

Reputations Study Guide

Reputations by Juan Gabriel Vásquez

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Plot Summary

The following version of the novel was used to create this study guide: Vasquez, Juan Gabriel. *Reputations*. Riverhead Books, September 20, 2016. Kindle Edition.

The day after Mallarino was given a medal of honor for his work as a political cartoonist, Samanta Leal visited him at his home in the mountains. She hoped he would recognize her from the party she had attended at his home 28 years ago, but he did not. When she finally told Mallarino who she was and why she was there, Mallarino wondered if he could adequately remember the events of that long ago day.

He detailed the events of the party as best he could, as well as the scandal that ensued after Samanta's father chased Cuéllar, a Congressman, down the stairs from the bedroom where Beatriz and Samanta were sleeping. It was assumed by the other adults, as well as Mallarino who had seen Samanta shortly after Cuéllar had been chased down the stairs, that he had molested Samanta. The girls were passed out because they had drunk the left overs from adult drinks they found scattered about the house. Mallarino discovered that Samanta had been moved from the position in which he had laid her. It appeared her skirt had been lifted and one knee bent. Samanta confided that she had never been told about what had happened nor did she remember anything.

Because Samanta wanted to know exactly what had happened to her, Mallarino got contact information for Cuéllar's widow. Cuéllar had killed himself shortly after Mallarino had drawn a cartoon suggesting that Cuéllar liked little girls. Mallarino called Rodrigo Valencia, his boss, for the information; but, Rodrigo would not give it because he believed Mallarino was also doubting his own opinion of what had happened. If Mallarino had been wrong about Cuéllar, it would ruin his reputation.

Samanta and Mallarino met on the sidewalk outside the office where Cuéllar's widow worked. There are no details of the meeting between the two women. The novel ends with Mallarino seeing himself destroying all of his caricatures, pictures, and drawing utensils in the future.



Chapter 1 pgs 3-18

Summary

As Mallarino got his shoes shined, he thought he saw Ricardo Rendón, a political cartoonist who had died long ago walking the street. Out of curiosity, Mallarino asked the man shining his shoes if he knew Rendón. The man did not. Mallarino went a step further and asked if the bootblack knew Javier Mallarino. The man knew Mallarino was a political cartoonist. The man also said that he had heard Mallarino did not come around any more since he had moved to a house in the mountains. Mallarino considered that he was about to receive an award for his political cartoons. It was the crowning glory of a career of forty years. Though his work was recognized, no one recognized his face. It was one aspect of his work that his ex-wife had liked.

When Mallarino's boss, Rodrigo Valencia, told him that he had been chosen for the award, he cautioned Mallarino that this sort of honor would probably not be given again. He said it would be unwise of Mallarino to turn down the award. Because the award was so important, it would be given on the main stage at the Teatro Colón, a venue Mallarino thought was too grand for the affair. He did turn down the offer of a bulletproof Mercedes to transport him to the Teatro Colón. Instead, he chose to drive himself.

Mallarino briefly wondered what Rendón might have done in his place, even though he was aware of what Rendón had done. He had gone into a bar, drawn a final cartoon, and then shot himself in the head. In the 79 years since Rendón's death, no one understood why he had killed himself. Mallarino wondered why he had imagined he has seen Rendón and realized it was because he felt he was going to replace that man as a leading cartoonist. Mallarino thought about how strange memory could be and the quote "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards" (16) came to his mind. As he continued to walk, he heard the sound of high heels approaching from behind him. It was his ex-wife, headed for his award ceremony as well. They walked together.

Analysis

The main character of the novel, Javier Mallarino, sees the world like one would expect a cartoonist to see it. These cartoonists use exaggerated drawings to personify the people whom they satirize. When he imagines he has seen the former political cartoonist, Rendón, he recognizes him by the man's outstanding features the "dark suit, untidy bow tie, and broad-brimmed hat" (4) the he usually wore. Mallarino also sees the man who is shining his shoes in terms of a caricature. He notices the outstanding features of the man's face "a veiny nose, small protruding ears, and a white-and-gray moustache" (4).

While Mallarino recognizes that he holds power because of the statements he is allowed to make through his cartoons, he is also comforted by the fact that few people



recognize his face. “Yes, it was a terrible power. There was a time when Mallarino desired it more than anything else in the world; he worked hard to get it; he enjoyed it and exploited it conscientiously” (10). Even though Mallarino recognizes his power, at this point in his life he believes that he has always used it conscientiously. Through the course of the novel, things will happen that will cause Mallarino to question how conscientious he has actually been.

As Mallarino continues to think about his belief that he had sighted Rendón, he tells himself that it must have been a false memory. In this statement, Mallarino indicates that not all memories are reliable. In this case, he could not have seen Rendón because that man has been dead for decades. Thinking about memory, Mallarino thinks about a quote he had heard somewhere: “It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards” (16). He does not know where he has heard that quote before but it will take on a special significance later on in the novel.

Mallarino’s thoughts about his career as a cartoonist also cause him to think about his ex-wife. It is obvious they are still friends since they are walking to his awards ceremony together. It is also clear that Magdalena did not like what Mallarino did for a living. She was glad people did not know what he looked like because it made her believe there was less of a chance for them to attack him.

Mallarino’s thoughts are very detailed in nature. They are those of an intellectual. He uses a good deal of literary techniques in his writing. Personification is found in a couple of different places. For instance, in one place when he is looking around the town he notes how he is “finding his gaze met by the tall buildings” (3-4). From this description, it appears that the tall buildings are looking back at him. He also personifies life as an entity that could seek him out. In this quote he is said to be “letting life come to him instead of hunting it down in its hiding places” (5). Life is characterized as something that can come to him as well as something that can hide from him if it wishes. In a simile Mallarino’s beard is described as looking “like an outlaw’s bandana” (9). It is as if Mallarino has some reason to use his beard as a way to hide or disguise himself, as if he has committed some wrong.

An important object in this section is the black bulletproof car that Mallarino was told would pick him up for the giving of his award. This car, which would have protected him from a shooting, would also have protected his identity to some extent. Remember to this point, people still do not recognize what he looks like. Those who see him arriving at the awards ceremony or who see him at the ceremony will know what he looks like and will be able to attack him if they have that desire.

Keep in mind also that this book is a translation from Spanish, the original language in which it was written. This accounts for the Spanish names and some words, like *aguardiente*, that do not have a clear English translation.



Discussion Question 1

Discuss the relationship between Mallarino and Rendón. What do they have in common?

Discussion Question 2

How does it appear that Mallarino's career as a political cartoonist affected his marriage? What is the relationship like between the two at the time of the novel?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the significance of the award that Mallarino is about to receive. What will it mean to him and his career?

Vocabulary

perversion, virtue, provocation, nostalgia, dexterous, caricatures, perpetrator, puerile, repudiated, sycophancy, homage, guttural, apotheosis, imbecile



Chapter 1 pgs 18-37

Summary

Mallarino had just started drawing cartoons when he and Magdalena got married. He had dropped out of architecture school and refused to let his father help him get a job so that he could paint. He believed his caricatures were only a temporary way to make a living.

Mallarino was outraged when one of his cartoons was edited before it was published. He confronted the editor of the paper for an explanation, but the editor only made fun of his complaint. When he got home, Magdalena told Mallarino they would show the newspaper by not sending them any more cartoons.

Mallarino drew out a series of three cartoons about editing and sent them, along with a letter, to Pedro León Valencia, the editor of *El Independiente*. He offered to let the man publish the cartoons if he would publish all three together. Pedro like the cartoons so much that Mallarino was offered a permanent position. The routine of Mallarino's days once he began drawing regularly is described. His happiest moments were those when he was drawing. It was not until he signed his cartoons that he realized what statement he was making through the drawing.

He noted that the world changed during the time he worked for *El Independiente*. He began to feel restless and wonder if he had done the right thing by giving up painting. Additionally, Pedro left the paper in charge of his oldest son, Rodrigo, and Mallarino realized he had enjoyed working at that paper partially because he had been hired by a man known as a legend in journalism.

Finally there came a day that changed Mallarino's deteriorating attitude. He arrived at his post office box to discover that the lock had been filled with chewing gum. When he finally finished the required procedure to get the lock changed, there was an envelope containing a letter among his magazines and papers. There was no return address or name of a sender on the envelope. The text of the letter accused him of assaulting and discrediting the military. He was called an unpatriotic liar, told that the patriots' patience with him was growing thin, and that they knew where he lived and where his daughter went to school.

At home, he showed the letter to Magdalena. They were so frightened that they made Beatriz sleep in their room that night. The next day Magdalena called Rodrigo at the newspaper office. They were surprised when he laughed and told them the threatening letter meant that Mallarino had finally made it as a political cartoonist. He explained "you're nobody in this country until somebody wants to hurt you" (37).



Analysis

Although he has gotten so good at his profession in the last forty years in his career, being a newspaper cartoonist is not what Mallarino intended to do with his life. He wanted to paint, and he even had his work complimented by a well known artist. Mallarino believed his stint at drawing political cartoons was only a way to get by until he could make his living by painting. Instead, cartooning turned out to be a lifelong vocation.

The threatening letter that Mallarino gets is described as being a turning point in his life. He and his wife were in real fear for their lives, until Rodrigo Valencia assured him the threat was just part of working for a newspaper. The purpose of a political cartoon is to evoke a response in the reader. That response might be one of humor or one of anger. In this particular instance, Mallarino angered a certain group of people who believed because of the comment he made about the military through his cartoon, that he was unpatriotic. Mallarino has had other friends and relatives who have broken off their friendships because of things that Mallarino has caricatured.

The reaction of a writer to having his work edited is discussed in this section. One of the cartoons that Mallarino sent to the first paper for which he worked was edited before it was published. The editing took place without Mallarino's knowledge or permission. The editor makes fun of Mallarino's anger as he indicates advertising must come first, even over news stories, since advertisements pay for the journalists salaries and keep the newspaper running. Mallarino felt strongly enough about the fact his work had been edited that he went to work for a different newspaper.

Mallarino describes his process of drawing, the way he follows the same routine every day. He also indicates there is a time when he is drawing that he is free from any opinion of the drawing he is doing. He loses the feelings of anger, sadness or joy that the cartoon is supposed to depict. It is not until he puts his signature on his drawing that he is able to look at it and see it as the public might see it.

Literary techniques continue to be used in this section of the novel. For instance, Mallarino compares his drawings to fish: "if they're not used today, they can't be used tomorrow" (20). As Magdalena helps him with his career as a cartoonist, he describes her as being a natural at getting things done. She is described as going through life "like an overseer strolling around a plantation" (23). Magdalena puts forth the appearance that she knows she knows what she is doing and that she expects to have her demands followed.

Particularly of interest is the way that Mallarino's experience with his vandalized mailbox is described. His thoughts are personified as he tries to figure why he cannot fit his key into the lock like he usually could. He finally realizes the lock is blocked but "The revelation arrived late, like a careless guest" (33). His slowness to realize why his mailbox will not open is personified and compared to a guest who arrives to a function late. The action of the locksmith breaking into the mail box is described in a way that it almost seems a sexual violation. "What followed was the violation of the lock" (34-35).



Along with a sexual violation, Mallarino describes the locksmith's act of breaking into the mailbox being a "violation, a violent and treacherous penetration of his private life" (35). The magazines in the box are personified as they are described as "looking at him imploringly from the shadowy depths" (35).

Among the significant objects in this section of the novel is the chewing gum used to fill the lock on Mallarino's post office box. It is the first sign something is not right. Also an important symbol is the envelope and letter that Mallarino finds in his post office box once the lock is broken. As his editor tells him, it is a sign that he has finally made it in the world of cartooning.

Discussion Question 1

Compare and contrast Mallarino's and Magdalena's reaction to Rodrigo's reaction concerning the threatening letter that Mallarino receives.

Discussion Question 2

Discuss Mallarino's reaction to the editing of his cartoon. How is the meaning of the cartoon changed by the editing? Do you think Magdalena is right in suggesting that her husband begin publishing cartoons elsewhere?

Discussion Question 3

Discuss the agreement that Mallarino and Pedro reach. What does it mean that Pedro is willing to go to such lengths to get Mallarino to work for him? Why is it important to Mallarino that it was Pedro who hired him?

Vocabulary

obstinacy, prolongation, histrionic, unassailable, judicious, dispossessed, egocentric, prodigious, infringements



Chapter 1 pgs 38-63

Summary

Mallarino waited backstage while images illustrating his life appeared on a screen and an announcer detailed Mallarino's biography. When he was called on stage, Mallarino was overwhelmed by the applause. The theater was full. He did not realize until they began to sit down that the people had been standing. The minister announced Mallarino. She explained how her ideas of many people reflect what she had seen drawn by Mallarino instead of her own idea of that person's appearance. She also suggested that when politicians no longer appeared in Mallarino's caricatures, they realized that they no longer existed.

Mallarino spotted Magdalena's face in the crowd and noticed her melancholy smile. He wondered what her life had been like for the last several years as they had not discussed their personal lives with one another. He noted Beatriz was not there, the only blemish on the evening. Months and months would often go by without him seeing her. He thought she was trying to escape the family and her past.

He hears the minister refer to him as being the "country's critical conscience" (43) as she presents him the medal. Another honor is given him that day, a postage stamp with his image on it. The image was a caricature that Mallarino drew of himself forty years prior, at the beginning of his career.

When Mallarino spoke to the audience, he told them that in forty years, he had realized the same things still worried people and the same things still made them laugh. He noted that successful cartoons played on certain characteristics of a person that would never change. As Mallarino's speech continued he explained that the most difficult politicians to deal with were those without distinctive features. For those people he indicated he had to invent a distinctive characteristic, but that caricaturists could never invent reality, they could only distort it. People called out to Mallarino from the audience. He told them that in the words of "Ricardo Rendón, his mentor, a caricature compared to "a stinger, but dipped in honey" (46). He explained the quote was his compass for his work.

The next morning, Mallarino and Magdalena woke up together in his house in the mountains. He wondered if this was the beginning of a reunion, but the two did not talk about it. She suggested they have lunch together the following day.

Mallarino was working on a cartoon when his doorbell rang. It was a journalist he had met the day before who wanted to interview him for her blog. The young woman's name was Samanta Leal. She had approached Mallarino with a book for him to sign and asked him for an interview. During the interview in his house, Mallarino felt the interview was a pretext for something else, a feeling he'd had when he met her the previous day. There was no order or method to the questions that she asked. She questioned him



about his uses of digital technology after he asked him about his use of a voice recorder instead of trusting her memory as journalists did in the past.

It was after Samanta saw a particular caricature in Mallarino's studio that he sensed the purpose of her visit would soon reveal itself. She told him that up until that time, she had been lying to him. She had been looking for that particular caricature to prove to herself that she had been in his house when she was only a little girl.

Analysis

The real conflict of the novel is introduced in this section of the book. Up until this point, the author has built up Mallarino's character as a person who is revered by his country and its people even though his work often makes powerful people angry with him. Even though his cartoons do arouse strong emotions on the day that they are published, they are rarely remembered from one day to the next. The man whom Mallarino has just replaced as Colombia's premier caricaturist has already been forgotten by the people. Mallarino believes he will be forgotten just as easily.

One of the statements that Mallarino makes during his speech, one of which he seems most sure is this: "Caricatures might exaggerate reality, but they can't invent it. They can distort, but never lie" (45). Mallarino makes a challenging statement when he says that caricatures can never lie. He is assuming, of course, that his caricatures have never lied. It is this statement that Mallarino will later question after Samanta has told him her real purpose for visiting him at his house.

Although it is not a major theme, there is also a discussion of the use of technology in journalism as Samanta pretends to interview Mallarino for her blog. It is when she brings out a voice recorder that Mallarino points out that journalists at one time had trusted their memory to remember interviews. "In my day people just took notes,' perhaps, or perhaps 'Journalists don't trust their own memories anymore' — and Samanta asked him how he got along with the new technologies, if he had become accustomed to using digital aids" (56). Mallarino indicated that he did not like using technology to draw or send his cartoons. He felt that touching up a drawing digitally made drawings "boring, predictable, monotonous" (56). He did not have Internet or email. He had tried sending cartoons by fax but the lines did not transfer smoothly.

The idea that journalists depend on technology to help them remember the details of interviews also touches on the idea stressed in the novel that one's memory can be fallible. Mallarino seems to be of the idea that a journalist should be able to remember the details of an interview without having to record it.

Interesting is the way that Mallarino describes how Samanta looks at the contents of his house: "Samanta Leal looked over the paintings as if seeing an absence, as if what she was really looking for was missing among them" (55). Mallarino had sensed when he first met Samanta that the request for an interview was a cover for something else. He got the feeling again when she began asking him strange, disordered questions. He



also noted that Samanta seemed to be looking for something in the house. As if she was not seeing what was there, but what was not there. It was not until she asked permission to see his study that she found the caricature of King Louie Philippe for which she had been looking. For her it was a symbol of proof she really had been in that house before.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss Mallarino's reasons for not liking digital technology. Are his reasons valid? Justify your reasoning.

Discussion Question 2

What are the signs that Samanta is looking for something other than just an interview with Mallarino? How does Mallarino react to her presence? What is he thinking about when he first meets her?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Mallarino react as he does when he learns that Samanta is there for personal reasons, rather than interview him?

Vocabulary

retrospective, deluge, laudable, grandiloquent, intransigent, prudent, peremptory, subversion, litany, hackneyed, equilibrium, insolent, pretext, duplicitous, comprehensible, assimilated, loquacious, indolence



Chapter 2 pgs 68-94

Summary

As Mallarino studied Samanta's face, he could see no glimpse of the girl she once was when she visited his house years ago. He wondered if it was because something so traumatic had happened that it had caused her to erase her childhood and rebuild herself as an adult. He could not remember her or place her in his memory, but she wanted him to try to remember the details of a day twenty-eight years prior when she had visited his home.

Mallarino had moved to his house in the mountains in 1982 because he and Magdalena had finally split up. She had asked him if what he was doing was worth the threats and loss of friends. He believed he had been betrayed because she did not think it was worth it for her or for their daughter. Magdalena had doubted his refusal to protect anyone from his criticism. He believed that he was protecting his reputation. At the time, seven year old Beatriz seemed to be undeterred by the tension between her parents. Mallarino knew it was this period in time that was probably when her distrust in her parents had started. It was when Beatriz began showing signs of stress, Mallarino knew it was time for him to move out. Mallarino found the house in the mountains, an unusual deal for which he signed a short term contract. He believed he would be there only short term.

Mallarino had thrown the party to which Samanta, as well as a large group of adults, was invited in hopes of making Beatriz's second home more normal to her. He had never hosted a party by himself Magdalena had always been in charge of that. When Samanta's mother had dropped Samanta off, she had made a point to ask where Beatriz's mother was. Mallarino had told her that she was coming later.

Although he sensed the girls moving around the house during the course of the party, Mallarino was busy with his guests. There was food, and guests were drinking. Rodrigo Valencia was there. He told those gathered how Mallarino was going to be the greatest. Another cartoonist, Gerardo Gómez, was there. He had been threatened, like Mallarino, but he had been exiled to Mexico for his protection by the police. Gómez suggested it was because Mallarino's drawings were not as controversial as his. Gómez kidded Mallarino about going soft.

In the middle of their conversation, Gómez pointed out a man who had just entered the house and asked why he was there. Mallarino recognized him as Adolfo Cuéllar, a conservative congressman he had used as the focus of his caricatures several times in the past years. The last cartoon that featured Cuéllar had been drawn after a man beat his wife to death with a hoe. Cuéllar had commented that when a woman was hit, it was generally for a good reason.



Back at the party, Rodrigo told the two men that he had invited Cuéllar because Cuéllar had begged to be allowed to talk to Mallarino. Rodrigo felt he had been left with no choice but to arrange a meeting between the two. Mallarino was furious that his boss had invited the man, whom everyone believed to be an idiot, to his house on a Sunday for a meeting, but Rodrigo convinced him to talk to Cuéllar for just long enough to satisfy him.

As he greeted Cuéllar, Mallarino thought how everything about the man made him feel only disgust. He was irritated by Cuéllar's choice to call him by his first name and asked him not to do so since they did not know one another. They went to a small nook to talk and Cuéllar told Mallarino that he believed Mallarino had "mistaken image" (88) of him. He thought the caricatures that Mallarino drew of him were unfair. Mallarino was annoyed because Cuéllar was begging him, telling him that he was a good person. Mallarino had expected Cuéllar to complain, but not to beg and seek favor. Mallarino realized he hated the man because he was so weak.

Mallarino had just discovered how completely disgusted he was by Cuéllar when he heard glass breaking. Elena Ronderos came to tell him there was something wrong with Beatriz and Samanta. The two girls had been finishing up the drinks they found around the house and were drunk, splayed on the floor. The girls were taken to the master bedroom and laid out on the bed. Mallarino called a pediatrician who told him to give the girls sugar water every twenty minutes.

Analysis

Mallarino recounts the circumstances that led up to what turns out to be a scandal at his house. He discusses his memories of that day and brings up again the quote he remembers about memory. "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards, he thought again, and again he wondered where those words came from" (69). He also considers Samanta's request that he "jog his memory" (68). This phrase causes Mallarino to see memory in a personified manner, he believes Samanta refers to memory "as if memory were something we could take out and exercise, or nudge into action, by way of certain well-chosen materials, by the mere effort of physical work" (68). Even though Mallarino knows it will not be possible for him to remember everything that happened that day, much less what other people saw and remembered from that day, he decides to give it a try. He does not ask Samanta why it is so important that she knows what happened that day. He seems to assume she already knows some things about what happened.

In this section, the reader learns some of the reasons behind Mallarino and Magdalena's breakup and how Mallarino came to be living in the house in the mountains. Mallarino believed that Magdalena betrayed him when she suggested to him that he not go against people who were their friends and family members in his political cartoons. Mallarino, on the other hand, lived by his refusal to get into bed with anyone and give anyone special release from his opinion. They decided they should live apart, believing it would be best for Beatriz.



It turns out that Magdalena and Mallarino were arguing over their differing beliefs about the powers of the media, in this case the newspapers. While Mallarino believes it is the responsibility of journalists and political cartoonists to tell people what they should think. Magdalena, on the other hand, believes people are smart enough to draw their own conclusions. They look to the newspapers as a way to confirm what they already know. She shows her low opinion of newspapers when she adds that people look to newspapers for confirmation despite their “mendacious authority” (72), mendacious, of course indicates that these sources of news are not always telling the truth.

The author foreshadows that something bad must have happened to Samanta the night of the party in the way that Mallarino tries to find the child in the girl’s face but discovers that he cannot. He indicates he has seen people like this where no trace of the child they were remains because “something’s happened in the meantime, one of those private cataclysms that don’t mold a person but rather raze them, like a building, and force them to reconstruct themselves from scratch” (68). The reader must wonder what happened to Samanta and if that cataclysm happened at Mallarino’s house or at some other point in her life.

Both Mallarino and Cuéllar’s reputations are discussed. Mallarino, for instance, believed that if he bowed to his wife’s desires to leave certain people out of his political caricatures, that it would damage his credibility, and thus his reputation, for being impartial. On the other hand, the way that Cuéllar flaunts his reputation is made to seem like a detrimental aspect of his personality. “Few public men carried their reputations the way Cuéllar carried his, standing on his shoulder like a parrot — no, draped around his neck the way a snake charmer carries his snake” (84). It is as if Cuéllar wants to draw attention to his reputation despite the fact that so many people dislike him.

This intense dislike that Mallarino feels for Cuéllar along with the fact that Cuéllar was invited to a party at Mallarino’s house without Mallarino’s permission work together to ignite Mallarino’s distaste for Cuéllar. Although he did not like the man when he came into his house, Mallarino liked him even less by the time he got done talking to him. It is noted in particular “I hate him for making the fact so obvious, for allowing me to abuse my strength, for giving me away, yes, for exposing this power that maybe I don’t deserve” (90).

Note the use of “I” to refer to Mallarino as the author allows Mallarino’s thoughts to appear in some places in the first person point of view.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the problems that seem to have led to the downfall of Magdalena's and Mallarino's relationship. Is there any way to pinpoint any one time when their relationship started to go bad? Justify your answer.



Discussion Question 2

Why is Mallarino so disgusted by Cuéllar's plea for him not to draw a caricature of Cuéllar again? How might this encounter color Mallarino's memories of the evening?

Discussion Question 3

What does it say about Mallarino's parenting that Beatriz and Samanta get drunk during the party? Was he being a responsible host and parent by allowing the children in such close proximity to alcohol? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

obstinacy, banal, antagonism, prestige, unnameable, mendacious, irremediably, inertia, teeming, solitary, sully, prudent, tedium, flaccid, supplicant, repugnant, diatribes, gesticulating, trepidation



Chapter 2 pgs 94-106

Summary

Samanta was surprised to learn that she and Beatriz got drunk at the party. She had never been told what had happened. Mallarino said he checked on the girls every twenty minutes and gave them sugar water just as the doctor had instructed him. He emphasized how the girls were so still that he worried at one point if they were even breathing. Samanta said she did not remember anything that happened with the alcohol or afterwards. She only had a vague memory of her father putting her in their car to go home. Mallarino admitted that he and everyone else was upset at the point Samanta's father came to get her that he did not remember exactly what happened very clearly.

Samanta questioned him, drawing the story out of his memory. Mallarino remembered Samanta's father arriving, but he did not clearly remember if he had answered the door or not. He did remember finding himself in the uncomfortable situation of having to tell Samanta's father what had happened to the girls. Samanta's father had gone off in the direction of the stairs to find his daughter in a way that Mallarino thought was rude, so he left the man to find Samanta by himself.

It was when Samanta's father got upstairs that Mallarino remembered that he had begun hearing shouting from upstairs. It seemed to Mallarino that everyone had stopped what they were doing at that instant. He remembered Cuéllar coming down the stairs first with Señor Leal following him, shouting at him. Samanta's father was asking Cuéllar what he had done to his little girl and demanding to smell his hands.

Mallarino did not stop Cuéllar to ask what had happened. He instead went upstairs to make sure Beatriz was not hurt. The bedroom door was ajar, which Mallarino thought was odd. He also noticed that although Samanta was still passed out, she was laying on her back, not her side like he had left her, and that the blanket had been thrown back. Her skirt was up and one leg was bent. He tried to turn away, but did not manage to turn away before he saw something. He was checking on Beatriz when Samanta's father came into the room and carried her out. Mallarino noticed his left hand was unusual because it was gripped about Samanta's bottom as if trying to cover her up.

After Samanta's father had left, the other guests began to leave as well. Mallarino drew a caricature the next day. It was published the following day.

Analysis

According to the facts as recalled by Mallarino, it appears that Samanta was sexually abused in some way by Cuéllar. He was the only one upstairs with the girls when Samanta's father went upstairs. Samanta was in a different position on the bed, her skirt up and her leg bent. Mallarino does not remember looking directly at what was displayed by Samanta's raised skirt but indicated he did see "something" (105) before



he looked away. He does not indicate if he saw underwear or if Samanta was naked under her skirt. He does indicate that Samanta's father was covering her bottom as he left with her. This leads the reader to think that Samanta might not have had underwear on at that point. Leal's shouts at Cuéllar to let him smell his hands indicates Leal might have thought he could prove what Cuéllar was doing by the smell on his hand, as if he caught Cuéllar in what appeared to be the act of groping his daughter.

Notice the way that Mallarino describes how his memory might be faulty about the night of the party. He recalls thinking that the music that had been playing stopped when Leal had come downstairs shouting. Using his common sense, Mallarino knew it was impossible for the music to stop at the exact moment everyone stopped talking. "It's impossible that the music would have stopped automatically at that exact moment, and nevertheless I remember it like that: the music stopped playing. Your memory does things, you know? Your memory turns off music and gives people beauty spots and changes the locations of friends' houses" (103). Mallarino describes the phenomena as his memory turning off. The reader must wonder at what other points in this story Mallarino's memory had turned off.

Significant to notice is the way that Mallarino describes the shouting that came from upstairs. He changes his comparison of the sound twice and even goes into a side story about mountain landslides to help Samanta understand the way in which it seemed the sounds of shouting came down the stairs. Similes are used in the description: "'It began upstairs,' said Mallarino, 'and then came down the staircase, rolling down the stairs like a ball — no, like a stone, like one of those landslides you get on mountain roads'" (100-101). At first he describes the shouting like a ball, which would gain momentum as it came down the stairs. He then changed his description and said it was like a stone, which would also gain momentum but would do more damage because of the added weight. He finally comes to the description of the shouting that he believes is best. The shouting was like a mountain landslide of stones. Not only was the shouting weighty and serious, there was a good deal of it.

Although there is no description given of the caricature that Mallarino drew after this experience, it can be assumed that it had some definitive effect. It can also be assumed that it had something to do with Cuéllar and his part in the upset at Mallarino's house.

Discussion Question 1

Based on Mallarino's description of what happened the night of his party, do you think that Samanta was violated by Cuéllar? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

Do you think that Samanta is being honest when she tells Mallarino that she has no idea what happened to her the night of the party? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 3

Based on the information that has been given about Cuéllar up to this point, what is your opinion of him? Do you think he is capable of violating a little girl? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

dregs, paranoia, affirmation, reticent, indignant, discretion



Chapter 2 pgs 106-129

Summary

The caricature that Mallarino had drawn pictured Cuéllar on a hill surrounded by a crowd of heads that clearly belonged to young girls. He had Cuéllar saying the words “suffer the little girls to come unto me” (107). It was considered an out-of-context caricature, but it had felt very natural to Mallarino. The caricature had taken him only twenty-five minutes to draw.

Gómez had called Mallarino the day the caricature came out. He congratulated Mallarino for his spunk in having that opinion published. Rodrigo thought it was harsh but necessary. The newspaper office got calls from Cuéllar’s office staff threatening to sue. It was believed the threats to sue as well as the threatening letters that were received only validated the idea that the cartoon suggested. Mallarino felt it was because the cartoon did not say anything specifically that made it so difficult for Cuéllar to defend himself.

When he had seen Magdalena next, she had told him she had something to talk to him about. That caricature of Cuéllar had been tacked to the bulletin board at the school where Cuéllar’s boy’s attended. One of the boys had gotten into a fist fight because of it.

Magdalena asked Mallarino if Beatriz had said anything about the party or if he knew the full story from Samanta. Even though they had believed perhaps they might learn more when school started again, Beatriz came home to tell her father that Samanta had not returned to school that year. Mallarino thought perhaps it was for the best, to remove Samanta from the place where she had possibly been hurt. As time went by, Samanta began to disappear from their memories.

Cuéllar, however did not disappear. There was a scandal in a movie line, then an article where Señora Cuéllar was interviewed. When she was asked to talk about her husband she indicated “Dirty laundry gets washed at home” (115). Later on, the congress asked for Cuéllar’s resignation. On a newscast, Cuéllar said the reasons were personal, not because he was trying to cover anything up. Mallarino saw humiliation in both the man who had come to him and the man who was speaking on the news. He recognized that Cuéllar realized he had become too visible.

Mallarino had invited Magdalena to a bullfight shortly after Cuéllar’s resignation. They saw Rodrigo Valencia waving to them from the top floor of the arena. Magdalena was unhappy because she knew it meant Rodrigo would invite them somewhere after the fights were finished. Mallarino told her that he would refuse to go.

They were walking away from the stadium when Rodrigo came up behind them. Rodrigo insisted that they come with him. He said it had nothing to do with the bullfight. They went to a restaurant at the Tequendama Hotel where two journalists and others



were waiting to talk to Mallarino. One of the journalists told Mallarino that Cuéllar had been having health problems as well as marital problems. It was his health that caused him to see a doctor earlier that day. In addition to the check up, Cuéllar had complained about the loss of his reputation. When the doctor had left the room to write a prescription for antidepressants, Cuéllar had jumped out of the window in the office.

The girl who told Mallarino the story asked if he felt in any way responsible for his suicide. They believed Cuéllar's loss of reputation began with the caricature that Mallarino had drawn. Mallarino refuted the suggestion. He said he did not believe a caricature was capable of that much power. In the car on the way to pick up Beatriz, Mallarino noticed a heaviness in the atmosphere between them.

Magdalena finally spoke to Mallarino and told him how she had noticed an admiration in the eyes of the reporters even as they had told him of their horrible suspicion. She felt like he was proud of the fear that he inspired in people. Because he was so proud of that fear, she did not want anything else to do with him or their daughter to have anything else to do with him.

Analysis

The caricature that Mallarino drew of Cuéllar is significant both for the affect it has on Cuéllar's life and the affect it has on Mallarino's life. The caricature suggests that Cuéllar has unnatural relationships with or unnatural likings for little girls. Mallarino defends his act of drawing the cartoon because it was both easy and seemed natural. He does not believe that it states directly anything about Cuéllar's personal life, that the person interpreting the cartoon must read that into what Mallarino had written. He believes the fact that Cuéllar's people believe that it is a smear against the congressman indicates they recognize what Mallarino is accusing him of, giving the accusation credibility.

Mallarino's life is changed by this caricature because it is after Magdalena sees how the other journalists interact with Mallarino about the drawing that she decides that she no longer wants to be around him. She also will not allow Beatriz around him. This is a major blow since Mallarino had imagined himself as being successful in the attempts he had made thus far to get back in Magdalena's good graces.

The caricature also has a devastating effect on Cuéllar and his family. There begin to be more rumors of trouble that Cuéllar has caused. In addition, there are stories that Cuéllar and his wife has begun having marital problems. One of the reporters who questions Mallarino about the caricature and its affect on Cuéllar's life indicates that he did not appear to be having so much trouble until that particular caricature was published. It is indicated that Cuéllar tells his doctor that he is bothered by "the irreparable loss of his reputation" (126) just before he jumps to his death from the window of the doctor's office.



One of the lessons that the novel teaches it that one's reputation is fragile and that once it is destroyed, it cannot be easily repaired. It is almost as if once Mallarino sowed the initial seeds of doubt in the minds of the people, they began to look for problems with Mallarino. When Mallarino watches on television as Cuéllar resigns as a Congressman, he believes that there are differences in the man he spoke to the day of the party and the one who speaks to the news crew but believes that these differences are tied to the same trait, the trait of humiliation. It is indicated the caricature had been the seed of the humiliation while the "broadcast on national television at peak viewing hour, its full flowering" (118-119).

To a certain degree, it does not seem that Mallarino is sorry for what he has done to Cuéllar's reputation by drawing the caricature and having it published. "And now that the caricature was out there in the real universe, where opinions have their effects and reputations are feeble, there was no turning back, nor did Mallarino want there to be" (109). At this point, Mallarino does not think twice about whether or not it was a good idea to publish the caricature. He again does not think it was a bad idea when he is confronted by the journalists who believe the caricature might have had something to do with Cuéllar's downfall and have led to his suicide. Mallarino argues that a caricature does not have the power to make a person commit suicide.

Although Mallarino doubts his cartoon about Cuéllar had anything to do with that man's downfall, he indicates he believes the fuss that was made by the people working with Cuéllar helped to keep the scandal of the cartoon alive. "What was the mysterious mechanism that turned a journalistic attack into a kind of quicksand where simply making a fuss was enough to make one sink further and irremediably?" (110) asks as he thinks about the way the topic of the cartoon grew worse and more widely known as some people tried to argue against its validity. In fact, their very arguments against its validity seem to underscore that fact that something must have happened in order for them to feel they had something against which Cuéllar needed to be defended so strongly.

Notice there are two places in this section where an allusion is made to Biblical characters in connection to Cuéllar. In the first, Mallarino's words that go along with the image of the man standing on a hill are almost identical to Jesus Christ's in the Christian Bible where He is criticizing His followers for keeping the children from Him. Of course, Mallarino's words take on a more scandalous tone when it is considered that Cuéllar wants only little girls to be allowed to come to him. Cuéllar is also compared to a Biblical character when Mallarino sees him talking to the reporters on the television. It is described that only Cuéllar's head can be seen, appearing as if he is John the Baptist, an innocent man who was beheaded for proclaiming the gospel, with his head severed and floating in the crowd on a charger. These comparisons of Cuéllar to Christian martyrs seems to be the author's statement that Cuéllar might not be as guilty as some believe.



Discussion Question 1

What is your opinion of the power of Mallarino's political cartoon? Do you believe it might have been the thing that began the destruction of the man's reputation? Why or why not? Do you think Mallarino is in any way responsible for Cuéllar's suicide?

Discussion Question 2

What affect does the caricature have on Mallarino's marriage? Do you understand Magdalena's reasons for deciding to leave Mallarino? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

How does the comparison of Cuéllar to Biblical figures affect your opinion of him? What impact do you think the author intended these references to have?

Vocabulary

adulterated, expunged, promontory, denunciation, instigate, ardently, validity, obliterated, consternation, complicity, vertiginous, hermetic, methodical, inscrutable, feigned, clemency, clandestine, tacit, accoutrements, coagulate, tedium, impeccable, improvised, formulaic



Chapter 3 pgs 133-150

Summary

Mallarino drove himself and Samanta down the mountain in a dangerous, pouring rainfall. The night before, he had felt sorry for Samanta and the pain she must have felt because of the new knowledge of the way she had, perhaps, been violated. She had told him how she had even come to ask for an interview. She had recognized the house in the slideshow and was determined she had been there before. She hoped Mallarino would remember her when he saw her but to her disappointment he did not. After she learned what she had, she wondered why she had thought it would be a good idea to go digging in her past. She told him that her parents had taken her past away from her when they moved. It was as if the girl who had visited his house had ceased to exist. Samanta had voiced her wonder of to whom her past even mattered. As Mallarino had thought about her words that morning, he realized that her past mattered to him. He sent a fax to Rodrigo, asking for contact information for Cuéllar's widow.

When Rodrigo called Mallarino, Mallarino asked him to remember the party and Beatriz's friend. He told Rodrigo that girl needed to talk to Cuéllar's widow. Rodrigo questioned whether the girl needed to talk to the widow or if it was Mallarino who wanted the information. He said he would not help Mallarino until he understood why Mallarino wanted to get in touch with the widow.

It was when Mallarino told Rodrigo that the girl did not remember what happened the night of the party that Rodrigo seemed to understand. He believed that since the girl did not remember what happened, it meant that Mallarino was second guessing himself as well. Mallarino was relieved that Rodrigo had made the accusation because he was thinking it himself but not wanting to say it out loud. Mallarino wondered to himself if there was a way that the past could change from being known to being questionable. As he pondered the dilemma, he realized that it was not that Samanta did not know what happened, it was that she did not remember. He felt that by talking to Cuéllar's widow it would help to restore her memory.

Rodrigo, however, realized that if it turned out Cuéllar had done nothing to Samanta that it could have retributions both for Mallarino and the newspaper. He warned Mallarino not to start asking questions. He reasoned that nothing could be done to change anything that happened in the past or anything that happened as a result of the caricature. Rodrigo added that no one had even particularly missed Cuéllar. In the continuing narration of the phone call, Rodrigo asks Mallarino what good it would do for him to question his own credibility about something that happened so long ago. Rodrigo warned Mallarino that the beasts of the newspaper world will kill him. When Mallarino again suggested that it might help Samanta, Rodrigo cursed Mallarino before he hung up the phone.



Analysis

The author sets up an atmosphere of danger as a backdrop from this section of the novel as Mallarino drives himself and Samanta down the mountain. The real danger will come to Mallarino if his readers find out that he is questioning the night of the party at his house, the night that Cuéllar had supposedly molested Samanta. Mallarino's admitted uncertainty about that night's events will cause the public to question his credibility, just like the cartoon caused the public to question Cuéllar's credibility all those years before.

Memory, again, is described as a fickle creature, one that changes without warning and can be influenced by suggestion. Samanta asks Mallarino "Am I remembering because you put the memory in my head?" (138). She wonders if the things she believes she is remembering are real memories, or fabricated memories based on what Mallarino has told her.

Mallarino finds himself questioning the validity of news. He remembers how certain he had been of what happened: "so certain had Mallarino been that he'd drawn a cartoon about it. Was what appeared in the press not true beyond all doubt or uncertainty? Was a page in the newspaper not the supreme proof that something had happened?" (143). Remember also Mallarino's belief that caricatures could not lie, they could only exaggerate the truth. Although he argues he is looking into Samanta's attack only because he wants to help himself, he is also questioning everything that he believed was true about himself and his job.

Instead of hiding his uncertainties, Mallarino faces them. He thinks about how Rodrigo seems arrogant because he claims to know not only what he saw, but what everyone else at the party saw Cuéllar do. Mallarino thinks Rodrigo is doubly arrogant since no one really saw what happened, they just saw the aftermath of what happened. Mallarino also seems to have enough humanity in him that he does truly care what might have happened to Samanta while she was under his care at his house. He, and not Rodrigo, has seen the way the story of her possible molestation has affected her. He feels he cannot leave her with her uncertainties since he is the one who has made her aware that they exist.

Discussion Question 1

Since Rodrigo so quickly believes that Mallarino is questioning himself, do you think this means that Rodrigo has also questioned what really happened? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What does it mean for Mallarino that he might be questioning what actually happened so many years ago? What do you think of his reputation as a political cartoonist at this point?



Discussion Question 3

Do you think it is really important for Mallarino to help Samanta? Do you think he is questioning what happened that night for personal reasons? Use information from the book to support your answer.

Vocabulary

enshrined, intuitions, interlocutor, fortuitous



Chapter 3 pgs 150-177

Summary

To get the information he wanted, Mallarino had to call several reporters from competing newspapers as well as some members of congress who owed him favors. He noticed how the people went out of their way to help him. He realized it was because of his reputation. Despite the people's desire to help him, Mallarino had trouble getting the information he wanted because so few people remembered Cuéllar. Mallarino realized how quickly people really were forgotten, just like Ricardo Rendón had been forgotten.

Mallarino planned to drop Samanta at her house so she could change clothes and rest. He had an appointment down town. After he was finished they would meet in front of the travel agency at 3 p.m. As Mallarino made his way to Samanta's house, he realized she had begun to cry. She apologized and said she had not needed the new information about her life at that point.

When Mallarino parked the car next to the curb at Samanta's building Samanta told him she had been fifteen when her father had gone away on a business trip. He had never come back. Her mother had taken her to the airport and they had found his father's car. It was completely clean inside. Her father leaving the family had not really bothered her that much, but she wondered if it was somehow connected to what had happened that night at the party. She wanted to know what had happened to her private parts that night, if she had been violated.

Mallarino met Magdalena for lunch. He did not talk to her about Samanta. He wished he could ask Magdalena what would happen next, how to remember what would come next. He did ask her from where the saying: "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards" (164) came. She reminded him that it came from Alice in Wonderland, once of Beatriz's favorite books. Magdalena told Mallarino that Beatriz would be moving closer to them and had promised that they would be seeing more of her. It surprised Magdalena when a man spoke to Mallarino and said that he enjoyed his work.

He thought about marriage, what destroyed them and why the people involved could not see the end coming. He wondered what had happened to Magdalena's last marriage. On impulse, Mallarino asked Magdalena to come and live with him. It was not until they were outside that Magdalena told Mallarino that she had hoped that he would not have considered them living together again. She explained that time had made her a different person, one who preferred to live alone.

Mallarino remembered Rendón's actions just before he shot himself. As he was thinking about the time of Rendón's death, he heard Magdalena saying to him that they did not "have time for this anymore" (174). As they walked, Mallarino saw the bootblack walking toward them. This time he recognized Mallarino. He apologized for not having recognizing him in the past.



Analysis

Ironically, now that Mallarino is questioning his own credibility, people are recognizing him for his work. Magdalena is surprised that people are recognizing Mallarino in a positive way. When she lived with him, she had seen only the threats, lost friends, and alienated relatives.

Just as Rodrigo had forecasted, few people remember Cuéllar. For this reason Mallarino has trouble getting contact information for his ex-wife. Using his reputation, however, Mallarino is finally able to track down what he was looking for. The experience gives Mallarino pause because he realizes that all people really are forgotten despite the mark they may have made on the world.

Believing that his relationship with Magdalena is on the mend, Mallarino suggests that they try living together. She seems to consider her answer carefully before she tells him that she wishes that he had not thought of the idea. Her insinuation that they do not have enough time to worry about living together, along with Mallarino's memories of what he has learned about Rendón's suicide seem to put him in a melancholy mood.

Mallarino is additionally in a depressed mood because of Samanta's distress about what might or might not have happened to her. She said she was having no problems in her life before she found out about what happened at the party. Even when her father had left she and her mother she had not been terribly distressed. She believes she has been put into hell because she does not know what happened to her during a portion of her past.

The reintroduction of the bootblack into this section of the novel ties the ending of the story to the beginning. The bootblack, who had no idea who Mallarino was just two days prior, greets him by name and apologizes for not recognizing him. Mallarino's life has changed. He is now known by face, but is not sure that he deserves the recognition.

Discussion Question 1

Discuss the tone in this section of the novel. How does the author use events and circumstances to help set this tone?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of Magdalena's words to Mallarino that they do not have enough time left to try living together again? What do you think she is trying to tell him? How does he interpret her words?



Discussion Question 3

It is during this part of the novel that Mallarino remembers the circumstances of Rendón's suicide. Why do you think this is significant?

Vocabulary

surname, itinerary, asphyxiated, macabre, candid, revulsion, reproach, indigenous, minuscule, obsequious, flagrant, squalid, perilous



Chapter 3 pgs 178-187

Summary

Mallarino left Magdalena with a kiss on the lips that he thought might be their last. He stood on the sidewalk and looked for the sign for the business where Cuéllar's widow worked. He saw Samanta waiting near the business. As he stood in the crowd of people waiting for the light to change, he thought about what he and Samanta were about to do. He wondered if Rodrigo was right, if his enemies would come down on him regardless of what they discovered during the interview. He knew that while Samanta could come away with a variety of different outcomes, there would only be one possibility for him. As he thought about that possibility, he realized that he understood the anger with which he would be attacked because he had felt that same anger when he attacked and humiliated Cuéllar. He knew that would be his future if he went into the office with Samanta.

The light turned red, and Mallarino called out to Samanta as he hurried toward her. He knew it would not do any good to go back to the night of the medal ceremony when people were patting him on the back. He realized his career was really a failure because even though he had been pointing out the problems with others for forty years, nothing around him was any different. He wondered if he could forget the way he had been praised. He realized the past was gone while all that he had was his future. He realized at that moment that he had the power to remember his future. He sees himself writing a resignation letter to Rodrigo and faxing it. After that task is finished, he sees himself throwing into a garbage bag all of the tools he used for his writing. He will empty his filing cabinet drawers and desk drawers into the bag as well. He believes he will next clear off his cork board and throw away all of the caricatures and pictures, one by one that he had tacked there.

Analysis

Through the course of the novel, Mallarino has been obsessed with the idea that memory only works backward. In this section he knows without doubt that he can remember what will happen to him if he goes with Samanta to talk to Cuéllar's widow because he has seen it happen so often in the past. In fact, just as he is about to get eaten by his enemies, he saw Cuéllar get eaten by his enemies after Mallarino raised questions about that man's reputation.

The author brings the story full circle as Mallarino imagines a future in which he sees himself collecting up his drawing supplies and throwing away the pictures and quotes that once inspired him. Just as Cuéllar's humiliation leads to his suicide, the reader must wonder if Mallarino has the same ending in mind for himself. If he believes that his muse, Rendón, killed himself because he saw that although he was praised for his commentary on the world, that world did not change any at all based on his critique.



Mallarino may also wonder if Rendón reached a point in his life where he questioned his own credibility.

As Mallarino considers the outcomes that his fall from grace will have, he indicates that public opinion of him might range from one end of the scale to the other. Some might see him merely as irresponsible while others might see him as having slandered Cuéllar, having ruined his life. He also considers that he will go down in history as a person who has abused the power of the media. While Magdalena accused him of abusing this power in times past, he never believed that of himself. As he stands on the brink of his own humiliation, a show of doubt in himself, he realizes that he has abused the power that being a journalist gave him.

The tense of the novel changes from past to future when Mallarino imagines his activities when he arrives home that evening. His actions are symbolic of the ending of his career. He disposes of all the things associated with his work as a political cartoonist. He is no longer proud of his work nor does he want to be reminded of the person he thought he was when he was drawing these cartoons.

Discussion Question 1

How does Mallarino go about discovering that he can remember the future. Is he really remembering the future, or just applying the pattern of the past to the future?

Discussion Question 2

Although the author never really indicates that Mallarino goes inside the travel agency with Samanta, do you think that he does? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the author not choose to include what Samanta learns at the travel agency? What does this tell the reader about Samanta's story as compared to Mallarino's discovery of himself?

Vocabulary

esplanade, affront, fervor, impertinent, clairvoyance, epigram, lucidity



Characters

Javier Mallarino

Javier Mallarino is the main character in this novel. He is a political cartoonist who never intended to make his living drawing caricatures. He wanted to be a painter and began drawing caricatures to earn money until his career as a painter could develop.

When the novel begins, Mallarino is preparing to go to an awards ceremony where he will be honored as Colombia's leading political cartoonist. During the ceremony, he is given a medal and presented with a postage stamp with his likeness on it. It is the capstone of his career.

On the next day, Mallarino is visited by a woman named Samanta Leal. Leal tells him that she once visited in his house. She tells him that she does not remember what happened that night at his house. Furthermore, she was never told by her parents what was believed to have happened to her. Mallarino tells her that a congressman who was visiting the house, even though he was not invited, appeared to have molested her.

After the alleged incident at his house, Mallarino drew a caricature in which it was suggested that the congressman, who was named Cuéllar, was a child molester. Cuéllar threatened to sue Mallarino and the newspaper for which he worked because of the way the caricature had changed the public's opinion of him. Cuéllar later killed himself because he said that the caricature had caused irreparable damage to his reputation. Mallarino was asked by several journalists if he believed his caricature had in any way caused Cuéllar to kill himself. Mallarino argued that a caricature did not have that much power.

When Samanta asks Mallarino about the past and realizes that she does not remember what happened, he begins to doubt himself. He arranges for them to talk to Cuéllar's widow about the event, even though he knows that it will end his career.

Magdalena

Magdalena is Mallarino's ex-wife. The two were married shortly after Mallarino began drawing caricatures. She supported his work by making suggestions about how he could get more of his cartoons published. It was after Mallarino received his first threatening letter that Magdalena became afraid of the power the Mallarino held over the people of Colombia.

Magdalena and Mallarino began to fight more and more about Mallarino's work until they saw it was beginning to affect Beatriz, their daughter. It was at this point they knew it was time to live in different houses. Magdalena continued to see Mallarino socially until the night that the journalists confronted Mallarino about his possible role in Cuéllar's suicide. It was at that point that Magdalena recognized that her husband liked



the power he held over the journalists and the respect that they had for him, despite the possibility his cartoon had caused Cuéllar to kill himself.

Magdalena remarried after she and Mallarino divorced but that marriage lasted only 18 months. She and Mallarino reconnect and begin seeing each other again after his awards ceremony. However, when Mallarino asks her to move in with him, she refuses. She tells him they do not have time for that and that she prefers to live alone.

Samanta Leal

Samanta Leal is the girl whom Beatriz invited to Mallarino's 1982 party in his mountain home. Samanta and Beatriz drank the leftover adult drinks they found left around the house during the party. While she was passed out, it appeared that Samanta was molested. It was suspected that it was Cuéllar who had possibly molested Samanta because he was the only one in the upstairs of the house when Samanta's father went to get her.

As an adult, Samanta attends Mallarino's awards ceremony and recognizes his house from the slide show. She lies to him and pretends to be a journalist wanting an interview. At his house, Samanta asks for a blow-by-blow description of what happened the night of the party. She claims to know nothing about what happened and says that her parents moved her away from the place and never talked about it again.

Samanta learns that she got drunk at the party and also that it was believed that she was molested by Cuéllar, a congressman, who had come to beg Mallarino to stop portraying him as Mallarino had been doing in a caricature. Because Samanta wants to know for sure what happened to her, Mallarino arranges for her to meet with Cuéllar's widow. The novel does not share if Samanta actually met with Cuéllar's widow or what she found out about that night.

Rodrigo Valencia

Rodrigo Valencia is Mallarino's boss at El Independiente. He takes over the newspaper after his father Pedro León Valencia retires.

It is Rodrigo who tells Cuéllar that he can meet with Mallarino at the party at his new house in the mountains. Rodrigo was among those who attended the party. When he saw the caricature that Mallarino drew about Cuéllar, Rodrigo said it was harsh but necessary.

When Mallarino asks Rodrigo to get him contact information for Cuéllar's widow, Rodrigo refuses. He fears that Mallarino is questioning what actually happened that night instead of just wanting to help Samanta. Rodrigo knows that Mallarino's investigation, even to help Samanta, will destroy Mallarino's credibility because it will appear that Mallarino is doubting himself.



Adolfo Cuéllar

Adolfo Cuéllar is a congressman for whom Mallarino developed an extreme dislike because of the way that he came to him at his home during a party in an attempt to beg Mallarino not to portray him in his caricatures the way he had in the past.

Mallarino drew another caricature after Cuéllar was seen coming down the stairs in his house the night of the party with Samanta's father following him, shouting and asking to smell Cuéllar's fingers. After seeing this caricature, many people believed that Cuéllar was responsible for molesting at least that one girl.

Before he committed suicide, Cuéllar claimed it was that caricature that had destroyed his reputation.

Gerardo Gómez

Gerardo Gómez is the political cartoonist who has just arrived back in Colombia when Mallarino throws his party at his new house in the mountains. Gómez had been sent away by the police for his own safety when he received threatening letters.

At the party, Gómez kidded with Mallarino that he had gone soft because he had not received any more threats. After Mallarino had the cartoon about Cuéllar published, however, Gómez called Mallarino to apologize for his insinuation that Mallarino had backed off in his job out of fear.

Carmenza de Torres

Carmenza de Torres was the wife of Cuéllar. Later, she was his widow after his suicide. She did not appear to support her husband and seemed to be trying to separate herself from him after Mallarino's caricature was published. The only comment she would make about the cartoon was that the family preferred to wash its dirty laundry at home.

It is Carmenza de Torres whom Mallarino tries to get contact information for so that Samanta can talk to the woman about what might have really happened the night of Mallarino's party.

Beatriz

Beatriz is Magdalena and Mallarino's daughter. She appears in the novel only as a child. She and Samanta were friends at the time that Mallarino threw the party at his new house in the mountains.

Beatriz, as well as Samanta, got drunk on the leftover drinks they found around the house. While Samanta appeared to have been molested while she was passed out, Beatriz was not touched.



The Bootblack

Before Mallarino is given his award and his picture appears in the newspaper, he asks this bootblack if he knows who Javier Mallarino is. The man knows this political cartoonist lives in the mountains but does not recognize the man whose shoes he is shining as that cartoonist.

When this same bootblack sees Mallarino the day after he received his award and was in the papers, the man apologizes to Mallarino for not recognizing him.

Female Reporter from El Independiente

This female reporter from El Independiente is the one who tells Mallarino and Magdalena how Cuéllar killed himself by jumping out of the window in his doctor's office. She shares with them that Cuéllar blamed his situation on the loss of his reputation, beginning with the caricature that Mallarino had drawn of him.

This female reporter is the one who asks, on behalf of the other reporters, if Mallarino feels as if he is responsible in any way for Cuéllar's death.

Ricardo Rendón

Before Mallarino took the title, Ricardo Rendón was considered the greatest political cartoonist in Colombian history. He died 79 years before Mallarino was presented with his award, but he was Mallarino's muse. While in a deep depression, Ricardo had committed suicide by shooting himself in the head. No one ever understood why he had killed himself.

Señor Leal

Señor Leal is Samanta's father. He is the one who discovers Cuéllar in the upstairs of Mallarino's house and runs him out of the house. Leal is shouting at Cuéllar, asking to smell his fingers, as if that will prove to Leal what might have happened to Samanta.

When Leal carries Samanta out of the house, Mallarino notices that he is using one hand to cover her bottom, as if she has on no underwear.

Pedro León Valencia

Pedro León Valencia is Rodrigo Valencia's father. He is the legendary publisher of the El Independiente and the man who originally hired Mallarino.

Pedro passed his position on to his son soon after Mallarino began working there.

Elena Ronderos

Elena Ronderos is the woman at Mallarino's party who alerted Mallarino to the fact that Beatriz and Samanta were drunk.



Symbols and Symbolism

Bulletproof Black Mercedes

The bulletproof, black Mercedes is a sign of the danger that Mallarino faces because of the political cartoons that he draws daily for the newspaper. The people giving him an award for being the most respected political cartoonist in Colombia offer to send this car to take him to the awards ceremony. It is a sign that they believe he needs some sort of protection to keep him safe from his enemies.

Chewing Gum

The chewing gum packed into the lock in Mallarino's mailbox is a sign that someone has tampered with the box. When Mallarino finally gets a locksmith to open the box, Mallarino discovers an anonymous letter inside.

An Envelope

An unsigned envelope that Mallarino finds in his mailbox is a sign that he does have enemies. Rodrigo tells Mallarino is it a sign that he had made it as a political cartoonist. Inside this envelope is an unsigned letter threatening Mallarino. The writers indicated that they knew where Mallarino lived and also where Beatriz went to school.

Mallarino's Signature

Mallarino believes that it is not until he puts his signature on his caricatures that they seem to become part of the real world. Up until this point, the drawings seemed free of consequence.

A Stamp

This postage stamp bearing a caricature that Mallarino drew of himself is a sign of Mallarino's popularity and prestige as a cartoonist.

Unwrapped Book

After the awards ceremony, Samanta presents Mallarino with an unwrapped book for him to sign. The fact that Samanta has not yet unwrapped the book is an indication that she did not like Mallarino enough to look at the book before she brought it to him to be signed. Perhaps, she had just purchased it.



Image of King Louis Philippe

This image of King Louis Philippe is the caricature that Samanta had been looking for to prove to herself that she had, indeed, been in Mallarino's house before.

The Caricature of Cuéllar

This caricature of Cuéllar is a symbol that strikes off a change in both Mallarino's life and in Cuéllar's life. It is the public's reaction to the caricature that Cuéllar believes ruined his reputation and his life. The reaction to the cartoon is the final step in the destruction of Mallarino's and Magdalena's marriage.

Samanta's Father's Car

Samanta's father's empty car is a sign that her father had left her family for good. Samanta and her mother found the empty car in the airport after her father was gone from a business trip for longer than usual.

Alice in Wonderland, the Book

The book, *Alice in Wonderland*, is significant because it is from this book that the quote "It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards" comes. This book was one of Beatriz's favorite books when she was a child.



Settings

Parque Santander

The Parque Santander is the place where the opening scene of the novel is set. It is here that Mallarino has his shoes shined

Teatro Colón

The Teatro Colón is the venue where Mallarino is given his medal that honors his forty years as a political cartoonist. It is during the ceremony that Samanta realizes she has been to Mallarino's home when she was a child. She approaches him during a reception after the ceremony and asks him for an interview.

Mallarino's House in the Mountains

Mallarino's house in the mountains is where Samanta confronts Mallarino about what happened there 28 years ago when Mallarino threw a party after he had just moved into the house. It was in Mallarino's house that it is believed that Cuéllar molested Samanta.

Tequendama Hotel

It was in a restaurant in the Tequendama Hotel that Mallarino learns that Cuéllar killed himself. Before committing suicide Cuéllar blamed his depression and the loss of his reputation on the caricature that Mallarino had drawn of him. Also, during the meeting, the journalist asks Mallarino if he thinks he was in any way responsible for Cuéllar's suicide. Mallarino's responds that he did not believe he was responsible for Cuéllar's suicide.

Mallarino's response and the respect that Magdalena sees the other journalists hold for him, despite the knowledge that he might have pushed another man to suicide, sicken Magdalena. She leaves Mallarino for good after that interview.

Outside the Unicorn Travel Agency

It is as Mallarino approaches the place where Samanta is waiting for him outside Unicorn Travels that he realizes that regardless of what Samanta learns from Cuéllar's widow, his career as a political cartoonist will be over because people will believe that he is questioning himself.

Bogotá, Columbia

Bogotá, Columbia is the town and country where the action of the story takes place.

Themes and Motifs

Effects of the Abuse by the Media

As a political cartoonist, it is Mallarino's job to make statements based on current events. Mallarino uses the caricature, which features exaggerated representations of political leaders, to make his statements. Just as the minister says in her speech at Mallarino's awards ceremony, many people align their view of society to what they see in Mallarino's cartoons. He has the power through his work to color the way the public sees social and political events and people.

As their marriage is deteriorating, Mallarino and Magdalena disagree about the power of Mallarino's cartoons. Mallarino argues that political cartoonists are needed to tell people what to think. He has the opinion that without him, the public would be unable to interpret social and political events and draw their own conclusions about those events. Magdalena gives the general population more credit with her belief that people know what they think about current events, they just look to the media to confirm what they believe. Magdalena accuses journalists of being a poor way for the public to confirm what is true since she believes the media often lies and distorts the truth.

It is not until after his visit with Samanta that Mallarino realizes that he might have been responsible for leading the opinion of the general public in the wrong direction when it came to Cuéllar. Mallarino drew his cartoon after an evening in which Cuéllar irritated Mallarino by showing up in his house uninvited at a party to beg Mallarino to portray him in a different way in his caricatures. Mallarino was already disgusted by the man when he observed Leal chasing Cuéllar out of the house. Then he saw that it appeared Samanta had been sexually violated. Although he was sure at the time that he was justified in accusing Cuéllar of being a child molester, Mallarino is much less sure when he talks to Samanta and realizes she remembered nothing about the event. Her parents had never told her anything about it either.

As Mallarino considers the way people will remember him, he knows that it will not be as the country's conscience and the winner of a national award. He is afraid people will see him as a man who abused the power of the media and went unpunished. Although he did not think at the time that his caricature really had the power to push a man to suicide, he rethinks his assumption after he finds himself in the same position as Cuéllar. Mallarino knows that he will be judged only on the fact that he second guessed himself, regardless of the truth of what happened with Cuéllar. Since he is doubting his own beliefs, his career as a cartoonist is over.



Effects of Divorce on Families, Children

Although it is a minor theme, the novel also discusses the negative effects of divorce on children and families. This is seen mostly in the turmoil in Mallarino's family. However, it is also touched on in the stories of Samanta's family and Cuéllar's family.

At first, Mallarino believes that Beatriz is not affected by the tension between her parents. It is not until they discover that she is licking her hands, drying out the skin, because of stress, that her parents realize that their fighting is troubling their daughter. It is at this point that Mallarino decides it is time for him to move out of the house. He notes that he believes it is the time that Mallarino and Magdalena tried to pretend everything was okay in their relationship despite their arguments, that Beatriz began to distrust her parents.

After her parents split up, Beatriz's life remains a challenge. She lived her life between two houses without the care of both parents. This was a particular problem when it came to the party that Mallarino threw. He pointed out to the reader that he had never thrown a party before and was trying to fill both Magdalena's role as hostess and his own role. He had allowed Beatriz to invite a friend to the party. He never dreamed of the two young girls getting into any trouble. It was because Beatriz and Samanta were passed out from all the liquor they drank (which occurred because they had no parent to watch over them continually) that Cuéllar was able to sneak into the room where they were staying and allegedly abuse Samanta. Perhaps, if both parents had been there, the abuse might not have taken place.

Samanta was never told anything about what happened to her that night. Her parents decided to move away and start a new life for Samanta in another town. Samanta's father leaves her and her mother years after the alleged sexual abuse. Samanta confides to Mallarino that she was never really that bothered by her father leaving the family. When she learns about the alleged sexual abuse, she wonders if it played any role in her father's decision to leave.

Although Cuéllar and his wife did not divorce, it was clear they were having marital problems. There were cryptic references to problems at home and indications that Cuéllar and his wife were not getting along. Their boys were in fistfights at school because a copy of Mallarino's caricature was tacked to the bulletin board at their school. In the doctor's office just before his suicide, Cuéllar told the doctor about problems with his wife and sons, as well as his loss of reputation.

Power of Fame/Reputation

One's reputation and the power that reputation holds are addressed in the novel. Mallarino realizes how hard it is to build a reputation. He believes he has been particularly careful when it comes to creating and protecting his reputation. By the end of the novel, however, he realizes how easily a reputation can be destroyed.



Mallarino puts his reputation ahead of even his family. It is more important than their friends and relatives. When Magdalena confronts him because they are losing friends because of his cartoons, he defends himself by saying that he has his reputation to protect. “My reputation is at stake, he thought without saying. And the sacrifices had worked: his reputation was there, his good reputation and his prestige. Mallarino had earned them the hard way; he didn’t get into bed with anybody” (71).

Even before Mallarino has reached the point where he is recognized for his role in people’s day-to-day lives, Mallarino has already begun to think of the way that everyone eventually falls out of people’s memories. He questions the bootblack who is shining his shoes to prove his point to himself. This man does not know who Ricardo Rendón was even though that man was once considered the greatest political cartoonist in Colombian history. The man does know the name Javier Mallarino, but he does not recognize that the man whose shoes he is shining is Mallarino. Another example of how quickly people fall out of people’s memory is found when Mallarino begins looking for contact information for Cuéllar’s widow. He has trouble getting this information because people have already forgotten who Cuéllar was and why he was significant.

It is when Mallarino is confronted by Samanta about what happened at his house during a party in 1982 that Mallarino realizes how quickly one’s reputation can be destroyed. Because Samanta has no memory of what happened to her, Mallarino begins to question his own memory of that night. When he drew the cartoon insinuating that Mallarino was a child molester he had been sure of what he had witnessed. Nearly thirty years later, he discovers that he is doubting himself.

Mallarino knows that it is his doubt alone that will destroy his reputation. Regardless of what Samanta learns during her conversation with Cuéllar’s widow, whether his accusation of Cuéllar was true or untrue, Mallarino will have lost his credibility simply because he doubted himself.

Fickleness of Memory

Repeated through the novel is the quote from the novel *Alice in Wonderland*: “It’s a poor sort of memory that only works backwards.” As Mallarino realizes he is struggling to remember what actually happened the night of Samanta’s alleged attack, he realizes that memory is fickle and unreliable. At the end of the novel, Mallarino comes to the conclusion that he can “remember” his own future based on the patterns of the past.

When Samanta first comes to his house under the guise of being a journalist for an Internet blog, Mallarino criticizes her for using a voice recorder. He recalls a time when journalists depended on their own memory to recall details of an interview. Even though he is critical of her memory aid, Mallarino soon realizes how difficult it is for him to remember the details of the party that he threw in his house 28 years prior. Samanta had attended that party as a child and wanted to know what had happened.



As Mallarino tries to recount to Samanta the events of that night, there are some memories that he knows are not right. For instance, he has in his mind that the music stopped at the moment that he and the guests heard shouting coming from upstairs. He knows that the music did not really turn off that instantly. In the excitement of the evening some part of Mallarino's memory has also gotten blurred. For instance, he does not remember if he met Samanta's father at the door or if someone else did.

Meanwhile, Samanta also struggles to recognize what memories are her own and what memories are being influenced by what Mallarino has told her about that night. The only thing she appears to remember clearly is her father putting her in the car to go home. Since listening to Mallarino's explanation of the story, she believes she is remembering other details of the evening. She is not sure if they are true memories, or if they are being influenced by what Mallarino has told her. Samanta's memories are an example of how a person can generate memories they believe are their own based on what someone else had told them.

At the end of the novel, Mallarino sees himself "remembering" the future when he realizes that his career as a political cartoonist is over. He is going to meet with Samanta and Cuéllar's widow to see if she can shed some light on what happened the night that Cuéllar allegedly molested Samanta. He already knows that just by doubting himself, he will open himself up to criticism by his critics. Based on this knowledge, Mallarino sees himself destroying all of his tools and mementoes associated with his work as a political cartoonist.

Drawbacks of Technology

When Samanta asks about Mallarino's use of digital technology in drawing his cartoons, he is proud to report that he does not depend on technology in any way. He indicates it is an aspect of his persona for which he is famous. He refuses to use the Internet, email or any digital drawing aid in his work.

It is when Mallarino criticizes Samanta for her use of a voice recorder that Samanta asks him about his own use of technology. He is proud of the fact he draws his cartoons by hand and does not rely on any technological drawing aids. His cartoons are not even touched up or corrected digitally. He believes these corrections make the cartoons look "boring, predictable, monotonous" (56).

Instead of searching the Internet for topics for his cartoons, Mallarino depends on traditional newspapers and magazines for the information he needs. He does admit he has a variety of news programs on his television and does take advantage of the pause feature to let him study the characteristics of a politician's face more closely if needed.

As a member of the younger generation, Samanta is surprised that the newspaper for which Mallarino works is willing to send a courier each day to get the copy of the cartoon to be published. She expected to learn that he sent it by email. Although Mallarino does have a fax machine, he refuses to send his cartoons by fax because

they do not reproduce smoothly on the other end of the transmission. He explained he had people asking him if he was well because of the way his cartoons included broken lines and rough edges.

Overall, Mallarino sees technology as a way to make drawing cartoons less personal and more consistent. Instead of giving in to the ease of using these technologies, Mallarino chooses to challenge himself by doing his own drawing as well as his own research.

It appears that the author includes these references to technology and the ability to do things in a way that Mallarino sees as the easy way in order to illustrate that Mallarino is an upstanding person. He is willing to go out of his way to make what he believes is a superior product. This compares to all of his work. He is willing to do things the hard way to assure himself that he is doing them correctly and in the bounds of his own moral guidelines.

Styles

Point of View

This novel is told from the viewpoint of a third person narrator. This narrator focuses on Mallarino. By keeping this focus, the narrator knows his thoughts, feelings, and emotions of Mallarino. The use of a third person narrator keeps a distance between Mallarino and the reader. If it were told in the first person, the reader might develop too close a connection to Mallarino.

The focus on Mallarino is appropriate since the story is about his discovery of himself and his ability to destroy a person's reputation. Mallarino realizes that he can destroy a person by creating a caricature that portrays an untruth.

Language and Meaning

Significant about this novel is that it is a translation from Spanish. Many of the names in this novel are Spanish names. Some of the words, like *aguardiente*, a Spanish word for high volume alcohol, has no translation to English.

Also significant about the language of the novel is the way that the author describes the things that Mallarino sees and experiences. He sees life in the same way that he sees the politicians of whom he draws caricatures. He notices and comments on the things that never change. He uses personification, simile, and metaphor to describe the things encountered in everyday life.

Each caricature may be considered as a metaphor for the person it portrays. Mallorini uses personification as he gives each caricature living qualities of the individual and points out similarities between the lifeless face on the page and the human being. Mallorini's cartoons speak a language of their own.

Structure

This novel is divided into three main parts. The first part of the novel builds Mallarino up as the hero of the Columbian media. This is the part of the novel that could be considered the exposition. It tells about Mallarino's award, the beginnings of his career, and the early years of his marriage to Magdalena.

The second part of the novel describes the problem in the novel. Mallarino drew a caricature about Cuéllar, a man whom he believed had molested a little girl at Mallarino's house. Years later when Mallarino met the girl who had allegedly been molested, he was surprised to learn that she remembered nothing about the molestation and that her parents had not even told her about it. This encounter caused Mallarino to question his own opinion of what happened that day. This section included the rising



action as Mallarino recounts the story to Samanta and the climax as he argues with Rodrigo about the morality of what he plans to do in order to help Samanta.

The action begins to fall when the reader realizes that Mallarino plans to go through with his plans to go with Samanta to talk to Cuéllar's widow. Mallarino has already been told what will happen if he talks to Cuéllar's widow, an action that will be seen as questioning his own intentions. The denouement comes when Mallarino realizes he can remember his future. He sees himself resigning from his position as a political cartoonist and destroying all of his materials.



Quotes

The guy who does the cartoons for the newspaper, the man said. 'But he doesn't come around here anymore. He got tired of Bogotá, that's what I was told. He's been living out of town for ages now, up in the mountains.'

-- The Bootblack (Chapter 1)

Importance: When Mallarino asks the bootblack who is shining his shoes if he knows who Javier Mallarino is, this is the answer that man gives him. It is at this point that Mallarino realizes that even though his name is known, people do not know what he looks like nor can they connect his name to his face.

His political cartoons had turned him into what Rendón had been in the 1930s: a moral authority for half the country, public enemy number one for the other half, and for all of them a man able to cause the repeal of a law, overturn a judge's decision, bring down a mayor, or seriously threaten the stability of a ministry, and all this with no other weapons than paper and India ink."

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: Mallarino recognizes that he, like Rendón before him, has the power through his cartoons to change the course of his country. He believes that he takes his job very seriously.

But the next day, when he opened the newspaper, he found that the second line of the text had disappeared, and its absence was like a crack in the earth, a drain down which everything seeps away."

-- Narrator (Chapter 1)

Importance: This simile describes how Mallarino felt when he opened the newspaper for the first time to discover that his cartoon had been edited.

Rodrigo says congratulations, you've finally made it. He says you're nobody in this country until somebody wants to hurt you."

-- Magdalena (Chapter 1)

Importance: Magdalena and Mallarino are both surprised with the levity with which Rodrigo accepts the news that Mallarino is being threatening. Rodrigo indicates this threat is not a cause for fear. Instead, it is a sign that Mallarino has succeeded in the political cartooning business because he made a statement that has made someone angry enough to lash out at him.

In some way,' the minister went on, 'to be caricatured by Javier Mallarino is to have a political life. The politician who disappears from his drawings no longer exists.'"

-- The Minister (Chapter 1)

Importance: Just in the way that Mallarino was considered to have finally come into his



rights as a political cartoonist when he made some one angry, the politicians whom Mallarino caricatures know that they are active as politicians if they are appearing in these cartoons. It is when Mallarino is no longer finding a reason to make fun of them that they know their importance as a politician is failing.

And the only thing I always say, my only response to the complaints and aggression, is this: Caricatures might exaggerate reality, but they can't invent it. They can distort, but never lie."

-- Mallarino (Chapter 1)

Importance: In his acceptance speech, Mallarino tells his audience that a political cartoonist cannot invent reality, but they can only distort it. He claims at that point in his knowledge that a cartoonist cannot lie about political situations. After his visit from Samanta, however, Mallarino realizes that his belief about not telling the truth through his cartoons might not have been completely right.

If that were the case, the deterioration could not be less opportune, for now Samanta Leal, from whose face a little girl had vanished, was urgently asking him to remember that little girl and her visit to this house in the mountains in July of 1982, and not just that, but also the circumstances of that long-ago visit, the names and distinguishing marks of those present that afternoon, everything Mallarino saw and heard but also (if possible) what the rest of them saw and heard."

-- Narrator (Chapter 2)

Importance: Samanta Leal comes to Mallarino asking for information about a day she spent in his house years prior. Mallarino worries she will expect more detail than what he might be able to give her of the things that happened that day.

Maybe that's what a reputation is: the moment when a presence fabricates, for those observing, an illusory precedent."

-- Narrator (Chapter 2)

Importance: When thinking about Cuéllar, Mallarino comes up with this definition of a person's reputation.

Maestro Mallarino,' she said (and Mallarino saw the alert spiral notebooks and pens erect over them like phalluses), 'we are all in agreement, as public opinion is as well, that Congressman Cuéllar's fall from grace began with your caricature. My question, our question, is: Do you feel in any way responsible for his death?'"

-- Female Reporter from El Independiente (Chapter 2)

Importance: It was after one of Mallarino's more derogatory cartoons about Cuéllar, the one in which Mallarino suggested that he was responsible for sexually violating a young girl, that Cuéllar killed himself. In a late night meeting, the female journalist asked Mallarino if he felt he was in any way responsible for the man's suicide. Mallarino said that he did not feel at all responsible.



But that's what there was in the air, that sort of fear you inspire, yes, a reverential fear. And then came the worst: when I realized that you were proud."

-- Magdalena (Chapter 2)

Importance: It was after Magdalena heard the conversation between Mallarino and the journalist about Cuéllar's death that Magdalena realized that she did not like the man whom Mallarino had become. It was at this point that they stopped trying to reconcile and their divorce became final.

That's not it. She's the least of it, Javier, what matters least to you is what happened to her. You want to confirm that you didn't make a mistake, isn't that it?"

-- Rodrigo Valencia (Chapter 3)

Importance: When Mallarino called Rodrigo Valencia asking for information about contact information for Cuéllar's widow. Rodrigo Valencia realized that Mallarino would be killing his career as a political cartoonist if he went ahead with his inquisition into what had happened to Samanta the night of the party in 1982. Rodrigo knows Mallarino is trying to make sure that he had not made a mistake, just as much as he was interested in Samanta finding out the truth about what had happened to her.

His name helped, he had to admit, but he was not the least bit concerned about exploiting his reputation to achieve these modest ends, for, after all, were not these journalists and politicians the ones who had given him this reputation and the power that went with it?"

-- Narrator (Chapter 3)

Importance: Although he did not like using his name and the power his name afforded him, Mallarino figured it was okay since it was the journalists he asked for the information and the politicians about whom he wanted the information who had given him the power he had.

I'm sorry,' said Samanta. She smiled, wiped both eyes with the same hand, smiled again. 'It's just that I was fine. I didn't need this.'

-- Samanta (Chapter 3)

Importance: Perhaps, Samanta may regret having delved into her past when she learns there was a possibility she was sexually violated by a politician who attended the party.

Your Honor is the caricaturist,' said the man. 'I shined your shoes the other day and didn't even recognize you, how very sorry I am.'

-- The Bootblack (Chapter 3)

Importance: After Mallarino is given his award and his picture appears in newspapers, the bootblack who had shined his shoes the day before recognizes him. The man apologizes for not recognizing Mallarino even though there was no way he could have recognized him.



For her there could be a variety of results, one possibility among many or at least between two; not so for him, for, no matter what happened at Unicorn Travels, on his way out Mallarino would encounter his enemies of forty years pointing at him, egging on a crazed mob ready to judge him summarily and burn him at the stake, the stake of capricious, changeable public opinion.”

-- Narrator (Chapter 3)

Importance: Mallarino realizes that Samanta may have different outcomes from her meeting with Cuéllar’s widow, depending on what the widow tells them. For him, however, Mallarino has come to realize that the inquest will symbolize the end of his career as a cartoonist. He will lose his reputation because he second guessed himself.