

The Sense of an Ending Study Guide

The Sense of an Ending by Julian Barnes

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Plot Summary

The novel begins with a series of images, as the central character lists memories from his youth that have stuck with him. These details are not at all organized, but carry a common theme of water, as he describes steam, a drain, a river and bathwater. The author begins his tale in school, when he was in high school. He is British, and so the style of education and such is also British. He opens by describing his friends, and the addition of their newest member to the group, Adrian Finn, a decidedly intelligent boy whose tact for banter with Professor Hunt makes the boys eager to add him to their numbers. The narrator introduces himself, both to Adrian and to the reader as Tony Webster. Adrian assimilated to the group rather easily, although his attitude is a polar opposite to the skeptic nature of the other three. They all hate their parents, except Adrian although his parent's separated when he was younger. The others assume that social constructs are inherently flawed, but Adrian believes in living by principles.

During their time at school a student, Robson, dies from suicide. Rumors circle around the school that he committed this act after his girlfriend became pregnant. The friends discuss the philosophical meaning of suicide, coming to the conclusion that Robson did not die for the right reasons. As a group these boys feared living life as a non-epic, living life simply as an ordinary individual, someone no book would ever be about. They are somewhat disappointed by Adrian's lack of desire to pursue his life based on these literary ideals, they believe that he has been given the gift of a broken home, and he must pursue it.

The boys graduate and separate. Adrian earned a full ride to Cambridge. Tony got a girlfriend, through no effort or skill of his own, simply through his existence. Her name was Veronica Ford. She was a diminutive girl who disliked his taste in music, but appreciated his taste in books. He assumed she was a virgin, but had no information to back up that claim. After some time she took him to meet her family. Her father was large and a little crude, her brother typical and her mother aloof. He had an awkward conversation with Mrs. Ford, where she warned him about Veronica, but quite vaguely.

Tony returned to Bristol, and a week or so later Veronica came to London to meet Tony's friends, Adrian included. She had an instant connection with Adrian, something that Tony noticed and resented. They discussed their relationship a year or so later, and broke up. Quickly after the breakup the two had sex, after which Tony decided not to get back together with her, making it almost rape in the mind of Veronica. Strangely enough, Tony received a letter from Veronica's mother more or less congratulating him for ending the relationship. He later received a letter from Adrian requesting his permission to date Veronica, to which Tony reacted strongly. He decided to respond positively at first. He then wrote a new response letter, harsh and unrelenting, speaking of Veronica being damaged, but without any real reasoning behind this accusation. He never heard back from either of them.

Tony graduated from his university and went backpacking in the U.S. where he met Annie and spent three months with her, marveling at the ease of their relationship. As

soon as he returned from the states he was informed that Adrian had committed suicide, with the reason that he had rejected the gift of life. Tony found out from Alex that Adrian had been happy and in love, presumably with Veronica. Tony decided to admire and respect Adrian's reason as philosophically and logically sound. He met with his friends a year later on the anniversary of Adrian's death, but it was clear that remembering Adrian would not be enough to keep the group together. He met Margaret, got married, had a daughter and got divorced.

It is now the present tense of the book and Tony has finished, more or less, with his reminiscing and begins to speak about his current life as a retired hospital library assistant. He receives a letter from the estate of Mrs. Sarah Ford, Veronica's mother who had passed away. He is left 500 pounds and two documents, the first a letter somewhat explaining the unwarranted gift. The second document is still with Veronica Ford. He then finds out that the second document is Adrian's diary. He goes to talk to his own lawyer to see if there is any legal way to force Veronica to return the diary, but of course there really is not. He does receive the email of Jack, Veronica's brother and attempts to use Jack to get to her. He receives Veronica's email from Jack and writes to her, requesting the diary and an explanation. Veronica responds with the phrase "Blood Money", which only confuses Tony even more. They email sparingly until Veronica sends him one page of a diary in which Adrian is trying to turn relationships into a mathematical formula, with variables that Tony cannot understand. They continue to email until Veronica sets up a meeting.

They talk, or more spar, until Veronica gives him an envelope and leaves. A day or a half later he reads the letter and finds out that it contains the harsh letter than he had written to Adrian and Veronica. Tony realizes how bad this letter really had been in the past. He begins to blame himself for Adrian's suicide. He emails Veronica about her family, and learns that her father died from his drinking and cancer, and her mother started smoking and losing her memory. He emails her again and they set up another meeting. Tony speaks about his life story since their breakup, and after she hears it she leaves.

They set up a third meeting, this time at a subway station. They drive, and Tony tries to converse but can't as Veronica deigns not to respond. She shows him a man, clearly mentally behind who calls Veronica by one of her middle names, Mary. Tony tries to find the man on his own and succeeds, but the man reacts negatively. Tony believes he has come to the correct conclusion that the man is Adrian and Veronica's son. This signifies that Adrian's suicide had not been the perfect logical one, but rather unremarkable like that of Robson.

Tony emails Veronica to apologize, but receives a response that he has again misunderstood the situation. He returns to the pub where the man he believes to be Veronica's son spends his Friday nights and talks with his handler, who informs him that his name is Adrian, and that he is Veronica's brother. He infers from this that Adrian is indeed the father, but Sarah Ford is the mother, and his mental illness was caused by her advanced age at the time of the pregnancy. The variables of the mathematical

formula also now make sense. He closes the story by stating that life is full of responsibility, but even more unrest.

Chapter One: High School and Robson's Suicide

Summary

Anthony, "Tony" Webster, the narrator and central protagonist, begins the novel with a set of random memories, all of which relate in some way to water and later events that the reader will make connections to. Tony mentions the ability of time to change at the will of the individual and how age and emotions can drastically alter it.

Tony begins his account in high school, with the disclaimer that his memory might not be the same as it once was. He introduces Adrian Finn, a shy but brilliant and intelligent boy, as the fourth member of his group. Adrian seems to be joking in class, which is why the boys approach him, but they soon find out that he is more serious than not. Adrian declined to join the friends in wearing their watches with the clock on the inside, signifying his "otherness". Nevertheless, he joined the group, but did not alter his views to match those of the group. He participated in school activities and didn't hate his parents despite their divorce. The other boys agreed that the key to a happy family is not having a traditional family. Where the boys were anarchistic and against the system, Adrian tried to teach them to act based on principles. He replaced Alex as the most philosophic member of the group, as he had simply read more books. They were self-admittedly pretentious, and constantly under the fear of the parents that they would turn into stereotypical rebels. Tony recalls an example of Adrian's discussion with Old Joe Hunt, their history teacher, on the responsibility of the Serbian gunman for starting WWI. Adrian hits the nail on the head by saying that in order to understand history, it is necessary to know the historian first.

Later that year it was announced that Robson, one of their classmates, had died "in the flower of youth". It was later revealed that he had impregnated his girlfriend and hung himself. The boys discuss the philosophical merit, with Adrian referring to it as the only real philosophical question, much to Alex's chagrin. After much discussion they come to the decision that Robson's suicide is only philosophical if he did it to balance out bringing in a new life to the world. However, they doubt that this was his real intention. They admit that most of their negativity towards Robson was caused by their jealousy that he had had sex while they didn't have the opportunity.

The group of boys was also disappointed that their life was not currently turning out like literature, they were missing all of the key elements. Adrian, coming from a broken home was the only one with something to work with, and he decided not to search for any more information regarding his parent's divorce. Adrian brings up Robson's suicide in Hunt's class to discuss how difficult it is to discover the truth without a primary source.



Analysis

The point that the author begins with is the somewhat arbitrary nature of one's memory, especially while they are aging. He makes this point by listing many seeming random memories, that are very detailed. Of course later in the novel these details are just small parts of the story that Tony tells the reader, but right at the beginning it is a strong example of the lack of choice to recall that the elderly have. This idea is expounded upon by his remembering of how they wore their watches and how at the time it was a symbol of their togetherness, but now it is a symbol of how Adrian stood out from the group and from society in general. In fact, it is very clear that Adrian is above and beyond the other boys in the group, and it is for this reason why it almost makes sense that Tony decided to begin his account not with meeting Alex or Colin but with meeting Adrian, because he simply was that much more important and unique.

Adrian was different from society but not counter-society, which is a very important point to specify. There is a huge difference between the boys and society as a whole but an even greater gap between Adrian and the boys. This leads to the conversations that they have and the general relationship of the group being quite unique. Robson's suicide is where the author makes his first point regarding the value of life and the group that he had created, and how they tended to view the world not in terms of individuals but in terms of literary rights and wrongs and how life would go if it were a novel, something that is clearly flawed but in their mini-society is the only acceptable reaction. They are always striving to act like their favorite novel characters but are simply not satisfied with the blandness of their lives, and they almost wish they had a situation like that of Adrian or Robson so they could act like their heroes.

The author also uses Joe Hunt's class to discuss the connection between the historian and the individual trying to retell a story, as a simplified version of history. The need to know the historian is similar to the reader's need to know Tony's history which is why in chapter one readers receive all of the necessary information regarding Tony, and the second chapter is when the story really begins. In this novel's case, the readers have the primary source, and so the retelling is much easier although still plagued by memory deficiencies.

Discussion Question 1

What is the difference between Colin's view of his parents and Adrian's view of his parents? What effect does divorce have on these perceptions?

Discussion Question 2

What is the importance of memory and understanding biases for the study of history?



Discussion Question 3

What effect does the boy's study of philosophy have on their judgment of Robson's suicide? What effect does this judgment have on their perception of life in general?

Vocabulary

gout, nonsensically, malleability, approximate, deformed, punitive, characterization, inventiveness, polygamous, sycophantic, copulation, denunciations, indiscernible, hedonistic, retrospectively, exonerating, catastrophic, susurrus, lachrymose, puerile, provocation

Chapter One: Veronica and After

Summary

The boys split up after college: Tony to Bristol, Adrian to Cambridge, Colin to Sussex, and Alex to his dad's firm. They swore to remain friends, but it didn't really happen as they all seemed to only be close friends with Adrian.

Tony met a girlfriend, even though his charm consisted of being charmless. Her name was Veronica Mary Elizabeth Ford, and it took him a long time to get that information. She disliked Tony's taste in music, but this wasn't a huge problem. They were intimate but not having sex; rather they were practicing what Tony called "infra-sex" or half-sex. Veronica did appreciate Tony's books, as he made a point to have more non-fiction Blue Pelicans than the fiction orange ones. Veronica focused on poetry, her collection more than just for show.

One weekend Veronica took Tony to meet her family in Chislehurst. He was greeted by Veronica's large, annoying beer-stinking father, who gave him a strange, false tour of the town. Her brother was more stereotypical in his teasing of Veronica. Her mother seemed a little different than the rest, especially the first morning when Veronica let Tony sleep in and left him alone with her mom. Mrs. Ford told Tony not to let Veronica get away with too much but does not elaborate on this statement. When Veronica and the men returned from their walk, she was a lot more friendly and open about her affection, seemingly more comfortable. She even gave him a kiss goodnight.

The next event that Tony recalls is when Veronica visited London to meet his friends. She seemed to connect more with Adrian, causing a little bit of jealousy on the part of Tony. After she left, Tony had to basically drag compliments out of his friends, showing his insecurity a little bit. He continued his relationship with Veronica into their second year where their intimacy escalated a little bit in Veronica's favor. After this she asked Tony where their relationship was going, to which Veronica called him cowardly.

Tony then tells the story of when he saw the Severn Bore, and how it was one of his few memories of college that did not involved Veronica. He remembers it as a very incredible and jarring experience, something completely unnatural. After their breakup Veronica slept with Tony, totally dispelling any notion that she could have been a virgin during their relationship. After that he decided to not get back together with her, to which she responded by calling him a rapist. He said that she had only slept with him because she had to. This ended their relationship, and soon after he received a letter of condolence from Veronica's mother, almost implying that he was better off without her. Tony had a few other sexual encounters after Veronica, but not many, and they weren't very rewarding.

The next significant event is when Tony received a letter from Adrian asking for permission to date Veronica, to which Tony quickly responded with a bubbly acquiescing

postcard. Two weeks later after drinking he wrote what he was really thinking, describing it as an attack on their moral scruples as well as warning Adrian about Veronica's damage. This damage was unclear to Tony at the time that he wrote the letter, and also in his old age. This theory is easily flipped on Tony being the damaged one, and he admits this while recounting.

Tony graduated from Bristol and left for the States for six months, backpacking and doing odd jobs, only sending the occasional postcard back to his family. He met Annie on the road and hooked up with her for three months. It was very easy, and ended as easily as it started which for Tony signified a lack of depth.

Analysis

The beginning of Tony's relationship with Veronica is important in that it shows how much he was willing to act the part in order to get a girlfriend, mainly to please his friends. He admits that his book collection was mainly just for keeping up appearances and he barely attempted to defend his music in front of Veronica. He even barely defended himself against her brother or father, maintaining his mostly neutral stance on most things.

It is also important to note the similarities between Adrian and Mrs. Ford at this point, how both of them are distinctively outside of the group, something that Tony notices in both cases. This could have been a deciding factor in their later relationship, as the reason for this relationship is never really revealed.

It is also important to note that Tony is inherently concerned with pleasing others and is a generally insecure individual, hence his jealousy of Adrian when Veronica seemed to like him more than the other friends in his group. His immaturity also came out when he needed his friends to congratulate him, which also brings back the element earlier of his desire to have this relationship just to seem normal or cool in the eyes of his friends. This insecurity is really uncalled for and quite ridiculous, especially given the events of the prior weekend, but Tony was so obsessed with the fact that they hadn't had sex yet that he let it cloud his vision.

Even this desire for sex was caused by a desire to be equal in experience to his friends, as he believed that his friends had already experienced it and felt he needed to get there himself. Therefore, when Veronica tried to use sex to get Tony back he wasn't won over because he had already gotten what he wanted out of the relationship. He admits to this hypocrisy a little in retrospect, proving the point that memory can change emotions over time.

Adrian and Veronica shouldn't really have had a great effect on Tony because he himself chose to not let her back into his life, but the idea of his friend achieving something more than him was too much and Tony reacted negatively again, quoting some damage in Veronica that he had no right to state or evidence with which to back it up.



Tony was simply not that ambitious of a person, as his six month hiatus proved. Although he found another relationship, this one the complete opposite of Veronica's complexity, he was still completely unsatisfied and thought it wasn't deep enough. In a way Tony was a strange combination of stagnation and unrest, as he did not have the will power to achieve ambitious life goals, but was never satisfied with what fell into his lap by chance, as both Veronica and Annie did. It makes him a very interesting character, and one that doesn't exactly fit the typical character development, as he remains more or less the same individual throughout his life. Readers see him grow up, but not in a substantial way besides his age becoming higher and his perception of the past weakening.

Discussion Question 1

What aspects of Veronica's and Tony's personalities make them compatible at first but not in the long term?

Discussion Question 2

Why is Tony's music so important to him, as it is a primary reason for his acceptance of the breakup?

Discussion Question 3

Why is Veronica's mom a "rival" to Veronica? Why does she send the letter to Tony post breakup?

Vocabulary

irrefutable, farcically, byplay, paterfamilias, enquiry, wisteria, vehemence, peritonitis, venerable, rudimentary

Chapter One: Adrian's Suicide and the Current State of Things

Summary

The day that Tony returned from his United States he was greeted with a letter from Alex informing him that Adrian had committed suicide. The two of them met to discuss the suicide, as always focusing on its philosophical merit. The two view suicide in general as having potential to be logical, heroic or glamorous, none of which describe Adrian's suicide. In his publicized suicide note Adrian said that life is a gift that is given without asking and so the individual has the right to reject it, and if he wants to he must act on it. Alex and Tony discussed his method, finding it acceptably Roman. They read that the coroner had labeled him mentally disturbed, which angers Tony, because it isn't possible for Adrian's mind to have been disturbed. Tony reflects on the fact that law, society and religion require a suicide victim to have been disturbed because a sane, healthy person doesn't kill themselves. As a result, Adrian's argument, however philosophical it was, is viewed by the public as the ravings of a madman. The two friends also discussed whether it was a criticism of society, whether it was the fault of his tutors or even the fault of Veronica, with whom Alex said Adrian seemed very happy in the months leading up to his death.

Tony returned home from this meeting and had to deal with his mother's theory, one that he did not appreciate. She thought Adrian was simply too clever. Tony decided that there couldn't possibly be another reaction behind the suicide, because as Adrian was a philosopher, he would not have written false reasons for his suicide. He also shifted from being angry at Veronica to feeling sorry for her. He finally decided on his own that he understood and admired Adrian's reasons as having seen the actions and conclusion of logical thought, but also as a waste.

A year later the three met up to remember Adrian, a successful night but not enough to sustain their friendship because they already knew the results and reasons behind it. Tony quickly recaps the rest of his life up to the present day. He married Margaret, worked in the arts, and had a daughter named Susan. After 12 years of marriage they divorced, custody of Susie was shared between them and there didn't seem to be a negative affect on her as a result. Tony had a few affairs after, but always talked to Margaret about them so they never got serious. Susie grew up, got married and had two children. Margaret's second husband left for a younger woman, but she is still friends with Tony, eating lunch with him from time to time. He's retired, a member of the local history society. He runs a hospital library and is more or less content. He reflects on memory and how when you are young, you never imagine yourself looking back and having uncertainty of memory, no matter how many physical documents exist. He still plays his music, although he has outgrown Tchaikovsky. He gets along fine with Susie, although they talk more in email than in person.

Analysis

As soon as responsibility skirting Tony returned from his voyage in the States he was immediately brought back to earth with the news that Adrian had committed suicide. Interestingly enough, even four years later, he and his friend Alex still had the exact same scale on which to measure a suicide as they had with Robson. There was still no focus whatsoever on the effect that Adrian's death had on them as individuals or on his girlfriend Veronica. Rather, the boys discussed its philosophical merit, especially coming from Adrian. Adrian clearly also believed in the same scale for suicide, as his suicide note was filled with logic, reason and philosophic quotes. He stated that he had rejected the gift of life, an idea that normal society cannot accept as being sane, because while clearly there is no choice involved in birth, it does not mean that one can choose to die simply because they don't want to live anymore. This is a generally accepted ideal in today's society as well, that suicide is a cowardly, selfish act that negatively effects those around them, while having a net neutral effect on the individual who committed the action.

Tony, of course, thought that this action somehow reflected back on himself, as an attack by Adrian on his beliefs and his inability to act in life. He also completely accepted Adrian's reasoning, thinking that there was no way that anything that Adrian said could be a lie. This is another aspect of their relationship, the semi-worship that Tony and his friends gave to Adrian for what they perceived as more intelligent thought.

It is also interesting that Tony speaks more on the death of Adrian than how he met his wife of 12 years or his relationship with his daughter. This backs up the strange level of importance Adrian holds in Tony's life, really far too much. Tony's life goes about as well as the reader could expect; he's had some personal success and some failure, and seems generally content in his old age. The main difference is that he has finally come to terms, at least a little, with his lack of exceptional life experiences, and seems content to not act in a new or strange way.

Discussion Question 1

In the view of Alex and Tony, is Adrian's suicide the answer to the great philosophical question?

Discussion Question 2

What is the difference between Robson's and Adrian's suicides that makes Adrian's much more logical and reasonable for Tony and his friends?

Discussion Question 3

Why does Tony gloss over the events leading up to his marriage, deciding to focus on the divorce and his relationship post-divorce with his daughter?

Vocabulary

vindication, subsequent, desirability, corroboration, paradox, assiduous, neurotic

Chapter Two: the Will, the Diary, and the Formula

Summary

In the middle of his mundane and content retired existence, Tony receives letter from the estate of Sarah Ford. He had been left 500 pounds and two documents. He sent in his necessary paperwork and attempted to remember anything regarding why he would deserve this moment, but he really can't. In fact, he had erased Veronica from his memory. He has imagined a life with Annie, and a longer one with Margaret but never with Veronica. He admits that his fantasies are never very much different than his real life, he's just not strange enough to do so. He reads the first document, a half-hearted explanation for this gift, the second document is still with Veronica. He flashes back to a conversation with his wife about the two types of women: straightforward and mysterious. Tony said he prefers the straight forward ones more.

Back to the present, Tony calls the solicitor to request the second document, finding out that it is the diary of Adrian Finn. She tells him that Veronica is not yet ready to part with the diary. Tony asks her to try to get Veronica's address. The next day he calls her again and asks for Jack Ford's details, and then sets up a lunch meeting with his ex-wife as well as with the man who drew up his will, T.J. Gunnell. He flashes back again, telling the reader that he had written Veronica out of his life before dating Margaret, but because it was almost imprinted in his mind. Back to the present, Mr. Gunnell advises him not to take legal action. Two weeks later Tony receives Jack's email address, but not Veronica's. Tony writes Jack and asks for his help in getting back the letter, which Jack sends him a negatory rambling letter that reeks of falseness. Tony responds to this email by directly asking for Veronica's contact information.

Tony then has his lunch meeting with Margaret, and she gets right to the point, calling Veronica "the fruitcake". She asks him how he would react if Veronica strode into the room, and if there is any desire left for her. Margaret advises him to let it go unless there are past issues that he needs to confront. Tony responds no, but thinks to himself that it might be the case. Margaret advises him through an anecdote not to go looking for answers that he know will hurt him. A week later he gets Veronica's email from Brother Jack, and he has a change of heart in his perception of him, thinking of him as a slightly down on his luck businessman rather than a golf playing mansion dweller. Tony thinks about nostalgia, and how he is nostalgic for Margaret, Susie's birth, road-tripping with Annie and also nostalgic for remembered pain.

Veronica's response to his question regarding why he was left 500 pounds is "Blood Money", an enigmatic response that strongly confuses Tony. Tony, no longer being afraid of Veronica, begins his polite pedantic email campaign. Veronica is a little put off by this, and Tony explains his method with an anecdote about when he fought the town bureaucrats to save a lime tree. He then receives a letter from the solicitor with a

fragment of the document, one that he recognizes as being in Adrian's handwriting. It is some sort of math formula regarding relationships and responsibility but Tony can't make heads or tails of its importance. This formula brings him back to when he was young and used his brain as often as an athlete using his muscles. He views Adrian as a man who took control of his own life, something very few individuals can do, especially Tony. He continues the emails every other day until Veronica agrees to meet at the Wobbly Bridge.

Analysis

It is an interesting insight that Tony gives the reader, stating that he has more or less written Veronica out of his life. When a memory or an emotion has a large negative effect it is common to put it in the backburner, but not as if it had never happened. This kind of thing only happens when there is a traumatic event, and this event doesn't seem exactly catastrophic in the life of Tony. However, when taken in perspective of Tony's life and its blandness, it makes sense that he would never have wanted to have that life continue. He fantasizes about a further life with Annie because it had been easy and natural, and he thinks that this kind of life would be better for him. He admits in the present tense that he is just not strange, and he is content and happy with it. He also admits that he prefers a woman who is not enigmatic or makes him work for her real emotions or feelings, as he had more success with Margaret than with Veronica in his life. It is also fair and necessary to point out that Tony has had very little experience with women in general in his life, and so has not much to work with in order to reach this conclusion.

However, it is at this exact moment that Tony finally has the opportunity to follow his intellectual dream, he has an intriguing and strange story to follow: that of his friend Adrian's diary, and at the start it very much seems like he is pursuing the diary really just for the diary. He uses his best abilities and effort to receive the information of the diary, his pedantic ridiculous boring speech. It is ironic and humorous that the first move that Tony makes in his novelistic quest to find the diary is to send a false and ridiculous email to Jack Ford, and then has the nerve to be offended by what he perceives as an equally false response. His next move is to focus his emailing skills by emailing Veronica in an irritating and consistently tiring way. For Tony, this is how he feels he can pursue the literary dream. He's not going to go to her house, or attempt to steal the diary. he's going to bore her into giving in. Not exactly exciting novel material.

Tony's lunch meeting with Margaret perhaps reveals an ulterior motive, a strange latent desire to settle past issues. This is perhaps the first aspect of Tony that seems out of character, as it is clear from his recount that he is missing key aspects of the end of their relationship, nothing was made especially clear. It is very possible that his memory lapse is the result of this missing information, and also lends credence to the idea of the historian and the incomplete history. Of course the journey back into his past relationship and that of Adrian begins with a very literary and suspense-building quote from Veronica "blood money". Tony is utterly confused by this phrase, and also by the mathematical formula that he receives from Adrian's diary. He begins to have nostalgia



for his past, be it good or bad. He also remembers when his mind was an exercised muscle, one that he could stretch and flex in his youth, and one that sadly was not used very often in the same manner in his old age. This flexing and intellectual control of life is something that Tony wishes he still had and is jealous of the fact that Adrian had this control, even in death. This is one of the key aspects of Tony's life and worldview, life happens to him and when he dies it will be as the result of something completely out of his control, and that frightens and depresses him.

Discussion Question 1

Why does the author choose to use Sarah Ford to close off Veronica and Tony's relationship, and also to restart it? What does this say about her relationship with Veronica?

Discussion Question 2

What in Veronica's personality and mindset makes her reluctant to simply give Tony the whole truth at once? Does she have an ulterior motive?

Discussion Question 3

What does it say about Adrian's personality that he chooses to explain and unravel his problem with a mathematical formula?

Vocabulary

fixative, solvent, bequest, scrutinized, complacency, facade, solicitor, differential, plausible, bureaucrat, arborist, pedantic, insoluble, exegesis, pragmatism

Chapter Two: the Meeting, the Letter, the Second Meeting

Summary

Tony and Margaret meet at the Wobbly Bridge, named so for its now resolved faulty construction. They discuss the fact that Tony is not an alcoholic. He almost has nostalgia for their relationship. Veronica looks a little disheveled, but it may be on purpose. He asks for Adrian's diary and she tells him she burnt it, with the excuse that people shouldn't read other people's diaries. She gives Tony an envelope and leaves. He makes the connection of blood money to Adrian, and modifies Margaret's theory of straight forward vs. mysterious, as Tony had had both and enjoyed both types of women.

Tony waits a day and a half to open the letter, still confused as to why she had wanted a meeting, coming to the conclusion that she had agreed to it so the fact she burned Adrian's diary wouldn't be in writing. In the envelope is another photocopy, this time of his own letter to Adrian and Veronica - the hateful one. Tony thinks to himself that he is a different person than he had been when he wrote that letter but his younger self arrives to shock him. He wishes Veronica had burnt this letter. He views it as a warning from Veronica to not try any legal action, and then thinks of Adrian, and how this was the last piece of information he received from Tony. He also remembers that the first postcard he sent was of the Clifton suspension bridge where suicide was common.

The next day Tony thinks about how people develop a thicker skin later in life and are also less likely to attack people in such a cruel way. Tony feels real remorse for this letter, and sends Veronica an apologetic email. He then begins to have remorse about his own life; how he lost the friends of his youth, lost his wife and lost his ambitions. He had succeeded at being average. Veronica responds to his apology by saying he still doesn't understand.

Tony has another lunch with Margaret who tells him that he isn't in love with the Fruitcake and refrains from any "I told you so" triumphalism as always. Tony thinks of Susie, and how he would have had a bigger impact in the lives of Susie's children if he was still with Margaret, and how Susie doesn't ever leave her kids with him. He thinks she blames him for the divorce. Tony then questions the idea that character develops over time, as it is supposed to in novels. He believes that perhaps it doesn't after the age of thirty. He re-reads Adrian's formula and thinks on the chain of responsibility and how narrow it must be. Then both came to the solution that you start with yourself and move outwards with blame only if there is other evidence.

Tony envies Adrian in his life and the manner in which he died. He thinks of life as a long process, constantly disappointing until one is ready and willing to die. He then sends an email to Veronica asking her if she thinks he loved her back then, marveling at



how easy it is to do so over email, and how if he had to send a letter he probably wouldn't have had the guts. She responds the next morning saying that if he needs to ask the answer is no. He then decides that he wants to clear his remorse by proving that he is truly sorry. He likens it as clearing up one's accounts before a trip, except this time the trip is death. Tony almost decides to ask Alex and Colin for help, having exhausted Margaret as a resource, but decides against it because they will only have bad things to add to the confusion. So Tony returns to Veronica, his only remaining source. He asks about her family and her mother's death. Veronica almost seems pleased to have been asked, telling him that her father died of oesophageal cancer, as a result of his excessive drinking. Her mother had sold the house and moved to London, started smoking but then her memory began to fail. She died with a struggle but it was a mercy. Tony thinks to himself about how his memory hasn't simply steadily declined, it has but also with smatterings of recovery, mostly regarding his weekend in Chislehurst. He googles Chislehurst and finds out that most of what Mr. Ford had told him in their tour was false. He emails Veronica asking for a third meeting, to which she asks if this is to close the circle.

Analysis

In their meeting, the author discusses the effect that seeing someone can have on emotions and perception, where once there was nothing or a negative energy, that can change with physical contact. Tony is clearly effected almost immediately in this small interaction, as he remembers Veronica and almost wants his old relationship back and to have this mysterious enigmatic aspect of his life. This is interesting, as only a conversation ago he admitted to preferring a straight-forward woman and having no desire to even imagine a future with Veronica. This complete flip shows how much of his feelings for Veronica had been buried in his mind and hidden even from him, only awakened by his re-seeing her and the reminder of their physical connection.

Tony's reaction to his old letter gives the reader the first glimpse of his change of perspective in his old age, finally thinking about something other than himself and his own issues. Obviously when he wrote the letter in the first place he only was thinking of how what they were saying was clearly directed at him and how they wanted to make him feel bad, and impose their superiority over him. This second time that he is reading it he finally grasps the full weight of what he had said to his ex-lover and best friend, realizing that it was strong and unnecessarily hateful. He also re-examines their reasons for letting him know, thinking that inherently it was actually a very nice thing for them to do, so as he wouldn't be startled or angry at them. He actually feels sorry for the actions of his past, which is a complete turn around from his younger self, who clearly did not think at all about how his actions could potentially affect others.

However, this growth in character is rather short lasting as he nearly immediately turns it back to himself, starting to feel bad about his entire life, his decisions and his actions and how very average his life has ended up. This return to character precludes his next thought, about how character is supposed to develop over time in novels, but it rarely happens in real life. This is perfectly shown in the character of Tony, as he remains



average with the same value for most of his life, and even when he seems close to making some kind of increase in compassion, remorse or responsibility. In a way, only now is Tony realizing any responsibility at all for the failures of his past relationships, as he had written that Veronica was responsible for his ending and actively says that Margaret ended the marriage, without giving the reader any of the details. He is a relatively self-pitying individual who tends to think the worse of himself no matter what the situation, be it his divorce or his relationship with his daughter. He believes that blame and responsibility start with himself, which is a good idea to have, however he does not act on this responsibility in a positive way, albeit a lot more positively than Adrian or Robson. Tony is already very ready for death himself, having already cleared up his affairs, his will and the rest for when he does die. Now that Veronica is on that list, he feels the need to resolve this issue before he dies also. He feels like he has something to prove, something to be forgiven for, and he won't stop until he has gained this forgiveness.

Discussion Question 1

Why does Tony become excited about seeing Veronica again? Is he still searching for the diary?

Discussion Question 2

Does Tony experience growth or a change in perception when he reads the letter for the second time?

Discussion Question 3

Has Veronica matured over time? Or is she still the same close-minded, unwilling-to-be-vulnerable person that she was when they first dated?

Vocabulary

utilitarian, mackintosh, filament, anomaly, whimsical, distasteful, sodden, sufficient, malign, triumphalism, accumulation, spontaneity, gaffe, supercilious, enigmatic, descale

Chapter Two: the Third Meeting, Adrian Ford, and the Truth

Summary

While Tony is on the train to the third meeting with Veronica he recalls a full memory of her dancing to his music in his room, seemingly having been trained in ballet. He arrives early but she is of course already there. He tells her that she remembered her dancing to which she gives a non-response. He asks her how her life has been going but she insists he start. He tells her his whole life and she pays for her food and leaves.

On the train ride home Tony remembers how attracted they had been to each other. Nothing much happened over the next week, besides Tony feeling guilt for feeling excited about Veronica again, as if he was still married to Margaret. He also remembers that Veronica had been with him the night of the Severn Bore; they sat on a blanket, drank hot chocolate and talked about how impossible things could happen even if they were unbelievable without having seen them first. He thinks about a theory that his emotions regarding past events could change even as he recalls them with a mind similar to when he was young.

Tony is affected more by Mr. Ford's death than he had expected, feeling new sympathy for Veronica which has surprised him. He reaches out to Veronica again, requesting another meeting. She agrees and sets the location at a place unknown to Tony. He spends a week trying to remember new positive things about Veronica but fails. He views the new memories that he had been able to remember as his own personal Severn Bore. He arrives at the fourth meeting place where Veronica brings him to a car. He asks her if she remembers the Severn Bore and she doesn't respond. In fact, she doesn't respond to any of his attempts at conversation. She was clearly nervous but not about Tony. She points out a man, clearly the mentally disabled, walking in a group with a caretaker. Tony asks for clarification and Veronica speeds away and re-circles to see the same group. She tells Tony he doesn't understand. She gets out of the car and talks to the group, they call her by her middle name, Mary. She finally responds to Tony, telling him that she remembers the Severn Bore. Tony asks more questions but Veronica pulls up on the curb and kicks him out of her car.

On the train back he realizes that he had been trying to forgive himself in her eyes, even though she never felt the same feelings of remorse as him. The next week was very lonely for Tony as he thought about both Adrian and Veronica. He gets over this, though and emails Jack again. He also requests for Mr. Gunnell to act in his stead with the solicitor, as he believes Veronica to be unstable enough to request the diary to be returned.

Tony drives to the pub near which he had seen the strange man that made Veronica nervous. Tony doesn't find him the first Friday but the second Friday he does see him.



Tony simply observes. He becomes a regular at the pub until he musters the courage to talk to the man. When he mentions Mary's name the man becomes startled and walks away. His caretaker tells Tony that he should understand being "Mary's" friend.

Tony realizes that the strange man is Adrian's son, and assumes that he is also Veronica's which makes him think of how he basically laid a curse on the two of them with his hurtful letter. Obviously, he feels terrible and begins to understand Veronica's position more. He can't tell anyone this, as he has no one left to talk to. This also changes his opinion on Adrian's suicide, viewing it as closer to Robson's than he had thought with Alex. He then thinks of Robson's girlfriend and child, wanting to apologize for the way in which he had talked about her at the time. Adrian had a much easier solution than Robson, he only had to marry Veronica but couldn't do that. He wasn't clever or moral, just scared. Tony has a slight emotional breakdown in his remorse, thinking of his own bland life. He then writes an apology email to Veronica, not exactly feeling any better or worse after it, thinking instead of Susie and how lucky she is to be normal.

Tony's life continues and Veronica tells him he still doesn't get it. He continues to go to the pub, and one night talks with one of the man's caretakers who tells him that the man's name is Adrian and that Mary is his sister not mother. Tony realizes the full truth now, why he had received the 500 pounds, why Mrs. Ford had the diary, and why Veronica had said "blood money". He also understands the formula, and what all of the variables stood for. He realized he can't mend or change anything now. He thinks of a smattering of random memories remarking that there is responsibility but above all unrest.

Analysis

The Tony that is displayed in the last moments of the novel is one that is desperately grasping for positive elements of his time with Veronica in order to make himself feel better about his relationship with her and perhaps even thinking about the future. This is less to depict a more well-rounded image of Veronica for the reader, and more to show that Tony is literally sitting at his home and trying desperately to pull up positive memories of his ex-girlfriend. Of course the main impetus for this is not only the need to be forgiven, but also his own sexual desires as he gets excited about the past that they had had and what they could potentially do in the future. He only manages to remember her dancing and her being there at the Severn Bore, both of which don't really do much to bring her around to his ideal, as she pretty much blows him off both times he tries to bring it up. Tony even is able to regain a level of sympathy for Veronica, something that he hadn't felt even when they were going out, another sign of his all out willingness to try to make this work. It seems very clear that Veronica is not feeling even close to the level of nostalgia or emotions for Tony, as she seems to be trying to get him to find out the truth without her having to admit to it, as it obviously hurts her and embarrasses her. The issue is that Tony simply will not back off and leave her alone in his quest to gain forgiveness and perhaps rekindle the relationship he has left her no choice but to give him what he wants, no matter how difficult it is for her.



In this way Tony still hasn't changed, he is an inherently selfish person who doesn't want this new relationship to benefit Veronica, but to alleviate his emotions of nostalgia and remorse. It is not like there is anything missing in his life at this point, he had already stated that he is more or less content with his retired life, and he isn't strange enough to change this lifestyle. In fact it is unclear as to why Tony continues to follow the man, even after Veronica is no longer involved. It is possible that in his boredom he has become accustomed to the pub, and he goes there just to have something to do with his nights.

Tony has a brief lapse of remorse and compassion for others when he finds out that the man is Adrian's son, imagining how hurt Robson's child and girlfriend were after his suicide, and how heartlessly he and his friends had talked about them. Of course, right after this he turns it back onto himself, thinking of how terrible and inactive his life has been as normal, but there is nothing he can do about it. He finally finds out the whole truth and decides to stop acting, coming to terms with the unrest of the world and the necessity to be responsible for his actions. Unfortunately, he learns this lesson far too late for it to have any positive effect on his life, Veronica's or Adrian's.

Discussion Question 1

What does Tony mean when he closes the novel discussing the relationship between responsibility and unrest?

Discussion Question 2

Although Veronica is not very open in giving Tony information, she does lead him directly to the truth by the end of the novel. She has no reason to do this, so what are her motives?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the fact that Sarah Ford was pregnant have an effect on Tony's view on Adrian's suicide?

Vocabulary

obscure, acrimonious, fraternization, epigrammatic, solipsistic, etymologically, vexatious, affable

Characters

Tony Webster

Anthony "Tony" Webster is the primary protagonist, narrator and central figure around which the world of the novel revolves. He is a self proclaimed peaceable individual, and has been at times labeled cowardly for his desire to appease those around him. He plays the role of historian of his own past, attempting to see events from a new and different perspective, one that affects his self perception and his perception of those around him, namely Veronica (his collegiate ex-girlfriend). He is a truth seeker, looking for the truth of his friend Adrian's suicide, but also learning about himself in the process. His story is one of prejudiced incomplete memory, and how Tony recalls events defines the reader's opinion of the characters of the novel.

Adrian Finn

Adrian is Tony's friend at first, a brilliantly intelligent boy and then young man, clearly different from the others in intelligence and the manner in which he thinks. He is a part of Tony's gang, but at the same time is distinctively different, and chooses to be so. He is a child of divorce but holds no ill will towards his parents. He studied moral sciences at Cambridge, receiving a sizable scholarship. A half year after meeting Tony's girlfriend Veronica he begins dating her, which leads to him impregnating her mother and committing suicide, with the false reason that he had rejected the gift of life.

Veronica Ford

Veronica was Tony's girlfriend, a short girl with slightly judgmental protective and manipulative tendencies. She was "damaged" according to Tony, but the details of this alleged damage were only alluded to, not fully explained or confirmed. She is very closed-minded and secretive about her own life and feelings while being ready and almost eager to hear Tony's personal information. She is what Tony calls a mysterious woman, one who enjoys being coy and aloof. She doesn't help Tony decipher what had happened with Adrian, but remains content to give him various clues and allow him to slowly figure it out on his own, no matter the stress or pain it caused him.

Mrs. Sarah Ford

She is Veronica's mother, another somewhat mysterious woman who was not so openly present or talkative when Tony visited Chislehurst for the first and only time. In fact, she almost warned Tony about Veronica, telling him that he didn't have to take her actions all the time. She makes a second, posthumous appearance when she leaves Tony 500 pounds, a letter somewhat explaining the gift, and Adrian's diary, which sparks Tony's rekindling of his relationship with Veronica. She is clearly at odds with her daughter,

almost a rival, although the reasons behind this rivalry are never discovered by Tony or the reader.

Jack Ford

He is Veronica's brother, a stereotypical teasing and interrogatory individual when Tony first met him. He was used to, and clearly enjoyed, having fun with his sister's male quests. Later it is revealed that Adrian has a rather negative opinion of him, as he is somewhat of a slacker. He makes his second appearance when Tony uses him as an intermediary to get access to Veronica's email in his search for the diary.

Professor Joe Hunt

A relatively minor character, Professor Hunt was Tony and his friends' history teacher during their time at high school in London. Serving as a literary device, much of the background historical theory knowledge that the reader needs to have to understand the points that Tony and the author are trying to make regarding memory and reliable (or not so reliable) sources and how a source's history is equally important is demonstrated through dialogue in Professor Hunt's class, primarily with Adrian.

Colin Simpson

Colin was one of the original members of the gang, anti-establishment and rebellious like most teenagers. He was the physical combination of Baudelaire and Dostoevsky. He was anti-family, primarily anti-parents as he believed they did not have his best interests at heart.

Alex

The philosopher of the group, he was counter to the very idea of societal reality, as he challenged it at every opportunity possible, usually based on Russell and Wittgenstein. His philosopher position was challenged by the arrival of Adrian. Alex was the one who informed Tony of Adrian's suicide, conversing with Tony about the logical and philosophical merit of his death.

Robson

The tragic suicide of Robson, who died much too early in his life, serves as an ominous precursor to Adrian's suicide as well as providing a subject for the cynical gang to discuss whether or not his suicide was really tragic - if his reasons were worthy and admirable. They continued to ignore the general loss of a human life.



Mr. Ford

He was Veronica's father, first name unknown. He was an alcoholic large individual who arguably treated Tony poorly when he visited. There was implied sexual abuse of his daughter, but this was never discussed or confirmed. He eventually died as a result of his drinking from esophageal cancer.

Annie

Both a footnote and an important individual in the life of Tony Webster. Annie was the girl he met while backpacking in the United States. They shared three months together, seemingly very easily connecting and separating without much difficulty. While Tony did not imagine life if he had stayed together with Veronica, he did sometimes imagine it with Annie. He also told his wife Margaret that Annie was his first real girlfriend.

Mrs. Webster

She was Tony's mother, supportive and not overly critical. Her one prominent movement in the novel is when she attempted to decipher Adrian's suicide with little success, only irritating Tony with her hypothesis that Adrian was too clever for his own good.

Margaret

Tony's ex-wife during the time of the novel, Margaret is the opposite of Veronica, a down to earth, straight-forward and honest woman. Their divorce was more or less amicable, and although they don't see each other often, she still serves as Tony's adviser in life. Her role in the novel is to provide an outsider's insight into Tony's actions and give her two cents, which Tony inevitably ignores.

Susan Webster

She is Tony's daughter, of whom he is quick to state often in the novel that they have a good relationship, if not an excellent one. She is married and has two children, who spend much more time with Margaret than Tony as Susan trusts her more as a mother.

Mrs. Eleanor Marriott

She is the solicitor of Mrs. Ford's estate, responsible for helping Tony in his quest for Adrian's diary. She is professional and not very helpful.

T. J. Gunnell

The man who wrote up Tony's will, he gives Tony legal advice on whether or not it is wise to go after the diary as a piece of stolen property. Logically, Mr. Gunnell views this action as foolish.

Adrian Ford

A character whose mere existence is probably more important than his actions. Adrian Ford is the son of Mrs. Sarah Ford and Adrian Finn. The reasons for their coupling is unknown to the reader. He is mentally disabled, most likely as a result of Sarah's advanced age at the time of the pregnancy.

Symbols and Symbolism

Severn Bore

This natural event in which the river Severn reacts with the ocean and causes a wave represents the impossible in Tony's life and how it can still take place, no matter how logically ridiculous it might seem. More specifically, it can symbolize his rekindling of his relationship with Veronica.

Adrian's Math Formula

Quite literally this seemingly mismatched jumble of symbols and variables holds the key to the events leading to Adrian's suicide (A=Anthony/Adrian B=Baby M=Mother V=Veronica). As soon as Tony realizes the truth in the pub he is able to decipher this.

Adrian's Diary

More than just Adrian's thoughts leading up his suicide, this diary symbolizes Tony's past life, when he was really friends with Adrian and dating Veronica. He is desperately chasing after this past and the diary, not to learn more about Adrian's last days, but to rediscover his youth and his youthful relationships.

Virginity

This symbolizes youth and innocence traditionally, but in this novel it is always viewed as a negative as the boys (Tony included) try to remove that title. In fact, Tony assumes Veronica is a virgin because she doesn't want to have sex with him, ignoring the fact that he might be the problem, not the issue of overcoming the societal symbol of purity.

Tony's music

Tony's music symbolizes his maturity as well as his openness towards the outside world, as he has some lively pop music and other artists that are not commonly listened to within his self labeled pretentious group. Veronica, of course dislikes this type of music as it goes against her core personality. It also symbolizes a part of his identity as it is the first thing that he is excited to do following his breakup with Veronica.

Dancing

Similar to his music, Tony enjoys dancing, as it gives him a way to express his emotions. Veronica, on the other hand does not, as she prefers to keep things inside.

The one time she does dance, however, it is clear that she has had some ballet training, and at one point danced. Her doing this in front of Tony shows a slight willingness to be vulnerable on her part.

Robson's Suicide

This suicide symbolizes society's view towards any young person's death as tragic and a waste of life no matter how important the individual of they would have been successful or given anything to society later in life. Their age is enough to deem the act tragic, a fact that Tony and his friends strongly dispute.

Adrian's Suicide Note

His logical reasoning for his suicide represents the ideals that he and his friends have believed in for the majority of their young adult lives, ideals of logic and reasoning that turn suicide into an admirable and philosophical act. When it is revealed that this note is not the real reason for his suicide, this deflates how admirable it was in the eyes of the boys.

Email

Email is an ironic symbol, as throughout Tony's life he has struggled with communication in general, be it with his parents, friends and especially Veronica. Therefore, it is amusing that email makes it so simple and easy for him to reach her, someone so mysterious and aloof in his eyes. He even admits the benefits of the email over those of the letter.

The 500 Pound Gift

This willed gift from Sarah Ford, or "Blood Money", as Veronica puts it, symbolizes Sarah's sorrow and gratitude to Tony for having met and then incidentally caused the death of his friend. It symbolizes the guilt and inability to assuage that guilt, as her only option is to send money and a note to the one friend she knows of Adrian's.

Settings

Chislehurst

This is the location of one of Tony's strongest memories regarding his relationship with Veronica. It is her hometown, the one that he visited for a weekend about six months into their relationship and received a false tour from her father. It's not a town that is a particularly pleasant memory for the narrator, but it gives a good viewpoint as to the near upper-class status of the Ford family in terms of their wealth. It is also the only time the reader has an opportunity to view the Ford family dynamic, as it is clear that the mother is very much separated from her husband and children.

William IV Pub

As a location this pub is not all that interesting or remarkable, but what happens inside is. The first time Tony goes there to find Adrian Ford is when he realizes that he is Adrian's son, and assumes also Veronica's son. This realization is important as it redefines the rationale behind Adrian's suicide. The second time Tony goes to the pub he is stopped by Adrian Ford's handler, who drops the shocking fact that Adrian Ford is Sarah's son and not Veronica's. This also clarifies the page from his diary containing the math formula.

Bristol University

This is the location of Tony's college experience and also where he met Veronica Ford. His memories of this setting seem to only recall studying and his time with Veronica. It is the location of his failed attempts at love before Veronica, and a few unrewarding ones after her. Other than that, it was pretty much unremarkable for Tony, he never mentions meeting any other friends or any influential professors at the university.

United States of America

The United States serve as a setting for Tony's detachment from England and his family, as he uses his degree to spend six months doing various odd jobs and travelling. The most important aspect of this setting is his relationship with Annie, the easy-going girl he met and instantly connected with. Annie represents the opposite of Veronica in terms of difficulty for real reward, and Tony has imagined his life if he had stayed with her.

Minsterworth

This is the one aspect of Tony's memory that doesn't originally include Veronica, It is where he watched the Severn bore after midnight as the water rose into a great wave.



This event had an unsettling effect on Tony, as if it was unnatural and impossible, what he was seeing. It is only later that he remembers that Veronica was, in fact, there with him that night; they sat together drinking hot chocolate and discussing how the impossible might not be so impossible.

London

This is the location for the society challenging group of high school friends, the frenetic packed and very English London. It gives the boys a greater sense of independence than if they had gone to school in the countryside or a boarding school, as the large city gives them a greater sense of life. This city is also the location of another important event in the lives of Tony and Veronica, it is where she met his friends and they got the opportunity to judge her, much as Tony was judged by the Ford family. Veronica pays a lot of attention to Adrian, foreshadowing their future relationship and making Tony quite jealous. He is a little insecure of her, and basically asks his friends point blank to state their approval of her.

Themes and Motifs

Death

Death plays a very strong defining role in the plot of this novel as well as being a central theme around which much of the thought of Anthony Webster, the narrator, is centered. There are four specific deaths that each have an impact on the novel, the deaths of Robson and Adrian Finn center around the sub-theme of suicide and the value of human life, while the deaths of Mr. and Mrs. Ford have large effects on the plot, especially regarding the will of Mrs. Sarah Ford.

The theme of death is first introduced when Tony and his friends are in high school, with their classmate Robson's suicide, presumably as a reaction to his girlfriend becoming pregnant. The first clash regarding this theme is whether or not this death was tragic simply because it was the loss of a young human life, full of potential, or if there was something more to a suicide that makes it tragic, the reasons behind it have to be generally well thought out and rationalized. In this way, the author challenges the reader's perception of human life and its inherent value, by having his characters so strongly believe that Robson was an unremarkable individual whose death is really not a loss to humanity. In a society where human life, especially that of an educated young man, is strongly valued this contrast is striking. It becomes even more prevalent when Adrian Finn commits suicide, and his reasons for doing so. He chooses to take the route of a philosopher, stating that he has committed this action because he was not given the option to choose whether or not he wanted to accept life when he was born, he has now decided to reject the gift of life, which is really the only true philosophical response.

What is important to note, in this theme of death, his friends barely concern themselves with the fact that he has died, rather focusing on his reasoning and justification for the action. While the reader would normally feel some kind of remorse for the death of a major character, the author sucks them in to judging the individual as to whether or not he is worthy of such a poetic end.

This is another main aspect of how death is viewed in this novel; it is not viewed in the realistic naturalistic sense that most of humanity views it, it is viewed in the literary sense, where a heroic and dramatic death is almost romantic and something to be sought after as a means to end the adventures of life. This leads to a rather warped point of view regarding death not as part of the natural cycle, but in some sort of competition to be the most epic. This is most apparent in Tony's viewpoint of his own life as passive, unremarkable and not worthy of a novel. He even has an emotional break in which he questions his actions in life and his very attitude. This attitude regarding the worthiness of someone's death causes him to think less of Adrian when he finds out that he killed himself after impregnating Sarah Ford. Again, he is not concerned with the death of his good friend, but with the negative effect on Adrian's intellectual integrity and reputation.



The death of Sarah and her husband are more or less glossed over by both the narrator and Veronica, although it is clear that the death of her father affected Veronica in some way. The importance of Sarah's death, as it adds to the theme, is in her guilt and need to expel that. She feels responsible for the death of Adrian, and decides that the only way in which she can ease herself of this is to involve Tony. In this way, all of the events of the second half of the novel occur as Tony is able to finally work out why she gave him this gift in the first place.

Tony later comes to his own realization regarding life and death, regarding life as a continued series of disappointments and let-downs until one is not just accepting of death, but ready and eager to die. This goes along with the idea that the only way to truly accept death is to be satisfied with life or to be completely disillusioned with it, the latter being far easier to achieve and sustain. It is also interesting to note that all four deaths are more or less self-inflicted, as the two suicides being obviously so, but Mr. Ford dies as a result of his alcoholic nature and Sarah Ford's smoking plays a significant role in her declining health as well. Those two characters strongly follow this motto of lowering the quality of life to the point where death really is a gift that they can accept with ease, a gift far more easy to handle than a life full of responsibility.

Responsibility

Responsibility, with its similar motifs of guilt and blame, plays an essential role in this novel as the way in which characters deal with how the results of their actions defines both their character and the events of the novel. The first example of responsibility/blame takes place in Old Joe Hunt's classroom, where they discuss the Serbian assassin and his role in starting the first world war. The boys all discuss different angles on this case, with the main issue being the constant shifting of blame to the individual to alleviate society, then to society to alleviate the individual and on and on. Adrian is the most enlightened in this subject, stating that it is impossible to view history in an entirely blame-free point of view as it is necessary to know not only the greater context of the event but also the history of the author and his prejudices. On a large scale, it is clear that historians and humanity in general are used to passing the buck in terms of responsibility, and this serves as a basis macro scale model for the responsibilities of the protagonists.

The biggest personal responsibility that comes to light is the failed responsibility of Robson to care for his child. Even more than just simply rejecting the child and choosing to remove himself from its life, he decided to remove himself from life itself. He completely runs away from his responsibilities to the point where he is not even responsible for his own life.

Tony attempts to escape his responsibilities numerous times throughout the novel; the first is when he blames Veronica's insecurity for the breakup, and then proceeds to have sex with her after the breakup, again labeling her as the instigator and bad guy. He then runs away from his life's responsibilities for six months to the States. Furthermore, it can be argued that he runs away from the problems in his marriage by divorcing his wife.

The only time the Tony owns up to his actions are much in the future, when he realizes the effect of the things that he had said to Veronica in the past.

Adrian is completely destroyed by the very notion of responsibility. A once intelligent, logical and truly brilliant individual has been so effected by the responsibility of becoming a father with his ex-girlfriend's mother that he decides to back out of life itself because he simply can't handle it.

This inability for any of these characters to deal with the events of their life without casting blame about or taking 100% of the blame to the grave is a central theme of the novel. The final individual who has issues with guilt is Sarah Ford, who feels responsible for the death of Adrian Finn to the point that she sends Tony money as an apology because she simply does not know what else she can do. In fact, Veronica takes over responsibility for both Sarah and Adrian in raising their son, checking in on him and arranging his care-taking. Although she is viewed incredibly negatively from the viewpoint of the author, in terms of responsibility she is the most mature.

History (Memory)

History and how it is formulated is the central theme of this novel. Not only important are the various events that make up someone's history, or history in general, but also who is writing these events down, what they believe and how well they can remember it. Tony opens his recounting by stating that he can't remember everything in his own life, and admits to an obvious slant to his viewpoints. In fact, he has a very limited and narrow capacity to remember certain things, as evidenced by his piecemeal retelling of his collegiate experience and his lack of details regarding his high school days.

It is important to note that Tony is simply retelling his life, while obviously the author is telling the story of Tony and Veronica, Tony himself is not. He is merely attempting to make some sense of his earlier days which leads him back to Veronica. He even makes crucial and ridiculous mistakes while recounting his own life, mentioning an event that he was certain didn't include Veronica when in fact she was a central component. He also brings to the foreground the issue of age and how that can sometimes change one's perspective towards how they view their own actions, something that Tony realizes when he sees how his actions have effected his friend Adrian and Veronica.

Very early in the novel the author uses Joe Hunt's classroom to discuss the issues with sources and memory regarding formulating accurate accounts. The students use Robson's suicide as an example, stating how they only have rumor and a paltry suicide note to use in determining why he committed this act. This is true for all of history, there are very rarely first hand sources and the sources that are available are often tainted by prejudice and misinformation. Adrian Finn points out, much to his professor's pleasure, that in order to learn the history of an event it is equally necessary to learn the history and background of the historian. Other than Robson's suicide, the boys try to figure out the reasons behind Adrian's parent's divorce, and although these sources are readily



available they are unable to find out anything due to the lack of willingness on Adrian's part.

The entire plot of the second half of the novel revolves around this lack of sources, combined with incomplete memory in formulating the historian. In a way, the reader is the passive observer viewing both the lives of the historical event and the historian trying to find the facts. The event is twofold, the suicide of Adrian Finn and his child and Tony Webster is the historian. Therefore, it is necessary to have the historical background of Tony, his prejudices and defining events which the author presents in chapter one. Chapter two is Tony, with his previously explained history attempting to go through the various sources still living to reach the conclusion.

It is important to note that his best two sources are dead at the time of his search, Adrian from suicide and Sarah from her smoking and dementia. The result is exactly what goes on in determining historical events, but with individuals and relationships. As Tony delves deeper into his own past and how that affects how he views actions, he becomes slightly less partial and more neutral as he reaches the final conclusion, leading him to write this account. Even at the very end, it is still not entirely clear why Adrian committed suicide, whether it was driven only by philosophical reasons or by Sarah's pregnancy. The only reasonable response, to quote Alex, is "It could be both", a frustrating and all too common response in the world of history and memory.

Philosophy

Philosophy plays a major role in the mindsets of Tony and his friends, as it was a large part of their high school education. It was expected that they would have some familiarity with various well known authors and use these authors in their various classes. The reader only gets to see this in their side conversations and history class, but it is very clear the effect that it has on their minds and actions. The ideas that they get from these philosophers has an effect on how they talk and forms a kind of sub-society within the friend group and in their high schools and colleges in general. Tony states that one needs to have more classic literary novels in one's bookshelf to be viewed as a serious individual, or an adult. If this is not the case, one could still be viewed as a child.

There are two real philosophers, meaning individuals familiar with more of these classic literary authors and writings, in the group: Alex and Adrian. Adrian clearly and quickly defines himself as the most educated and intelligent philosophic mind in the group and the high school in general, spouting out incredibly logical responses to his teacher's questions. At first, it seems that his philosophical prowess is the reason for his untimely, tragic and early end, as he had spoken with his friends before about how suicide or the gift of life is the only really true philosophical question, much to the chagrin of Alex. He was clearly interested in the subject, and like the other boys believed that there was a way for suicide to be admirable if it was completed in the correct logical and philosophical contexts. Tony's mom puts it in simpler terms, as she believes that he was simply too intelligent for his own good. This doesn't strike Tony too well, but given the



information they had at the time, logical. They boys all agree with his reasons, as the reason is the most important thing. Although it becomes muddled later on, his philosophy clearly had some effect on his death, as the boys wonder if his tutors feel at all responsible, having been the ones that trained his brain.

Tony even has instances of philosophical conversation, namely with regards to his own life, his fantasies and life itself. He questions his actions and general passivity at one point, challenging his disposition as being cowardly and that he is not even worthy of life because of how he has used his. This is further supported by his lack of ambitious fantasy, being very content to relive his life almost exactly how he had already lived it. This leads him to consider life itself, and its point. He comes to the conclusion that life might simply exist to disappoint the living to the point that they can actually accept death, disillusioning them so much that they greet it with open arms. This interesting take on life seems to be accurate in the lives of many of the characters of the novel, as their lives visibly decline until they choose to die or die for reasons outside of their control.

Relationships

Relationships, how they begin and how they end, is a very important theme in this novel. The first relationships that are mentioned are those of the boys' parents, three of them having stable home family lives and Adrian's parents having divorced prior to them meeting him. Contrary to popular societal belief, he seems to like his parents the most, stating that he loves his mother and respects his father. Colin on the other hand refers to his, and all parents as FB (f*cking bastards) because he believes they curb his intelligent growth and freedom as a individual. The parent/child relationship is an important one, as the narrator discusses their fear of their children having sex, doing drugs and becoming delinquents as being generally over the top and exaggerated, as their lives were not even close to what their parents has suggested.

This relationship, and that of the family in general is also pronounced in Veronica's family dynamic. She seems to get along well with her brother and father, but her mother is at odds with the rest of the family enough so that Tony can recognize this in only a weekend. Her mother even badmouths her to Tony as well as sending him a congratulatory letter after he breaks up with Veronica. This is the source of the damage that Tony applies to Veronica as a way of shifting the blame of their failed relationship from himself to her, and then from her to her family.

The second type of relationship is the romantic one, as the boys all try to find what their parents are so afraid of them discovering, to little success. The first example of a relationship is Robson's horribly failed one. The boys ignore the negative implications of his relationship, choosing to be jealous of the fact that he had sex.

Tony has very little luck or skill with finding female companionship, preferring to let things just happen to him. Veronica stumbles into his way and he thinks she is nice merely because she doesn't run away. This starts a relationship where both individuals

are rigidly holding onto their own ideals, both scared of becoming vulnerable (although Tony opens up far more than Veronica) and full of negativity from Veronica towards Tony. In fact, the only moment of vulnerability on Veronica's end comes when she dances for the first and only time to Tony's pop music. This relationship ends as badly as it was going, with a drunken sexual encounter. The two part as enemies.

Tony has two more meaningful relationships, one with Annie serving as a shallow but incredibly easygoing relationship and his relationship with Margaret, which he glosses over, only really saying that she is not a woman of mystery, and that they still are friends after the divorce. This novel deals more with the failure of a relationship and the actions that the individuals take after the fact, be it suicide or simple detachment. It is important to note that although Tony and Veronica experience some healing of their broken relationship while Tony plays the role of historian, it is not fully resolved by the end of the novel, leading to that unrest that Tony closes with.

Styles

Point of View

This entire novel is an account from the main character and narrator, Anthony "Tony" Webster. Therefore the entire story, including events that he is not associated with, are told from his perspective. The reader finds out things when he does, and not earlier through a third party. In this way, the reader is taken along with the narrator, and their perception and viewpoint of everything is solely through his point of view. There are no instance where the reader is able to know certain events before the narrator, and the only changes in perception or point of view that the reader can achieve is when Tony himself has a realization or change of opinion later in his life. In a way, the narrator is really two completely different characters, young Tony and old Tony, each of them having different insights towards the same events. When the narrator does go into flashbacks, as he does very often, he returns slightly to his old point of view, and realizes and states that he knows he is doing so. Most of his asides, or moments when he is not continuing the plot, he is in conflict with his outdated point of view, one filled with emotion and reaction. Often he is in conflict with his old self, questioning the reasons behind his actions and their effect on others, something he clearly did not consider in the past.

This novel is set up as a kind of historical treasure hunt, as the point of view of Tony is set up prior to the events of current life, which are filled with new and changing perceptions of individuals. He has to deal with actions that he had committed in the past, and then forgot, for example the letter that he wrote debasing Adrian and Veronica and their budding relationship. In his youth, he wrote this letter, sent it, and did not receive a response, assuming that, if everything was not fine, it was at least no longer his problem. An important choice that the author makes is to not show the reader the letter during Tony's retelling of the events leading up to his writing it. This is important because in the context of this novel and how the author has set up the point of view, this choice signifies that Tony himself does not remember his exact terminology, only that he called Veronica damaged. It is only later in his life when Veronica shows him the letter that the reader, along with Tony get to read it for exactly what it was, a scathing, bitter, utterly harsh and unnecessary criticism and response to their alerting him to their relationship. He also remembers, at the same time as the reader obviously, that the postcard he had sent prior to the letter with a false happy message was of a bridge famous for its amount of suicides.

As a result, the reader gets to view the changing point of view of a young boy who grows up to be an old man, not in chronological order like, but through the eyes of a man looking back on his past actions and experiences. As a result, it is a very unique novel that changes distinctly based on the age of the reader. If it is read by a younger individual it is much easier to relate to the younger half of the story, a young man attempting to live life as a unique individual while still somewhat conforming to society's ideals. If it is read by an older individual it is easier to relate to the older Tony and his

insight and additions to his perception of life as a young adult. As a result, the short novel has a remarkable amount of fluidity and adaptability to its audience as well as inside its confines.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is decidedly intellectual, and clearly slanted with a prejudice towards intellectual, logical and philosophical thought. All of the major characters are college educated, and educated in a system that places a large amount of value on philosophy and the ability to draw conclusions from great literary writers. There are really only two characters that have the right, so to speak, to use these philosophers in a way that respects their actual vision, namely Alex and Adrian. Adrian speaks the most eloquently and elevated of the group, whether he is in class or outside of it. It is generally believed that his commitment to the philosophical ideal is what led him to his death, as he believed that he had finally solved the great philosophical question regarding the gift of life.

There is a defined level of judgment from these individuals and those that do not share their intelligence or ideals, namely the parents. The best example of this is when Tony's mom attempts to reach an understanding of Adrian's suicide, coming to the conclusion that he died because he was too intelligent. This goes against everything that Tony has learned in high school and college and also against his own ideals, as at the time he believed that Adrian's suicide was done logically and reasonably. It takes every inch of his willpower to not respond to his mother, as he knew it would only have made him angry.

Through this high philosophical language the author creates a sub-society containing Tony, his friends and Veronica. This society, guided by their high language and intelligence is against society and conventional wisdoms, choosing to use their education and intelligence to reach their own conclusions, guided by the literary ideal rather than real life experiences. This striving to become like the classic novels that they read leads to their downfall in a way, as Veronica tries to be mysterious and withholding, Adrian attempts the perfect suicide and Tony, although he has accomplished a lot in his life and has had periods of happiness, views his life as a passive acceptance of everything that had happened to him rather than an action towards a literary ending. He states that his life is not one that would be written about, as nothing in his life is novelistic. The best example of this attitude is when the boys were younger, and Adrian told them that his parents were divorced. Immediately the others in the group prepared themselves for the start of their literary quest, to find out the reasons for his parents divorce no matter what it takes. Adrian disappoints them by deciding not to go after these facts, choosing to remain content. Interestingly enough, the individual who does follow this is Tony in his search for the truth behind Adrian's suicide and the reasons for his own failed relationship with Veronica.

Structure

This novel is structured in the story within a story format, as the author is telling the story of wizened Anthony Webster, while Tony recounts his own story, from his days as a high school student. The result is a story that is not particularly well told on the part of Tony as he struggles with his memory and prejudice, making some egregious errors along the way. It is told with flashbacks primarily although these flashbacks begin and he does not return often to the present day. He opens his narration in the present tense where he then almost immediately goes back in time to his high school experiences, which he follows chronologically through his college experiences, his backpacking trip in America and his return to Adrian's suicide. The older Tony inserts some insights or changes of perspective throughout this process, but quite sparingly.

The novel continues in this way through the first chapter, and it is only when the second chapter begins that Tony closes his recounting of the past and begins to retell the events of his present life, much less exciting. Once the second chapter starts it is almost entirely in the present tense, which is a little difficult to understand when viewing the meta world of who is writing this part of the account. It is simpler and perhaps more correct to view this second half of the story as being the author's and not Tony's. During this second half there are still some flashbacks, but more relating to what Tony has already written. He corrects some mistakes that he had made as he comes to new realizations regarding his life, the most important connection being that of his night at the Severn Bore, where he had previously stated that this was his one memory of college that didn't include Veronica, only to realize that she was a central aspect of this night.

Towards the middle and second half of the second chapter the action takes over, as it becomes an intense search for truth almost like a thriller. Tony is always missing just one piece of information, one missing piece of the puzzle that Veronica creates. He is unable to solve it himself, and only learns the truth at the very end of the novel, which ends the novel without any resolution between Veronica and himself. The thrill that is created is more of a nagging irritation on the part of the reader, who cannot understand what is missing and why it is so important. Every choice that Tony makes regarding the truth seems logical and correct, only to find out from Veronica that once again he is behind the eight ball. This is a result of the point of view that the author creates, not allowing the reader to get ahead of Tony in his search.

Quotes

And yet it takes only the smallest pleasure or pain to teach us time's malleability. Some emotions speed it up, others slow it down; occasionally, it seems to go missing-until the eventual point when it really does go missing, never to return.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote is important as it sets up the general themes of this novel, having to do with the relationship between time and emotions, how time can heal certain things while at the same time making others harder to bear. It is the insight of an older Tony, one who has had his life experiences and come to a realization as to how they function.

Another detail I remember: the three of us, as a symbol of our bond, used to wear our watches with the face on the inside of the wrist. It was an affectation, of course, but perhaps something more. It made time feel like a personal, even a secret thing. We expected Adrian to note the gesture, and follow suit; but he didn't.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote is important for two reasons, the first is that it is another extension of the time theme, as Tony and his friends half believed that with the watches pointed towards the inside of their wrists, they could make time their own in a way. It is also important in explaining how Adrian was a member of their group, but not a true member as he never conformed to the things that made them a group.

Privately, the three of us examined his case and came up with a theory: that the key to a happy family life was for there not to be a family or at least, not one living together. Having made this analysis, we envied Adrian the more.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote hold value for it's defining of the relationship between the boys and their families, as well as their relationship with Adrian. For Tony and his friends, their parents are a source of negativity, something weighing over them that they do not like or appreciate. For Adrian, although his parents are split up, he loves and respects them. In terms of the relationship between Adrian and the other boys, it is very clear that he has been placed in an exalted position in the group.

Adrian, however, pushed us to believe in the application of thought to life, in the notion that principles should guide actions.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote continues to define the difference between Adrian and Tony's group, in terms of their viewpoint on life. Where the boys believe that the world is inherently chaotic, and one must find a way to subvert the norm, Adrian believes that his principles and values are the source of his actions. This philosophy is almost the

opposite of the other boys, as they refuse to accept the principles that they believe are enforced by society.

That's one of the central problems of history, isn't it sir? The question of subjective versus objective interpretation, the fact that we need to know the history of the historian in order to understand the version that is being put in front of us."

-- Adrian Finn (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote, along with showing Adrian's intellect and his ability to excel in the classroom, is the backbone of the novel. The novel that the reader is reading is narrated by Tony, and so there is a need to have knowledge of Tony's history in order to decide how much of what the reader is reading is unbiased fact, and how much is emotionally slanted. In many ways the reader is placed in a rather ignorant position, only have the perspective of one individual, much like a history student.

But in all other respects we judged that Robson had let us-and serious thinking-down. His action had been unphilosophical, self-indulgent and inartistic: in other words, wrong. As for his suicide note, which according to rumour (Brown again) read "Sorry, Mum," we felt that it had missed a powerful educative opportunity.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote serves as a foreboding one for the future events of the novel, namely Adrian's suicide which, while more or less for similar reasons served a larger philosophical purpose at least at first glance. It is interesting to note that the boys do not fault the act of suicide as inherently wrong, only that the way in which it was committed, sans thought or apparent reason, was wrong. It is interesting to think that, if Robson had left a more in-depth intellectual note, the boys would have perhaps applauded the act.

Real literature was about psychological, emotional and social truth as demonstrated by the actions and reflections of its protagonists; the novel was about character developed over time.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote is Tony speaking about the respective lives of Robson and Adrian, how Robson has nothing of novelistic quality to speak of, while Adrian has a large amount (which again forebodes Adrian's parallel suicide). More than that, this quote is the author attempting to explain what his novel is, very much a mix of those two definitions. While it is clearly a development of Tony's character, this novel does much more in terms of psychology than the average bildungsroman novel.

It had seemed to us philosophically self-evident that suicide was every free person's right; a logical act when faced with terminal illness or senility; a heroic one when faced with torture or the avoidable deaths of others; a glamorous one in the fury of disappointed love (see: Great Literature).

-- Tony Webster (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote spells out what the three reasons for suicide are, in terms of

the boy's understanding. These are the basic, normal and thought of reasons that have a reasonable and logical response from the boys. The importance of this quote is that Adrian's suicide does not fit in with any of these categories.

...that life is a gift bestowed without anyone asking for it; that the thinking person has a philosophical duty to examine both the nature of life and the conditions it comes with; and that if this person decides to renounce the gift no one asks for, it is a moral and human duty to act on the consequences of that decision.

-- Adrian Finn (chapter 1)

Importance: This quote is incredibly important, as it is the suicide note of Adrian Finn, the brilliant intellectual who kills himself apparently because he has decided to reject the gift of life. This comes as a shock to the other characters of the novel, as well as to the reader, as he was the most successful individual by far. It also challenges modern social thought regarding suicide, by regarding it as a logical and sound action, whereas normally society requires a suicide victim to be insane.

That's to say, understanding Adrian's reasons, respecting them, and admiring him. He had a better mind and a more rigorous temperament than me; he thought logically, and then acted on the conclusion of logical thought. Whereas most of us, I suspect, do the opposite: we make an instinctive decision, then build up an infrastructure of reasoning to justify it. And call the result common sense.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 1)

Importance: Again, this quote speaks of the difference between Adrian and the group of friends, but even more so there is a difference between Adrian and humanity in general with regards to his decision making. It is a powerful statement for Tony to make, stating that Adrian might be one of the few truly logical people in the world.

What you fail to do is look ahead, and then imagine yourself looking back from that future point. Learning the new emotions that time brings. Discovering, for example, that as the witnesses to your life diminish, there is less corroboration, and therefore less certainty, as to what you are or have been.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 2)

Importance: Bringing up the theme of time and its effect on emotions and one's viewpoint, Tony gives importance to the fading of memory with age and how humanity fails to realize that when they look back it is not with the same feelings or sentiment.

I rarely ended up fantasizing a markedly different life from the one that has been mine. I don't think this is complacency; it's more likely a lack of imagination, or ambition, or something. I suppose the truth is that, yes, I'm not odd enough not to have done the things I've ended up doing with my life.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 2)

Importance: This quote gives the reader some insight into the personality of the narrator, as even his fantasies are strikingly normal. This also represents how often

when individuals dream of their future life, it often puts personal relationships in the foreground rather than grandiose occupations or ambitions.

But if nostalgia means the powerful recollection of strong emotions-and a regret that such feelings are no longer present in our life-then I plead guilty.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 2)

Importance: This quote is perhaps a mix between the character of Tony and the author's personal voice as the narrator explains nostalgia as an emotion caused by the recollection of missing past emotions. It is a logical and sensible definition of a difficult and not necessarily standard emotion, defined very well by the author/narrator.

For instance: that when we are young and sensitive, we are also at our most hurtful; whereas when the blood begins to slow, when we feel less sharply, when we are more armored and have learnt how to bear hurt, we tread more carefully.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 2)

Importance: The narrator speaks on the difference between youth and old age and how this affects not only actions but how one views motives and perspectives. It should be the opposite, where the harshest blows happen when one can handle it, but unfortunately that is not the case.

Sometimes I think the purpose of life is to reconcile us to its eventual loss by wearing us down, by proving, however long it takes, that life isn't all it's cracked up to be.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 2)

Importance: This slightly nihilistic and pessimistic quote regarding the nature of life and death holds some truth when the inevitability of death is concerned. It makes sense that in order to take death as an acceptable part of the life cycle, one has to be either satisfied or disillusioned with life. The narrator chooses disillusionment as easier to achieve than satisfaction.

This acceptance of less than others had was also due to fear, of course; fear of pregnancy, fear of saying or doing the wrong thing, fear of an overwhelming closeness I couldn't handle.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 2)

Importance: This quote is important in stating that the ability to be satisfied or content with something that is not inherently satisfactory is caused by fear of the unknown, or fear of the negative known.

But this was different, simpler. There was no contradiction-I simply saw it in his face. In the eyes, their colour and expression, and in the cheeks, their pallor and underlying structure. Corroboration came from his height. This was Adrian's son.

-- Tony Webster (chapter 2)

Importance: This quote is vital to the plot of the novel as it is when Tony finally comes



to the realization that the man he had thought to be simply random was in fact Adrian's son, and in Tony's view also Veronica's son, an inference that the reader and Tony alike find out to be false.

So this image of him-this living, dead rebuke to me and the rest of my existence-was now overturned. "First-class degree, first-class suicide," Alex and I had agreed. What sort of Adrian did I have instead? One who had got his girlfriend pregnant, been unable to face the consequences, and had "taken the easy way out," as they used to put it.
-- Tony Webster (chapter 2)

Importance: This realization completely flips not only the viewpoint of Adrian's suicide but also the viewpoint of Adrian's character as an individual. Where he was viewed as different, more intelligent and logical than the others, it turns out he fell in the same way as Robson, an utterly unremarkable individual.

What did I know of life, I who had lived so carefully? Who had neither won nor lost, but just let life happen to him? Who had the usual ambitions and settled all too quickly for them not being realised? Who avoided being hurt and called it a capacity for survival? Who paid his bills, stayed on good terms with everyone as far as possible, for whom ecstasy and despair soon became just words once read in novels? One whose self-rebukes never really inflicted pain?
-- Tony Webster (chapter 2)

Importance: This outpouring of emotion from the narrator is important as it finally affirms Tony's own feelings about his life choices and temperament. He believes himself to be a passive observer to life, rather than an active participant.