how in order to pursue true personal fulfillment, it is often necessary to forego conventional or obvious avenues of fulfillment in order for more



difficult or obscure ones. Veblen's fascination with Norwegian culture and history is not a lucrative or widely held interest, but Veblen is able to derive so much interest and fulfillment from it because of her own private relationship with it. Similarly, Paul's fascination with the brain comes from a very private and offbeat place. One of his earliest memories of discovering the mysteries of the brain was simply sitting alone in the library and reading in quiet fascination about the various esoteric diseases and disorders that have been observed in various medical cases. Meanwhile, the novel demonstrates how the pursuit of something simply because it is lucrative or on an obvious path can lead to unhappiness or moral bankruptcy, such as complying with the wishes of the powerful yet unprincipled Hutmahcer Pharmaceuticals corporation.

In the end, the characters' most meaningful successes are the ones that hold weight for them personally and morally rather than ones that are showy and impressive simply for the sake of being showy and impressive. Veblen maintains her commitment to Norwegian culture and history, and she is able to move to Norway to work for Translators Without Borders and the Norwegian Diaspora Project. This is simply an extension of her earlier interests. However, perhaps even more significantly, Paul is able to find greater personal fulfillment living in obscure Norway tending to the medical needs of Norwegian cattle herders. This is not only because Paul's work in Norway is more personal and immediate, it is also because it gives him more of a sense of moral satisfaction. His work with Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals, while seemingly flashy and important, did not provide ad moral satisfaction due to its lack of morals and ethics. However, what Paul and the other characters realize is that the most meaningful and fulfilling successes are the ones that carry personal, emotional, and moral weight.

Styles

Point of View

The *Portable Veblen* is largely told from two distinct perspectives: Veblen's and Paul's. One of the main focuses of the novel is their relationship, so the novel divides its focus between Veblen's perspective and Paul's in order to present both sides of the relationship as it struggles and evolves. While Veblen and Paul both suffer from doubts about their engagement, their doubts come from very different places. Veblen worries that Paul may be reliant on consumerism or may not be able to coexist with her mother, and Paul worries that Veblen may be too determined to live what he sees as a strange and difficult life incompatible with his own personal goals. Examining both characters' thoughts and perspectives allows the novel to fully develop and demonstrate the characters' opposing personalities, opinions, and experiences. Moreover, because the novel ultimately vindicates Veblen's philosophies and decries the dangers of thoughtless ambitions such as the one Paul possesses, the full development of both characters' perspectives allows the narrative to strengthen its case advocating for Veblen's philosophies as the more fulfilling and constructive.

The novel is also told from a third-person limited point of view, meaning that while the narration is in third-person, each section of the story remains constrained by a specific character's experience. This allows the narration to alternately convey a character's thoughts and comment on each situation as it is shown to the reader. This ability to alternate is necessary because while the novel is in large part an examination of various characters' opinions of one another, the narrative also functions as both a satire and a series of moral arguments. In other words, the novel itself seeks to make light of the comical characters and their often absurd situations, but it also takes deliberate moral stances on the characters' behaviors and philosophies. It is much easier for a narrative to make these types of comments, either directly or indirectly, when the narration is able to free itself from simply conveying the characters' personal thoughts and opinions. The novel therefore uses third-person narration to achieve this occasional detachment.

Language and Meaning

The *Portable Veblen* follows a very distinct and unusual arc in terms of tone and how it relates the events of the novel. Specifically, the narrative is marked by distinct moments and sections of offbeat humor, but a significant portion of the novel relates the narrative with a more frank and direct tone. The moments of humor are primarily at the very beginning and end of the novel, although the styles of humor are quite different in these sections. At the beginning, the humor is rather broad and playful, focusing on the humorous and absurd ways in which Veblen and Paul are affected by their abounding love for one another. Towards the end, the humor is somewhat darker and is primarily seen with regards to Cloris Hutmacher's storyline. Cloris' fate is rather gruesome, and the juxtaposition with her technically happy ending and the terrible incident that brings



about that ending create a very dark sense of humor. Other instances of humor in the novel are generally brief and usually revolve around Veblen's strange and oddly endearing personality quirks. However, much of the middle of the novel deals fairly frankly with questions of family relationships, love, and morality.

This irregularity in tone appears to function as a way of alternately entertaining the reader and calling the reader's attention to the heavier themes it advances. Moments of levity or satire often help ease the reader into familiarity with dynamics of morals or character relationships, but when the novel shifts its tone towards frank approaches to the novel's themes, the reader is primed to interpret these themes as they have already been introduced to the story's component parts in humorous and entertaining ways. Then, when the novel concludes its various storylines in happy and uplifting ways, the humor generally serves to reemphasize the story's thematic emphasis on the value of optimism. For all the distress the characters have undergone, the novel ends with a fairly light and humorous touch, emphasizing the idea that an optimistic attitude is valid and valuable rather than misguided.

Structure

The *Portable Veblen* is structured in a generally linear fashion, with occasional flashbacks used in order to develop characters and fill in background information. Because the novel focuses primarily on Veblen and Paul's engagement, the story opens with a scene of them becoming engaged to establish their relationship as the central narrative focus. However, important narrative and plot points take place prior to the engagement, so the narrative often provides extended flashback to fill in this information. Important flashbacks include Paul's first connection with Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals, Veblen's childhood as the offspring of divorced parents, and Paul's traumatic episode concerning his high school girlfriend. These extended flashbacks are spaced fairly evenly throughout the story so as not to overly disrupt the present-day narrative. The spacing out of flashbacks also creates a controlled delay in the development of characters, slowly adding complexity to the characters' personalities while also giving increasing clarity regarding the characters' motivations.

While the structure of the novel is generally straightforward in terms of chronology and narrativity, it is less conventional in terms of how it structures itself in order to subvert reader expectations. One of the most prominent examples of this in the novel is how it heavily foreshadows a specific narrative conclusion and then completely subverts this foreshadowing. As soon as Veblen and Paul become engaged, Veblen is struck by a feeling of great trepidation and oncoming doom. This appears to foreshadow that Paul and Veblen's relationship is fated for an unhappy ending, and the novel seems to affirm this foreshadowing by revealing many different ways (to both the reader and the engaged couple) in which Veblen and Paul are incompatible. However, close to the end of the novel, Paul has several dramatic experiences that cause similarly dramatic changes in his personality and outlook on life, thus remedying the problems of his and Veblen's incompatibility. The novel does this repeatedly with regards to negative foreshadowing, such as the social dangers of Veblen's mother, the idea that Veblen may

have inherited mental illness from her father, and Paul's blatant cruelty and insensitivity towards his family. In all cases, the novel foreshadows doom and foiled dreams and then subverts this by providing happy endings.



Quotes

Veblen felt troubled, as if rushing toward a disaster. But was it of a personal nature, or worldwide? She wanted to stop time.”

-- Narration (chapter 1)

Importance: This ominous piece of narration establishes the recurring idea of Veblen's trepidation regarding her engagement and approaching marriage. Despite feeling so excited and in love, she cannot help but feel that there is some disaster approaching. This feeling becomes more relevant as the flaws in her relationship with Paul begin to reveal themselves. However, this foreshadowing is subverted when Paul and Veblen overcome their differences and become happily married.

Veblen had been lobbed one of her favorite topics: the gargoyle of marketing and advertising. 'I believe it. But what's weird about this—marketing is supposed to kindle the anticipatory daydream, supposedly the most exciting phase of acquisition. But here, what would be the daydream?

-- Veblen (chapter 1)

Importance: This quotation appears during the very first meeting between Veblen and Paul. Despite having no college degree, Veblen speaks very articulately about the nature and structure of marketing. This reveals Veblen's intelligence and establishes the idea of marketing, which becomes a running theme. In this quotation, marketing is characterized as a “gargoyle,” establishing the idea that it is not to be trusted, as it may be used as a dangerous tool of manipulation. This idea is developed and vindicated as the novel progresses.

She'd been named after Thorstein Bunde Veblen, the Norwegian American economist who espoused antimaterialistic beliefs and led an uncommon and misunderstood life. A noble nonconformist. A valiant foe of institutions and their ossified habits of mind.

-- Narration (chapter 1)

Importance: This quotation establishes the importance and relevance of Veblen's namesake, economist Thorstein Veblen. Veblen idolizes this economist and his ideas and philosophies. This quotation characterizes those ideas as “antimaterialist” and “nonconformist,” revealing the multi-faceted nature of the philosophies as well as their opposition to mainstream wisdom. This becomes important throughout the novel as the character's explore the meaning of success and the various ways in which fulfillment may be attained.

What if we don't agree on what's a pest?

-- Veblen (chapter 2)

Importance: Veblen says this to Paul with regards to their disagreement on squirrels. Paul wishes to trap the squirrel that has taken residence in Veblen's attic, but Veblen sees the squirrel as a harmless and beautiful creature to be left alone. This marks the



first disagreement between Paul and Veblen that is portrayed to the reader, and it sets the tone for the further areas of tension in their relationship. Paul takes a blunt and insensitive view of many things, while Veblen is much more unconventional and willing to embrace unusual things.

What if the psycho mother of his high school girlfriend, Millie Cuthbertson, committed hara-kiri on a bamboo mat, and coyotes paraded her entrails down every street in town?
-- Narration (chapter 3)

Importance: This quotation is presented when Paul muses on the possible success that may come from a partnership with Hutmacher Pharmaceuticals, While this passing reference may at first seem to the reader to be nothing more than an insignificant detail included for a darkly humorous effect, it is later revealed to be a reference to an incident of deep personal trauma for Paul. Recontextualized, this quote appears to refer to an incident that drives his blunt ambitions, or at least represents the insecurities that motivate him.

Was she merely attracted to burdens?
-- Narration (chapter 9)

Importance: This potential insight into Veblen's character is strongly rooted in facts of Veblen's backstory. As a child, she was caught between two extremely needy parents, her emotionally unstable mother and her mentally unstable father. Thus, she seems to have become accustomed to taking on the burden of other people's problems. This quote is inspired by Veblen's reflections on her relationship with Paul. She wonders if she is only attracted to Paul because of the challenges he represents, and she struggles with this fear throughout the novel.

...Silicon Valley, where fortunes are being made every day in the technology sector. But I wonder how many people here stop to remember that Thorstein Veblen, best known for his searing critique of society in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, came to the small town of Palo Alto in 1906."
-- Veblen (chapter 11)

Importance: This quotation from Veblen highlights the important juxtaposition between Veblen's geographical surroundings and her personal ideals. Pal Alto represents an area of rapidly increasing wealth and commercialism, but both Veblen and her namesake stand for ideals of anti-consumerism and unconventional living. This juxtaposition adds further urgency to the strength with which Veblen holds to her ideals in the face of opposition from both her environment and her fiancé.

You seem to admire strange and difficult lives more than upright, successful ones.
-- Paul (chapter 11)

Importance: This quotation carries significance for both Paul and Veblen's character. Firstly, it reflects upon Paul by revealing his idea of what constitutes an "upright, successful" life. He sees Veblen's life chiefly as a difficult and unsuccessful one, living



largely outside of consumerism. Meanwhile, Veblen sees Veblen's life as noble and ideal, finding ways to achieve happiness and fulfillment outside of the most popular and mainstream methods.

The extraneous status symbol brought to mind a vast trove of writings Veblen had familiarized herself with about the extended self. 'I never knew you wanted a boat.'
-- Veblen (chapter 12)

Importance: Paul and Veblen's discussion about the purchase of a boat reveals another area of tension in their relationship. Paul is very focused on mainstream ideas of success, namely wealth and socially accepted status symbols. To Paul, the purchase of a boat is a way of demonstrating his success to others. Meanwhile, Veblen sees conspicuous consumerism as arbitrary and unnecessary. She does not care about others' opinions of her, only of her own private sense of fulfillment.

When Paul criticizes my mother it feels worse than it should. Because she's not me, right? But it ruins my wish that I've met someone that fully accepts her, and therefore fully accepts me."
-- Veblen (chapter 12)

Importance: Veblen's relationship with her mother causes much strain on her relationship with Paul, and this quotation gives insight in to how and why. Veblen is not only used to her mother's eccentricities, taking care of her mother is an ingrained part of her childhood. While Veblen does try to put some distance between herself and her mother, she sees her mother as part of herself. Paul's unvarnished opinion of Veblen's mother is quite harsh and derogatory, as Paul is not accustomed to the older woman's emotional neediness.

Commerce was based on so many miserable, hoodwinking ideas that the device depressed her."
-- Veblen (chapter 16)

Importance: This quotation appears during a flashback regarding Veblen and her relationship with her birth father. Her father gives her a gift that Veblen sees as extraneous, and this appears to contribute to the feeling of distance between Veblen and her father. While the main factor of the distance between the two of them appears to be the father's declining mental state, this interaction helps develop consumerism as something that Veblen sees as alienating, putting distance between people.

Dad, it's okay. I do, Justin. I understand you now.
-- Paul (chapter 27)

Importance: Paul says this to Justin after Justin interrupts Paul's wedding ceremony, and it represents a fundamental shift in Paul's character. Despite having stated earlier in the novel that he would brutally punish Justin if Justin interrupted the wedding, Paul instead gives a sincere statement of understanding. This appears to be an effect of the

life-changing events Paul has undergone over the course of his novel, which made him reconsider his ambitions and ideas in general.