

Story of the Eye Study Guide

Story of the Eye by Georges Bataille

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Plot Summary

The Story of the Eye by Georges Bataille is hailed as the first of its kind. This novel is an erotic story that involves a young couple who become fascinated not only with eggs and other such objects, but with a young girl who is so scandalized by their attentions she kills herself. Later the couple comes to enjoy public sexual encounters and find themselves attacking a priest in his own church. The Story of the Eye is a sexually charged novel of immorality that will both offend and entertain modern readers.

The narrator falls in love with a young girl he meets at the beach. When he learns that this girl is a distant relative, the narrator finds himself drawn to her side as often as possible. The girl, Simone, sees the narrator's interest and begins to share it. The two begin a love affair that begins as innocent exploration. Soon, however, the couple begins to explore other avenues of sexual pleasure. When the couple is caught in the garden in the throes of passion, they grab the spy and force her to participate as well.

After experiencing this encounter with their young friend, the couple decides they would like to experience this sort of excitement with other friends. The couple throws a party and invites all their friends. At the party, the couple gets everyone drunk in order to lower their objections to their planned sexual overtures. Marcelle, their friend from the garden, objects and begs to leave. The narrator refuses to allow her, so she locks herself in the wardrobe. Soon Simone begins to seduce the young men in the room and the narrator turns his attention to the young ladies. When it is over, the narrator allows Marcelle out of the wardrobe. Marcelle is so upset by what she sees she begins to scream, causing the parents to rush to the room. Things go out of control and soon the police are called.

The narrator runs away from home out of fear of being arrested. Simone takes him into her bedroom and hides him there. Simone has become obsessed with Marcelle and tells the narrator she will not have intercourse with him unless Marcelle is present. They find out where Marcelle has been sent and visit there to see if they can rescue her. On the first visit, they find no way of getting Marcelle out. Simone falls ill during the ride home and the narrator spends several pleasant weeks taking care of her. When she heals, they again go to the sanitarium where Marcelle is being helped and steal her away.

At first Marcelle is confused by this situation. However, when they arrive at Simone's she remembers the day of the party and becomes agitated. Marcelle locks herself in the wardrobe once again. This time Marcelle takes her own life. Simone is upset by this because she had wanted to have Marcelle watch as the narrator took her virginity. Instead, Simone has the narrator lay Marcelle's body out on the floor and then has him perform intercourse on her beside the body. Simone then desecrates the body before she and the narrator run away.

Simone and the narrator go to Spain where Simone has a rich friend who will take care of them. The couple continues to explore their sexual obsessions with the help of this



man. First they attend bull fights where Simone finds the violence exciting. Then the couple and their companion go to Seville where they come upon the church of Don Juan. Here Simone becomes fascinated by the local priest. Simone seduces the priest, kills him, and then runs once again with her two male companions.



Chapter 1, The Cat's Eye; Chapter 2, The Antique Wardrobe

Chapter 1, The Cat's Eye; Chapter 2, The Antique Wardrobe Summary

The Story of the Eye by Georges Bataille is hailed as the first of its kind. This novel is an erotic story that involves a young couple who become fascinated not only with eggs and other such objects, but with a young girl who is so scandalized by their attentions she kills herself. Later the couple comes to enjoy public sexual encounters and find themselves attacking a priest in his own church. The Story of the Eye is a sexually charged novel of immorality that will both offend and entertain modern readers.

The narrator, a young man of sixteen, meets a young girl at the beach with whom he becomes obsessed. This young girl, Simone, turns out to be a distant relative of his so he finds excuses to spend time in her presence. Soon the girl becomes aware of his interest and begins to return it. The couple quickly begins exploring their sexual desires with one another. At first it is simple exploration, expected of a couple so young. Soon, however, it will grow into something more.

One day while participating in sexual play in the garden, the couple is caught by a young friend, Marcelle. Marcelle is watching them from the bushes. Simone grabs her and drags her into their web. Simone forces Marcelle to begin participating in their sexual play. Marcelle attempts to avoid the couple after that, but a week later they see her on the street. The couple invites Marcelle to tea. This tea turns into a party with several of the couple's other friends. Tea turns into champagne. Soon everyone is drunk. Simone begins to seduce the men in the room. Marcelle wants to leave, but the narrator will not let her. Marcelle locks herself in a wardrobe while an orgy begins in the room. When the orgy has ended, the narrator lets Marcelle out. Frightened by the scene and the blood she sees on the narrator, caused by a broken bottle, Marcelle begins to scream. These screams draw the parents. Chaos breaks out and soon the police are called.

Chapter 1, The Cat's Eye; Chapter 2, The Antique Wardrobe Analysis

A young man and a young girl meet, fall in love, and begin exploring each other sexually. These actions are normal in the life of any young person, introducing the theme of sexual exploration. What causes these two to stand out is an obsession with unusual acts of sexual pleasure. These obsessions, which illustrate the theme of indecency, includes the use of objects not normally connected with sex, like a bowl of milk, and public displays of lewd acts. One of these public displays causes the couple to



get caught in their sex play. When they are caught, instead of acting embarrassed as one might assume they would, they grab the young woman and pull her into their play. This girl, Marcelle, is younger than her two friends and she is of a moral upbringing, touching on the theme of modesty. This modesty causes Marcelle to suffer a great deal of humiliation, not only because of what this couple force her to do but also because of her own body's pleasure response. This episode causes Marcelle a great deal of emotional damage, leaving her vulnerable to an emotional break down.

The couple enjoys their time with Marcelle, causing them to desire to experience the situation once more. When they see Marcelle in the street, Simone and the narrator attempt to take her home in order to reenact their lewd behavior with her. This time, however, they do not just include Marcelle, but they include several of their other friends. Marcelle is horrified by what she sees happening around her and attempts to leave. However, the narrator will not let her. Marcelle panics and hides in a wardrobe, leaving the narrator with the opinion that she is participating by providing herself with self pleasure, but giving the reader the opinion that she is simply trying to protect herself from another rape. An orgy breaks out in the room outside the wardrobe. The narrator and Simone perform sexual acts on all those in the room. When it is over the narrator is covered in blood from cuts inflicted by a broken bottle. In this state, the narrator decides to open the wardrobe and bring Marcelle out. When Marcelle sees him, she begins to scream, suffering an emotional break due to the sight of the blood and the aftermath of the orgy. The parents of these children come running at the sound of Marcelle's screams and are stunned by what they find. The police are called. The police could mean arrest, which makes the reader wonder if the narrator is in danger of losing his freedom. The reader is also curious what will happen to poor innocent Marcelle.



Chapter 3, Marcelle's Smell; Chapter 4, A Sunspot

Chapter 3, Marcelle's Smell; Chapter 4, A Sunspot Summary

In fear of being arrested, the narrator ran away from home. Simone finds him living in the woods near her home and takes him back to her rooms. At first the narrator hides during the day and spends the night with Simone in her room. Soon, however, the narrator stays with Simone in her room all the time. During this time, their sexual life becomes more intense. However, Simone tells the narrator that she will not allow him to take her virginity unless Marcelle is present.

The narrator and Simone learn that Marcelle has been sent to a sanitarium. One night they sneak out of Simone's house and ride bicycles to the sanitarium. Once there they believe they are able to pinpoint Marcelle's room based on the fact that someone has hung a sheet out the window in order to allow it to dry. Simone and the narrator try to find a way to get Marcelle out of the building. The narrator finds an open window on the ground floor and sneaks inside. The narrator takes off his clothes and tries to sneak upstairs but becomes frightened when he hears someone else walking around. The narrator flees from the building only to discover that Simone is the person he heard. Simone had also snuck into the building.

Chapter 3, Marcelle's Smell; Chapter 4, A Sunspot Analysis

The narrator runs away, afraid of his father's reaction to his actions. The narrator believes himself to be safer outside his family's home since his sexual experience makes him believe he is now an adult. The narrator is not really as mature as he believes, however, as the reader observes his decision to live in the woods. The woods do not seem to be an appropriate place for a young man to live. However, Simone rescues him and he ends up moving in with Simone. This allows the narrator and Simone to deepen their sexual relationship. Included in their sexual play now is the gun the narrator has stolen from his parent's home. Simone likes it when he fires the gun and then holds the heated barrel against her skin. Other obsessions also continue, including the use of foreign objects. However, Simone has become obsessed with adding Marcelle to their play and refuses to allow the narrator to take her virginity unless Marcelle is present. The reader may be surprised to learn that Simone is still a virgin, but is most likely not surprised by her obsession with Marcelle. The reader does not know how deep this obsession is as of yet, but is sure to learn soon.



The narrator and Simone learn where Marcelle is being cared for at a sanitarium nearby. They ride their bikes to the building in hopes of helping Marcelle escape. They sneak into the building, both removing their clothing for some inexplicable reason. They become frightened of each other, afraid of being caught, suggesting they do have some understanding of decency and order. They leave, only to learn they were frightened of each other and not an official or police officer. This leaves the couple out on the lawn, naked and without having achieved their goal. They do imagine they see Marcelle in the window, however, giving them some hope that they will be able to rescue her some day.



Chapter 5, A Trickle of Blood; Chapter 6, Simone; Chapter 7, Marcelle

Chapter 5, A Trickle of Blood; Chapter 6, Simone; Chapter 7, Marcelle Summary

The narrator and Simone rush home on their bikes, in a hurry to arrive before dawn because they are naked. The rush makes them both exhausted, causing Simone to fall off her bike. The narrator carries her the rest of the way home. The next day Simone has fallen ill. The narrator nurses her back to health. During this time, Simone becomes obsessed with eggs. Simone likes for the narrator to put eggs in the toilet where they can watch them float. Later, Simone enjoys watching the eggs disappear when the toilet is flushed.

During Simone's recovery, the couple grows closer in their obsessions. Simone's mother becomes aware of their relationship and the narrator's presence, but does nothing to change the situation. Finally Simone becomes well again. The narrator and Simone return to the sanitarium, this time with tools that will help them rescue Marcelle. The narrator and Simone cut Marcelle out of her room through the bars in her window. On the way home, Marcelle tells them that she believes the narrator is her husband. Marcelle also claims to be afraid of someone she calls the cardinal. Marcelle is confused, but suppliant, allowing them to perform sexual pleasures on her on the side of the road. When they return to Simone's home and the scene of Marcelle's break down, however, she remembers who the narrator is, connecting him to the cardinal.

Chapter 5, A Trickle of Blood; Chapter 6, Simone; Chapter 7, Marcelle Analysis

The couple rush home, afraid of being caught out in the nude. Simone becomes exhausted, having to stop once and allow the narrator to rub her muscles to avoid cramps. However, this only allows a short reprieve. Simone continues in exhaustion eventually falling from her bike. The narrator panics, afraid she is dead. However, the narrator sees her breathing. The narrator carries her home despite his own exhaustion, showing the reader that there is a degree of affection there despite the obsession with sex. Simone wakes the next day sick from her experience. The narrator takes care of her, incorporating their sexual exploration into her care. Simone becomes obsessed with eggs, something that will come back into the story at a later time. At this point, Simone is happy to stare at the eggs where they float in the toilet. The narrator is excited by this as well and enjoys doing whatever Simone asks of him. Their sexual relationship is escalating, moving them beyond sexual exploration and into the world of fetishes making the reader curious where their relationship will lead from here. During this time as well the couple is discovered by Simone's mother. The narrator shows no



fear at being discovered and it seems Simone's mother would rather ignore the situation rather than do anything about it. Simone's mother's reaction allows the narrator to feel comfortable taking advantage of her lack of discipline and even appears to enjoy shoving his lewdness in her face.

When Simone recovers from her illness, she and the narrator return to the sanitarium to retrieve Marcelle. This time they plan better and are more successful. The narrator cuts through the bars of Marcelle's window and helps her out of the room. Marcelle is confused, believing the narrator to be her husband. Marcelle goes with the narrator and Simone willingly, even submitting to some sexual play on the ride home. All the way home, Marcelle tells the narrator of her fear of someone she calls the cardinal. Eventually the narrator realizes that the cardinal is him, as he was covered in blood the day of the orgy. When they arrive at Simone's house and Marcelle is returned to the scene of her break down, she remembers who the narrator is, connecting him to the cardinal. The reader knows that Marcelle's emotional state is precarious, therefore the reader might at this point be concerned what will happen now.



Chapter 8, The Open Eyes of the Deadwoman; Chapter 9, Lewd Animals; Chapter 10, Granero's Eye

Chapter 8, The Open Eyes of the Deadwoman; Chapter 9, Lewd Animals; Chapter 10, Granero's Eye Summary

Marcelle goes into the wardrobe and hangs herself. When the narrator finds her body Simone insists that he take Marcelle's body out of the wardrobe and lays her on the floor. Then Simone allows the narrator to take her virginity. Afterward, Simone urinates on Marcelle's face, but is unsatisfied due to Marcelle's inability to respond. Later, the couple runs away in fear of the police investigation. Simone suggests they go to Spain where she knows a rich Englishman who once offered to support her. In Spain Simone and the narrator find a greater amount of freedom to explore their sexual obsessions. They also discover bull fighting.

Simone finds bull fighting exciting because of the violence of it. Simone particularly likes the idea of the audience members eating the balls of the slain bulls. Simone requests Sir Edmund, her English friend, to arrange for her to be given the raw balls of the first bull slain. Sir Edmund agrees to her request. The first bull is slain by Granero, a popular matador with whom Simone has developed a fascination. After the bull is killed, Simone is delighted to have the balls. However, Simone cannot use them the way she would like because of the crowd and becomes frustrated. When Granero comes out to fight another bull, the audience is distracted giving Simone the chance to play with the bull's balls. While Simone is doing this, Granero is gored in the eye.

Chapter 8, The Open Eyes of the Deadwoman; Chapter 9, Lewd Animals; Chapter 10, Granero's Eye Analysis

Marcelle has killed herself due to the indecency that the narrator and Simone have exposed her to. It is also suggested that Marcelle is further upset by some sexual play with Simone and the narrator. Rather than grieving the death of their good friend, Simone and the narrator are only sorry that she is no longer capable of responding to their sexual behaviors. Simone attempts to fulfill her fantasy any way, but finds it unsatisfying. Simone will show some change later as a result of this experience, though it does not seem to have anything to do with grief or remorse. Simone seems to see everything around her through the eyes of sexual pleasure and it is only this that rules her behavior and emotions. Later the couple runs away to Spain in order to avoid prosecution, the second time the main characters of this book have run away to avoid the law.



In Spain, the couple indulges in deepening sexual depravity. Simone finds the bull fights exciting because of the death and gore. When Simone learns of a traditional use of the bull's balls, she decides to join in. However, Simone wants the balls rare, not fried. Simone then proceeds to use the balls in a lewd manner while her hero matador is gored to death through the eye. The symbolism of the balls and the eye here both remind the reader of the eggs Simone once found so fascinating. The symbol of the egg is less clear to the reader, unless it might symbolize the female egg that creates new life. However, the reader does not see much in the idea of new life in this novel.



Chapter 11, Under the Sun of Seville; Chapter 12, Simone's Confession and Sir Edmund's Mass; Chapter 13, The Legs of the Fly

Chapter 11, Under the Sun of Seville; Chapter 12, Simone's Confession and Sir Edmund's Mass; Chapter 13, The Legs of the Fly Summary

Simone grows bored and suggests they move on. Simone, the narrator, and Sir Edmund travel to Seville. The new location represents new excitement. Simone and the narrator find many public places in which to have sex while Sir Edmund watches. Every day they explore the city. One day they come across the church of Don Juan. Sir Edmund sends Simone inside to explore the church alone. Simone returns laughing hysterically. Before the narrator and Sir Edmund can learn what is so funny, Simone urinates on herself. Simone is now wet, making her dress see through. They decide to go inside the church and wait until Simone is able to continue their exploration through the city.

Inside the church they watch as a woman finishes her confession with the local priest. Simone decides she would like to make a confession. During her confession, Simone touches herself and then tells the priest what she is doing. Simone pulls the priest out of the confessional and begins to attempt to please him sexually. The narrator and Sir Edmund carry the priest into a more private room where they allow Simone to do as she likes. In this room Sir Edmund finds the key to the tabernacle. Sir Edmund retrieves the chalice and communion wafers, bringing them into the room with him. Sir Edmund forces the priest to urinate into the chalice and then orgasm on the wafers. The priest is so ashamed of what he has done that he swears to make sure that all three of his tormentors go to the guillotine.

Sir Edmund tells Simone how a man who is hanged often has an erection. Sir Edmund instructs her on how to strangle the priest while his dying body has intercourse with her. Simone kills the priest and then makes Sir Edmund cut out his eye. Simone plays with the eye while the narrator pleases her sexually. Finally, Simone and her companions leave, sneaking out of Seville in disguise. Soon they reach the Gibraltar where they buy a yacht and sail.



Chapter 11, Under the Sun of Seville; Chapter 12, Simone's Confession and Sir Edmund's Mass; Chapter 13, The Legs of the Fly Analysis

Simone decides they should move on because she is bored. The three companions end up in Seville where they continue their sexual obsessions. When Sir Edmund directs Simone to a famous church, she becomes obsessed with the priest who works inside. Simone seduces the priest and then takes advantage of his frailties to rape him. Simone and her companions then desecrate the church's sacred objects and then kill the priest.

These chapters are perhaps the most offensive of the novel. Simone's sexual obsessions have reached a fevered pitch. This is where all the lewd behavior at the beginning of the novel has brought the main characters in a climax that is as powerful as the obsessions Simone and the narrator entertain. The novel leaves the characters running away from what they have done once again, suggesting they will continue their lewd ways. It is a suggestion that leaves the reader both fearful and excited, ending the novel with the reader unsure if they even like the main characters any longer. This is an unusual ending for a novel, adding to the overall outrageousness of the entire novel.



Characters

The Narrator

The narrator is never named in the novel. The narrator is a young boy, sixteen when the story begins. The narrator is obsessed with a young woman who is a distant relative of his family. The girl, Simone, shares the narrator's interest and soon begins to allow him to spend time with her. The couple begins exploring the sexual side of their relationship almost immediately, learning about pleasure in what starts as an innocent bit of exploration. However, this exploration soon becomes an obsession that includes lewd and offensive behaviors.

The couple is caught one afternoon by a young friend. The couple draws her into their play and forces her to participate. Later, the couple has a party in which an orgy breaks out. The orgy causes this young friend to become emotionally damaged. The couple continues to be obsessed with this girl, bringing her back to the scene of her breakdown and causing her to end her own life. Soon after, the couple flees the country and lives under the supervision of a man as obsessed with the lewd as them. Soon they find themselves committing a terrible crime against a priest, leaving him dead. The couple and their guardian flee the country, going on the run and continuing their obsessive behaviors.

Simone

Simone is a young girl who becomes the object of the narrator's obsession. Simone encourages this obsession by participating willingly in his sexual play. Soon Simone becomes obsessed with a young friend who has added excitement to their sexual encounters by allowing herself to be forced to participate. Simone insists that she will not allow the narrator to perform intercourse with her until they can bring her friend back into their play. The narrator and Simone rescue this friend from a sanitarium where she was sent after their orgy. The girl is emotionally unstable, however, and takes her own life before Simone can force her to participate in their sexual play.

Simone flees to Spain with the narrator, enlisting the help of a friend who had offered to pay her way before. Simone loses all sense of morality when she arrives in Spain, indulging in many acts of sexual obsession with the narrator. All this leads to Simone seducing and then killing a priest. Simone does not seem to show regret for her actions and willingly goes on the run with her male companions to continue her behaviors.

Marcelle

Marcelle is a young friend of Simone and the narrator. One afternoon Marcelle happens on Simone and the narrator while they are participating in sexual play in the garden. When the couple sees Marcelle, they pull her into their game, forcing her to participate.



Some time later, the couple throws a party for all their friends where they get everyone drunk. Simone begins to participate in some lewd behavior that makes Marcelle uncomfortable. Marcelle wants to leave, but the narrator will not allow it. Marcelle then locks herself in wardrobe. When Marcelle is let out, the orgy is over. The narrator, who has been cut by a bottle, is covered in blood. Marcelle suffers an emotional break at this sight.

Marcelle is placed in a sanitarium by her parents. Marcelle is rescued from this place by the young couple who believe they cannot continue their sexual growth without her. Marcelle is confused and believes the narrator to be her husband. When Marcelle arrives at Simone's home and sees the same room where the orgy took place, she suffers a terrible break. Marcelle hangs herself in the wardrobe. Simone and the narrator have sex next to Marcelle's body and desecrate the body before running away to avoid a police investigation.

Sir Edmund

Sir Edmund is an older gentleman who Simone has befriended in the past. Sir Edmund is also interested in the sexual obsessions Simone and the narrator share. Sir Edmund willingly takes the young couple into his home where they share their sexual games with him. Sir Edmund takes the couple to the bull fights where Simone becomes fascinated with the idea of the audience members eating the balls of the bulls slain in the day's festivities. Simone convinces Sir Edmund to get her the raw balls of the first bull slain on their next visit to the fights. Sir Edmund does this and Simone uses the balls in a sexual manner.

Later the couple and Sir Edmund travel to Seville. While exploring the city, they come upon the church of Don Juan. Sir Edmund sends Simone inside alone and soon she returns laughing. The men go inside to see what is so funny. It is then that Simone decides to tell her confession to the priest. This confession leads to Simone seducing the priest. Sir Edmund finds the key to the tabernacle and takes the chalice in order to force the priest to defile it. Later, Sir Edmund tells Simone how to strangle the priest in such a way as to force him to become aroused before his death.

Simone's Mother

Simone's mother is a quiet woman who is raising her child alone. Simone's mother becomes aware of the sexual play of her daughter and the narrator when she accidentally walks in on them on several occasions. Simone's mother is shocked by what she sees, but she does not say anything. Due to her continual silence, Simone's mother becomes a joke to the narrator. Soon the narrator finds himself trying to get caught by Simone's mother in order to deepen her humiliation and to increase his excitement. When Marcelle dies, the young couple flee, leaving Simone's mother to deal with the fallout.



The Priest

Simone and her male companions come upon the church of Don Juan in Seville. Sir Edmund sends Simone inside to explore and she returns, highly amused by the religious atmosphere of the building. Simone returns to the church with her companions where she watches a woman leave the confessional after presenting her confession to the local priest. Simone decides to give her own confession to this priest. Before long, Simone is seducing the priest. The priest seems to be willing to be seduced, so Simone's companions drag him to a private room behind the altar. There, Sir Edmund forces the priest to defile the holy relics of the church. When the priest becomes outraged, Sir Edmund instructs Simone on how to strangle the priest in such a way as to force him to sexually please her in his death throws. Afterward, Simone has Sir Edmund cut out the priest's eye.

Friends

After enjoying a sexual encounter between themselves and Marcelle, the couple decides they would like to do the same with a group of their friends. The couple throws a party at which they ply their friends with lots of alcohol in order to help them relax. When their friends are drunk, the couple begins to participate in sexual play with these friends. Soon an orgy takes place. When it is over, the narrator lets Marcelle out of a wardrobe where she has hidden. Marcelle begins to scream, calling the parents to the room. A riot ensues, necessitating the calling of the police, leading to charges for lewd behavior. This leads to the narrator moving into Simone's room to hide from the police.

Parents

The parent's of the young couple's friends are shocked when they happen to find them participating in an orgy. The parents become outraged, screaming at the children. Soon the situation grows out of control and the neighbors arrive to see what the noise is all about. The situation is so out of control that the police are eventually called. The narrator runs home to his own parents. Afraid of his father's reaction, the narrator packs his things and leaves, taking with him a gun that is later used in sexual play with Simone.

Granero

Granero is a matador who is good looking and well liked by the audience members. Granero does not look like the other matadors and possesses a certain amount of class that allows him to stand out from the others. Simone is excited to see Granero perform and is even more excited to have him over for dinner following the bull fights. However, while Simone is obsessed with the raw bull's balls that have been presented to her, Granero begins his second fight of the day. The fight goes poorly and Granero is pressed up against the wall of the arena. Granero is gored several times, including once

in the right eye. When they take him away, the narrator can clearly see his eye hanging out of his head, something that greatly excites him.

Servants

Simone has several servants working in her mother's home. These servants know that the narrator is hiding in her room but do not say anything to her mother. When Simone desires some eggs during an illness she calls down to the servants to bring them up. When they arrive, the narrator believes it is a servant who is carrying them. However, it is Simone's mother. The narrator does not stop what he is doing when he realizes this, but continues to caress Simone's naked body, excited by the humiliation this is causing Simone's mother. It is at this point that the reader realizes the depth of the narrator's disregard for Simone's mother.



Objects/Places

Eggs

The narrator and Simone have a fascination with eggs. They often use eggs in their sexual play.

Bull Balls

When Simone attends the bull fights and learns that the balls of the slain bulls are often fried for members of the audience, Simone asks to be presented with a pair of raw balls.

Bicycles

The narrator and Simone ride bicycles to the sanitarium where Marcelle is being treated in order to rescue her.

Wardrobe

Marcelle hides in a wardrobe during an orgy orchestrated by the narrator and Simone. Later, Marcelle is driven insane by what she sees happening outside the wardrobe. When Marcelle is brought back to this room, she hangs herself inside the wardrobe.

Simone's Bedroom

The narrator hides out in Simone's bedroom after the orgy for fear of arrest for indecency.

Simone's Bathroom

While in hiding, the narrator and Simone like to use the bathroom, including the toilet and bidet, in their sexual play.

Sanitarium

Marcelle is sent to a sanitarium after the orgy at Simone's house due to the emotional breakdown this orgy caused her. The narrator and Simone go to the sanitarium and rescue Marcelle.



Confessional

Simone gives a confession in the confessional of a church in Seville.

Chalice

The narrator, Simone, and Sir Edmund force a priest to desecrate the chalice used in his church.

Eyeball

Simone demands the eye of the priest be removed after his death in order to play with it.

Garden

The narrator and Simone are caught in sexual play in the garden by Marcelle. The narrator and Simone force Marcelle to participate in their play.

Spain

The narrator and Simone flee to Spain after Marcelle's death to avoid the police investigation.



Themes

Sexual Exploration

The main characters of this novel are young and inexperienced when it comes to sex. However, this does not stop them from learning. In the beginning, the young couple spends a great deal of time exploring what gives them pleasure without indulging in sexual intercourse. The couple quickly learns what makes their passion intense and finds many ways to participate in these situations. At first, their sexual play is of a conventional type. However, when Marcelle happens on them in the garden, the couple discovers that they like being watched and they also like to share their play with other people.

The couple then participates in an orgy. The party is exciting for the couple. However, when they are found out by their friends' parents, their freedom comes under question. This leads to the narrator moving into Simone's bedroom in order to hide. While hiding, the couple finds a great deal of time on their hands to continue their play. This is when the couple finds that using certain objects, such as eggs, adds to the excitement.

The couple continues to explore, even as they move on to Spain after the death of Marcelle. The sexual play becomes more intense and dangerous, leading to the death of a priest. The couple shows no remorse for this death, but instead moves on to continue their play. Sexual exploration is intertwined throughout the entire plot, making it a major theme to the novel.

Modesty

Marcelle is a modest young woman. Marcelle is deeply offended by the acts she sees the young couple participate in throughout this novel. When Marcelle sees this couple in the garden, she is curious, but also offended. When the couple forces her to participate, Marcelle is emotionally damaged. However, the young couple does not see this damage, but instead become obsessed with making her a part of their sexual play. A party is thrown with the intension of not only including Marcelle in on their play, but also all their other friends as well. This situation pushes Marcelle beyond sanity, causing her parents to put her in a sanatorium. When the young couple learns where Marcelle is, they rescue her. However, Marcelle is so emotionally damaged that when she realize they are the couple who caused her emotional break, she hangs herself in a wardrobe.

Later, the couple comes across a young priest. Simone teases the priest until he reveals that he is human with the same desires and needs as other people. Simone, the narrator, and Sir Edmund drag the young priest out of the confessional and rape him. Simone then strangles the young priest when he threatens to have them arrested and put to death on the guillotine. It is the young priest's modesty that has attracted Simone, as it was with Marcelle, making modesty a theme of the novel.



Indecency

The young couple who is the main characters of this novel is fascinated with sex and all that it entails. However, this couple is not content in keeping their sexual exploration between just the two of them. The couple draws first Marcelle into their play, then a group of friends, and finally Sir Edmund, a friend of Simone's. This desire to include others in their sexual play causes cries of indecency from the decent people in their lives, especially the parents of their friends. It also leads to the death of Marcelle who is so emotionally damaged by being forced to participate in this play, play that goes against everything she was told as a child, that she ends her own life.

Indecency also comes into the story when the young couple uses props in their play. Simone uses a bowl of milk, eggs, and bull's balls in sexual ways that can only be called unusual. Simone enjoys the use of these objects, exciting her partner in increasing levels. However, the use of these objects is unnatural and indecent in the moral atmosphere of the time, causing them to not only shock those who accidentally find out, but also forces them to hide it from others.

When Simone enters a church in Seville, she is amused by the religious atmosphere of the place. Simone decides to make the priest an object of her sex play. Simone gives a confession while masturbating, shocking the priest. Simone then pounces on the priest, raping him and forcing him to do things that go against his calling. Simone's actions are outrageous and beyond indecent. It is these three situations that make indecency a theme of the novel.



Style

Point of View

The novel is written in the first person point of view. Often the narrator, who is never named, will make comments directly to the reader as though he is a confidant telling a story to a friend. This point of view gives the narration a sense of intimacy that is important to the feel of the novel. The novel is about an intimate side of the narrator's life, a side of life that is not often made the plot of a novel. Due to this, the first person point of view makes the subject of the novel a little less offensive.

Intimacy between the narrator and the reader of a novel is often very important to the plot. It is difficult for a reader to care what happens in a plot if there is not a level of intimacy, a desire to care. In this novel, it is more difficult than with other novels for the reader to feel sympathy for the main characters because of the subject matter. Many readers would be offended by the explicit sexual discussions in this novel. However, the first person point of view presents an intimacy that helps the reader overcome this offense and feels some connection to the main characters. This is why this point of view works for this novel.

Setting

The novel begins in an unnamed place that is simply referred to as X. There are beaches in this place and lots of country roads that the characters often travel. In this place, there is also the home of Simone where there are great rooms and a garden. The couple often spends time in these places, participating in intimate activities that are normally hidden behind closed doors. The fact that this couple participates in these acts out in the open allows the reader to know that this couple is not chaste or worried about being found out, an important element to the overall plot. Later, the couple runs away to Spain in order to hide from the law. In Spain they see bull fights and visit some great old architecture. The setting of Spain offers some distraction for the reader as well as the traditional pastimes, such as bull fighting.

The settings of this novel do not become characters on their own, like they might in other novels. In fact the settings in this novel are just that, settings. The writer spends little time exploring the settings or describing them to the reader. The writer wants the reader to remain focused on the young couple, not their surroundings. The writer is successful in this while at the same time using the culture of the settings to add excitement and a sense of danger to the narration. For this reason, the settings of this novel are handled expertly and with the desired effect.



Language and Meaning

This novel was originally written in French. The novel was translated into English many times and published several times since its original publication. This current translation was made of the original text and is presented as it is believed the author originally intended. The language within this translation is both surprisingly modern and uses some language that was common at the time it was first written. Many of the sexually explicit wordings in this novel is common to modern speech, surprising the reader who might not be aware that some of these words were in common use more than eighty years ago as they are today. However, the novelist also uses formal phrases and words that seem to contrast with the more vulgar language, giving the novel a sense of the surrealistic.

The language of this novel is appropriate to its subject matter. It contains many words that might offend the modest reader, but are the only words that could be used with this subject. The novel is generally accepted to be one of the earliest forms of pornography, so it is appropriate that the words are offensive and explicit. It is because of this that the language of this novel works for this work.

Structure

This novel is divided into two parts. The first part is the actual novel presented in thirteen chapters. The second part includes several non-fiction articles written by the author that explain where he got his ideas for the novel and why he chose to publish it under a pseudonym. The novel also includes a preface that explains that the novel has been published four times and each time some changes were made to the original text. The last time the novel was published, in the sixties, it included added material that extended the original story. An outline of this added material is included at the end of the novel. However, this preface assures the reader that the novel in its current form is the story as the author originally intended for it to be presented.

The novel follows only one plot. The plot takes a young couple from the early days of sexual awareness, through an obsession with another girl, to the death of a priest. This plot is linear and presented without flashbacks or other literary techniques that might serve to confuse the plot. There are no subplots, creating a work that is less than a hundred pages, but tells a complete story.



Quotes

"I grew up very much alone, and as far back as I recall I was frightened of anything sexual." Chapter 1, The Cat's Eye, pg. 3

"Thus a love life started between the girl and myself, and it was so intimate and so driven that we could hardly let a week go by without meeting. And yet we virtually never talked about it."

Chapter 1, The Cat's Eye, pg. 5

"More than a week had passed without our seeing Marcelle, when we ran into her on the street one day. The blonde girl, timid and naively pious, blushed so deeply at seeing us, that Simone embraced her with uncommon tenderness." Chapter 2, The Antique Wardrobe, pgs. 11-12

"It is hard to imagine the harrowing racket of that vast white sheet caught in the squall. It greatly outroared the fury of the sea or the wind in the trees. That was the first time I saw Simone racked by anything but her own lewdness: she huddled against me with a beating heart and gaped at the huge phantom raging in the night as though dementia itself had hoisted its colors on this lugubrious chateau." Chapter 4, A Sunspot, pg. 24

"When she finally caught sight of us, the surprise seemed to restore life to her face." Chapter 4, A Sunspot, pg. 28

"It was after such dreams that Simone would ask me to bed her down on blankets by the toilet, and she would rest her head on the rim of the bowl and fix her wide eyes on the white eggs. I myself settled comfortably next to her so that our cheeks and temple might touch. We were calmed by the long contemplation." Chapter 6, Simone, pg. 37

"By a sort of shared modesty, Simone and I had always avoided talking about the most important objects of our obsessions. That was why the word egg was dropped from our vocabulary, and we never spoke about the kind of interest we had in one another, even less about what Marcelle meant to us." Chapter 7, Marcelle, pg. 41

"I loved Marcelle without mourning her." Chapter 8, The Open Eyes of the Deadwoman, pg. 49

"Granero stood out from the rest of the matadors because there was nothing of the butcher about him; he looked more like a very manly prince charming with a perfectly elegant figure."

Chapter 10, Granero's Eye, pg. 59

"The priest, still gliding in his ecstasy, indicated the confessional with a distant gesture and reentered his tabernacle, softly closing the door without a word."

Chapter 11, Under the Sun of Seville, pg. 71

"The imbecile gaped dumbstruck at the Englishman: an extremely silly expression darted across his handsome face. Something like an absurd joy began to open his mouth, he crossed his arms over his naked chest and finally gazed at us with ecstatic eyes."

Chapter 13, The Legs of the Fly, pg. 79

"Curiously, we weren't the least bit worried about what might happen."

Chapter 13, The Legs of the Fly, pg. 81

Topics for Discussion

Why is the narrator obsessed with Simone? Does love have anything to do with their relationship? Are these two drawn to each other for any reason other than sex?

Why does Simone become obsessed with Marcelle? Why does Simone force Marcelle to participate in the play she and the narrator are caught acting out? Why does the narrator insist on the party that results in Marcelle becoming emotionally damaged?

Why does Simone refuse to have intercourse with the narrator without Marcelle's participation? Does Simone care about Marcelle? Why does the couple rescue Marcelle from the sanitarium? Why does Marcelle believe the narrator is her husband?

Who is the cardinal? Why does Marcelle believe he is out to hurt her? What causes Marcelle to realize the narrator and the cardinal are the same person? Why does Marcelle kill herself?

Why does Simone allow the narrator to have intercourse with her beside Marcelle's dead body? Why does Simone urinate on Marcelle? Why does this event change the way Simone reacts to the narrator's sexual attentions? Does Simone regret what she has done?

Why does Simone find the church in Seville amusing? Why does Simone go into the confessional? Is Simone attracted to the priest or is she attracted to defiling a priest? Why does Simone kill the priest?

Discuss symbolism. What is the symbolism of the eggs, bull's balls, and eyes that are used throughout the novel? Why is Simone obsessed with eggs? Why does Simone's use of these orbs excite the narrator?