

Thirteen Ways of Looking Study Guide

Thirteen Ways of Looking by Colum McCann

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



Contents

Thirteen Ways of Looking Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	4
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 1.....	5
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 2.....	6
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 3.....	8
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 4.....	10
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 5.....	12
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 6.....	14
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 7.....	16
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 8.....	18
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 9.....	19
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 10.....	21
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 11.....	23
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 12.....	25
“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 13.....	26
“What Time is it Now, Where You Are?”.....	28
“Sh’Khol”.....	30
“Treaty”.....	33
Characters.....	36
Symbols and Symbolism.....	39
Settings.....	41
Themes and Motifs.....	42
Styles.....	45
Quotes.....	46



Plot Summary

This guide was created using the following version of this text: McCann, Colum. *Thirteen Ways of Looking*. New York: Random House, 2015. Print (First Hardcover Edition, 2011).

Colum McCann's "Thirteen Ways of Looking" is a short story collection made up of four pieces of short fiction. These works are of varying length and include a variety of different characters.

The first story in the work is the titular "Thirteen Ways of Looking." "Thirteen Ways" is a story about a Jewish American and a former New York Supreme Court Justice, Peter Mendelssohn, who is murdered about half way through the story. The narrative shifts from Peter's point of view before the murder takes place to an unnamed third person narrator who narrates parts of the murder investigation and trial.

Through the third person narrator, readers learn that Peter is murdered by a restaurant employee who works at a restaurant where Peter and his son, Elliot, eat lunch. Pedro, the employee, is angry at Elliot because he had an affair with Pedro's daughter and later fired her. When Peter is walking home, he is attacked (it is possible that Pedro thought that Peter was Elliot) and killed. Within the story, we also learn about Peter's deceased wife Eileen, his daughter, Katya, and the housekeeper that takes care of him in his old age, Sally.

The second story, "What Time is it Now, Where You Are?" is a meta-narrative about a writer writing a New Year's Eve story and about a character within said story. The reader is witness to the development of Sandi, a marine in Afghanistan, and her family back in Toledo. Sandi's character and situation changes over time as the writer crafts the story. Through writing the story, the writer begins to reflect on his own family.

The third story, "Sh'Khol" is about a mother, Rebecca, who loses her deaf and adopted son after giving him a wet-suit for Christmas. In this story, Rebecca deals with the loss of her son and spirals into grief. After some exhaustive searching, the son, Tomas, reappears wearing a man's clothes. Rebecca initially thinks that Tomas had been sexually abused during his disappearance, but a doctor says otherwise. Rebecca then decides to bathe Tomas, and during the bath, it seems that Tomas gets an erection and wishes to bathe himself. It then becomes clear to Rebecca that Tomas is going through puberty and is no longer a little boy.

The final story in the collection, "Treaty," is a story about Beverly, a nun, and her confrontation with a man who had sexually abused her. Years ago, Beverly did missionary work in South America. During the mission, she was captured by right-wing militants who tortured and raped her. More than 30 years later, she sees the man's face on television at a peace talk. She goes to London and confronts the man, who has changed his name. She forces the man to remember what he did to her all those years ago.



“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 1

Summary

The chapter begins with a man’s first person present tense narration. The man is sitting in a bed next to an oxygen tank, and a writing table is visible. The room is full of contemporary art. The man describes himself as a blanket shape on the bed.

Analysis

The main purpose of this chapter is to make the reader ask questions about the narrator’s identity. The reader is given very little details about the narrator himself, but it does seem like he has little mobility, as he does not move throughout the entire chapter. The author uses this strategically as a sort of foreshadowing to the later explanations about the character and his circumstances.

Discussion Question 1

What is the purpose of not revealing the narrator's identity?

Discussion Question 2

What could be the reasons behind the narrator's lack of mobility?

Discussion Question 3

What could be the significance of the writing table?

Vocabulary

duve, embosser, lumpen



“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 2

Summary

The chapter opens with the narrator stating that he was born in the middle of his first argument. The author figures out that he can barely move and theorizes that a character named Sally must have re-tucked him in. This is followed by a series of memories, from the author flying a Curtiss SOC-3 aircraft, having a relationship with a woman with Eileen, and his time as an assistant District Attorney. The man also wrote an unsuccessful book. The man wonders why he can remember the events but not the dates of the events.

Readers soon learn that the man's last name is Mendelssohn; he has dementia and continues to complain about the coldness of his room, as the landlord does not turn on the heat until 5 a.m. His narration continues revealing that he was a District Attorney and Eileen loved James Joyce (they both loved the English language). He moved to the East Side of New York for Eileen, to an apartment that is now worth about \$2.2-2.5 million dollars. Readers learn that Eileen died of lung cancer.

Mendelssohn yells for the woman named Sally and she appears. Mendelssohn learns that he is wearing an adult diaper, but he does not remember when it was put on. Sally attempts to assist him out of bed (he has to use a bar) and the narrator internally complains about her grammar (the narrator cannot remember whether she is from Trinidad or Tabago). She takes the diaper off his creaking body, and he wonders why she calls him Mr. J, as his first name is Peter or Petros. As the diaper comes off, he complains about the sound of Velcro.

Analysis

The first thing the reader learns from this chapter is that the narrator is very unreliable. He has dementia and seems to not be able to remember his own first name, which is odd, since he can remember other important past memories. One of these memories is that of the aircraft he once flew. The author uses this to make the reader wonder if the narrator lost his mobility due to an aircraft crash. This is not cleared up in this chapter.

This chapter is also the first appearance of Mendelssohn's diaper, which symbolizes his old age and loss of bodily functions. Inversely, the Curtiss aircraft also acts as a symbol within the chapter. The plane symbolizes the things that Peter was once able to do, but can no longer do due to his age.

However, a great deal of character development takes place in this chapter. Readers learn that the narrator is quite the crotchety old man, as he complains throughout the majority of the chapter. It is also revealed that Mendelssohn was quite the successful lawyer, as he later became a judge and a local Supreme Court justice. It is also made



clear that Eileen was quite important to Mendelssohn's life. It is implied that her death may be the primary reason that he seems so irritable.

A final thing implied is the nature of Sally's relationship to the narrator. It is slightly implied that the elderly narrator has some sort of attraction towards her, but regardless, we learn that she is possibly his nurse or some sort of medical staff. The main character is quite irritable towards her as well, as she seems to have put a diaper on him. All in all, the majority of his anger seems to derive from his age and the affects that it has on his body and mind.

Discussion Question 1

What does the narrator's last name mean for his identity?

Discussion Question 2

What could the Mendelssohn's flight skills imply?

Discussion Question 3

What other reasons could cause Mendelssohn to be so irritable?

Vocabulary

pouchy, intonation, reservoir



“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 3

Summary

The chapter opens with a description of Mendelssohn’s living room as seen by two security cameras from an anonymous third person narrator. It is stated that the homicide detectives would later find the placement of these cameras suspicious, but they soon realized that Mendelssohn’s son, Elliot, installed them so that he could keep an eye on Sally. The police watched the video and saw Sally cleaning and Mendelssohn reading a book. The two left the frame for a while, and Sally eventually returned and started to read. Eventually, the phone rang and Sally answered. The words on the phone made her fall to her knees in sadness. Finally, the narrator compares looking through the footage to the act of a poet looking for particular wording.

Analysis

This author uses this chapter as a transition from the previous string of chapters narrated by Mendelssohn to some chapters being narrated by Mendelssohn and some narrated by the third person narrator. This is intentional, as in this chapter, it is revealed that Mendelssohn is murdered. Because of this, Mendelssohn cannot narrate the chapters that take place after his death. The chapter also foreshadows to the suspicions around both Sally and Elliot. The placement of the cameras make Elliot seem quite paranoid. However, the author is not told if the paranoia is due to a good reason. The reader may not be privy to information that Elliot knows in regards to Sally. Further suspicion of Sally is derived from the fact that it seems like at some points Mendelssohn was rather rude towards Sally. This could possibly drive her to kill him.

Discussion Question 1

Why might Elliot want to keep an eye on Sally?

Discussion Question 2

What does Sally's reaction imply about the relationship between Mendelssohn and herself?

Discussion Question 3

Is there a possible reason for the non-chronological ordering of the story's chapters?

Vocabulary

maritime, undulation, mantelpiece



“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 4

Summary

This chapter begins with Mendelssohn complaining about the lost art of newspaper folding. He then recalls back to the last week, when he visited his son, Eliot, his third wife, and his step-children. Mendelssohn then makes a snide comment about one of the children’s names, Aldous. Mendelssohn then thinks of his daughter, Katya, who is with her children on a peace mission in Israel.

The chapter then shifts into a series of flashbacks. Mendelssohn remembers his parents, who were not traditional Jews, but spoke Yiddish. They moved from their home country to Dublin, after his father got a job at a medical school. Readers then learn that Mendelssohn’s first name is Peter, and that his future wife, Eileen Daly was his neighbor. Mendelssohn’s family left Dublin for America when he was around 12 years old. On the boat ride over, Peter wrote Eileen letters. This behavior continued all the way through Peter’s time in the U.S. Air Force. During a week off from his duties, he went to Ireland to propose to Eileen.

The chapter then shifts back to the present, where Peter states that he must call his son. He asks Sally about the location of his Blackberry.

Analysis

The author intentionally leaves many holes in this chapter. However, the answers to some of these mysteries can be determined through context clues. Mendelssohn does not clearly state his family’s homeland. However, he does state that one of the cities of the country changed names from Vilnius to Vilma and other names. This city is the capital of Lithuania, revealing that Mendelssohn’s family were Lithuanian Jews.

The author does not say much about the large time period between when Peter left Dublin to when he went back to Ireland to propose to Eileen. All the reader is told is that at some time in between these two particular periods, Peter joined the U.S. Air Force. Readers learn that Peter never really stopped loving Eileen, but we are told very little about what Eileen had done within that time period. It makes the reader question whether Eileen strayed away from Peter’s love like Peter did from hers (it is alluded to that Peter had sex before proposing, and that some of his sexual experiences were from prostitutes).

The author also uses a very interesting literary allusion along with some word play in this chapter. When Mendelssohn comments about his step-grandson’s name, Aldous, he remarks “brave new world, it is not” (29), alluding to Aldous Huxley’s novel titled *Brave New World*. The author, or specifically Mendelssohn, also uses wordplay in regards to Eileen Daly’s name. Mendelssohn uses words like “lean, which rhyme with Eileen. He also repeats words like “daily,” which sound like Eileen’s last name, Daly.



Discussion Question 1

What is the point of not clearly stating Mendelssohn's homeland?

Discussion Question 2

Is there significance regarding Mendelssohn's hiring of prostitutes?

Discussion Question 3

What war does it seem like Mendelssohn fought in?

Vocabulary

broadsheet, mollifying, furtive



“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 5

Summary

The chapter starts with the third person narrator again comparing poets to detectives as they both laboriously find the truth. During the week of Mendelssohn’s murder, the detectives went through 34 days of footage from each of the apartment complex’s eight cameras. The narrator discusses some of the happenings in the footage of the day of the murder in present tense. Peter and Sally enter the apartment complex lobby. Sally is wearing a fur coat and walks with Peter. She briefly disappears, but comes back and puts a hand to Peter’s throat, adjusting his scarf. The footage shows the two speaking to the doorman, Tony. They leave, but the detectives continued watching to see if the criminal returned to the crime scene, it does not seem like he did.

They watch later footage from after the murder. They see Elliot with a black ribbon on his arm. The detectives were unsure about how he got the ribbon. Later, the rest of Mendelssohn’s family appears at the apartment.

Analysis

This chapter acts as an integral part of the story’s rising action. In this chapter, the author does not give the reader any real answers, but instead poses more questions. It is unclear whether Sally put her hand to Peter’s throat in a malicious way or if it was a red herring as the detectives seem to believe. It also forces the reader to wonder why the narrator used so much detail when explaining that Sally and Peter spoke to the doorman.

The two biggest mysteries, however, are the two involving Peter’s family. The detectives focus on the black ribbon that Elliot acquires as if it is a clue. It is possible that this could be a red herring like Sally’s touching of Peter’s throat, but it is not apparent. The black ribbon will appear again, which clarifies that the black ribbon seems to be a symbol of Elliot’s supposed grief. A final mystery is why many of Peter’s family members show up at the crime scene. It is normal practice for extended family to show up at a person’s funeral, not the murder victim’s apartment. This raises questions of whether the family is there for a reason (like a possible will).

Discussion Question 1

Why would the narrator highlight the amount of footage?

Discussion Question 2

What could the detectives be looking for in the lobby?



Discussion Question 3

Who does it seem like the detectives are targeting regarding their investigation?

Vocabulary

laborious, chickenwattle, askew



“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 6

Summary

The chapter begins with Mendelssohn stating that he chooses to walk with a walking stick because he dislikes using a wheelchair. Mendelssohn and Sally begin to walk to the restaurant where Mendelssohn is to have lunch with Elliot. On the walk, Mendelssohn begins to think about the nature of the blood that one inherits and, how he wished he had Italian blood like Tony, the doorman, who was Italian and once tried to read Kant, but could not. The two watch as a vehicle almost hits a bicyclist and Mendelssohn internally comments that New York moves too fast. He also thinks about his days at the Supreme Court, and he theorizes that he was elected because the Democratic Party needed a liberal Jew on the bench. He also thinks about the times when he heard Sally sobbing in her room.

When walking on a crosswalk, a woman in an SUV begins honking her horn at Mendelssohn. Mendelssohn notices that impatient drivers always have New Jersey license plates. They reach the restaurant and Mendelssohn tells Sally that Elliot will walk him home. Mendelssohn then asks Sally whether she likes salmon or steak, as he usually brings her leftovers after the meal. The main reason for the question is because Mendelssohn thought about getting her a meal for herself.

Analysis

One of the main themes of this chapter is what Mendelssohn considers to be the inheritance of blood. Mendelssohn seems to believe that genetic origin has a direct effect on the nature of a person. According to Mendelssohn, this can be seen in his own life, as his Jewish heritage influenced his political leanings and behavior. He also theorizes that a similar correlation can be seen in Sally. He believes that her Trinidadian heritage makes her very warm natured and laid back.

The author also discusses the theme of life moving too quickly. In Mendelssohn's internal monologues, it becomes clear that he feels that all of the events in his life have started and ended far too quickly; from the life of his wife, Eileen, to his time of the county Supreme Court. The author uses a metaphor to exemplify this: the busy road and those who drive on it. Mendelssohn comments that everyone wants to get to their destination as soon as possible and should probably slow down, as everything moves far too fast. Mendelssohn has this knowledge, as he is far older than the drivers like the woman in the SUV, who has not experienced life enough to realize this. In a way, the state of New York within this chapter represents the ways that the world has changed since Peter first arrived in New York.

Mendelssohn also makes a subtle joke about Tony not being able to read Kant. As “can’t” rhymes with Kant (Emmanuel Kant).



Discussion Question 1

Does Mendelssohn make unfair assumptions about Sally?

Discussion Question 2

What is the best way to describe Mendelssohn's view on modern life?

Discussion Question 3

Why might Sally sob in her room?

Vocabulary

zimmerframe, Yenta, injunctions



“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 7

Summary

This chapter returns to a third person narration of the detectives' search for clues. The detectives are looking through the footage provided by the 16 cameras in the restaurant where Mendelssohn and Elliot dined. They watch Mendelssohn and Elliot eat and drink while the workers work. Elliot seems to talk on the phone through much of the lunch. The detectives then make note to check if Mendelssohn's will has changed to include Sally, giving her a motive to kill him. Elliot leaves while Mendelssohn stays and sips his wine. Around the same time, two employees argue over the finances of a soccer betting pool.

Mendelssohn walks outside and a man with a B.C. hat punches him. The detectives then check if Elliot went to Boston College, which he did not. Unfortunately, a scarf and the poor camera angle hides the assailant's identity. The narrator comments that, like how a poem turns the reader into an accomplice, detectives turn into accomplices to the crime that they are investigating. The difference lies in the fact that murders should be fully solved.

Analysis

Like the last chapter narrated by the third person narrator, it raises many questions about who could have killed Mendelssohn. Elliot seems rather disengaged with his father, but as the detectives note, they still cannot rule him out, as sons kill their fathers more than people think. The author includes the detectives' thoughts about Sally killing Mendelssohn if he put her in the will to force the reader to continue to question Sally's motives. At this point, this line of investigation may still be red herring, but it is not yet clear.

The author makes use of a very interesting simile at the end of this chapter. In it, the narrator compares poems and readers to crime and detectives. Reader response literary theory suggests that poems turn their readers into accomplices by having the reader interact with the poem, creating their own response or interpretation. The narrator claims that crime is similar, as the crime forces the detectives to interact with the crime in a similar way. The detectives use their own thoughts and feelings to interact with the crime and create their own theories. The narrator finally discusses the fact that murders should be completely solved unlike poems. This comment is in regards to the multiple possible interpretations of a piece of poetry. However, with crimes, there should only be one interpretation, and in short, one criminal.



Discussion Question 1

What assumptions are the detectives making regarding the people in Mendelssohn's life?

Discussion Question 2

What is the difference between an "unfinished" poetic interpretation and an unfinished murder investigation?

Discussion Question 3

Why do the detectives assume the BC stands for Boston College?

Vocabulary

obscuring, accomplice, intricacies



“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 8

Summary

The narrative returns to Mendelssohn meeting his son, Elliot for lunch. Elliot enters the restaurant while talking on the phone. Mendelssohn comments that it has been a long time since the two have discussed anything but pleasantries. Elliot tells his father that he had an affair with his secretary who is now suing him. Elliott then meets Dandinho, the restaurant’s busboy who always wraps customer’s leftovers in intricate shapes. Dandinho somehow knows Elliot’s investment firm. Mendelssohn then meets his waitress, a young woman named Rosita from Zimbabwe. After a while, Dandinho looks at Elliot in an odd way, and Mendelssohn orders more wine.

Analysis

This chapter serves as character development for Mendelssohn’s son, Elliot. In this chapter, the reader learns that Elliot is quite rich and spoiled and seems to do whatever he wishes. Mendelssohn states that his current ex-lover/secretary is probably not the first subordinate that his son has had an affair with. It is implied that this legal difficulty is rather stressful for Elliot. This chapter leaves the breadcrumbs for a theory that the detectives explore in the next chapter: that Elliot killed or had his father killed for inheritance money in order to clean up his legal issues. Another loose end that this chapter does not tie up is the reason why Dandinho looked at Elliot in such a strange way.

Discussion Question 1

Could Elliot be considered a red herring?

Discussion Question 2

What words can be used to describe Elliot's character?

Discussion Question 3

What does the interaction between Mendelssohn and Rosita say about Peter's attitude towards women?

Vocabulary

roiled-up, garrulous, l'chaim

“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 9

Summary

This chapter consists of the detectives observing Mendelssohn’s funeral, who was not being buried in the traditional way, as he was an atheist or an agnostic while still being somewhat traditionally Jewish. The detectives state that they can learn a lot from observing people at a funeral. Elliot is the first to arrive, he checks his phone and still has the black ribbon pinned to him. Katya arrives next and greets her brother. The restaurant manager, Tony, and Dandinho are all at the funeral for some reason. The detectives theorize that the murder could have been due to the anniversary of one of his judicial cases, but they brush this off. The detectives also tell the reader that Mendelssohn had put some money aside for Sally’s nephew in the will.

The chapter ends with a revelation about the assailant’s hat. They realize that the B.C. does not stand for Boston College, but for Brooklyn Cyclones, a sports team. The detectives realize that they have seen a poster of the Cyclones during the investigation, but they do not reveal any more details.

Analysis

This chapter continues some of the investigative theories from the previous chapter. Elliot does not seem particularly broken up at the funeral. This is rather suspicious. However, much of the detectives’ curiosity lies in the fact that Dandinho is in attendance. Why would the bus boy of the restaurant attend his customer’s funeral? As the detectives state, it could just be that Mendelssohn was one of his best customers, or it could be something more. Finally, the detectives also make it more clear that Sally has more of a motive to kill Mendelssohn. If Sally needed the sum of money for her nephew, she could have killed Mendelssohn to get it.

The chapter ends in an immense cliffhanger. The detectives realize that the B.C. stands for Brooklyn Cyclones, and that they had seen a Cyclones poster during their investigation. However, they do not reveal where they saw this post or who it belonged to. This acts as the cliffhanger for the chapter, as the reader must read on in order to reach the answer.

Discussion Question 1

Why is Dandinho's appearance at the funeral suspicious?

Discussion Question 2

What could the money put aside for Sally's nephew mean for the crime?



Discussion Question 3

Why do the detectives look into Mendelssohn's case history (other than looking for crime anniversaries)?

Vocabulary

agnostic, gangle, retribution



“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 10

Summary

This chapter picks up during the Mendelssohn’s lunch. Peter recalls that many lawyers would give their arguments drunk and do just fine. He also remembers coming home after a long day of work and drinking scotch. After dealing with Elliot’s phone calls for a while, Peter contemplates that he always gravitated towards Katya rather than Elliot, even though she was once a troublesome teenage Marxist; she even forged Peter’s signatures for donations to the Black Panther Party (which the press eventually noticed). She later went to university for Oriental Studies and wrote her thesis on Ptolemy II.

Mendelssohn internally states that he is glad that he is just old and does not have Alzheimer’s. He also thinks about setting more money aside for Sally’s nephew in the will. Peter notices that Dandinho is still staring at Elliot. He asks Elliot about it, and he replies that they have never met. Elliot explains that he has to leave and apologizes. Peter stays, orders Tiramisu and walks to the bathroom. He later sits back down to the table and his desert.

Analysis

The author uses the vast majority of this chapter as character development for the Mendelssohn family. Within Mendelssohn’s internal contemplation, readers learn that Elliot is certainly not the favorite child; even though Katya was rather difficult as a teenager, Mendelssohn still seems to prefer her over his son. This ties into the overlying murder narrative as it gives credence to the possibility that Elliot did actually murder his father out of spite.

Mendelssohn’s health status is clarified in this chapter as well. While his forgetfulness in previous chapters may lead readers to believe that he suffers from Alzheimer’s Disease, Mendelssohn clarifies that this is not the case. It seems Mendelssohn just suffers from the common dementia that elderly people tend to experience.

Discussion Question 1

What does Katya's connection to the Black Panther party say about her character?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the fact that Mendelssohn does not have Alzheimer's?



Discussion Question 3

What is the point of explaining that Dandinho looks at Elliot?

Vocabulary

gimlet, gin-lit, tomfoolery



“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 11

Summary

This chapter takes place in an interrogation room narrated by the third person narrator. The narrator explains that there are two cameras in the room as well as a two-way mirror. Two detectives, a man and a woman, interrogate Pedro Jimenez, the busboy at the restaurant where Elliot and Peter dined. Through the interrogation the detectives learn that Pedro’s wife is deceased and he has a freshly divorced daughter. The detectives reveal that they know the nature of his daughter’s divorce. She worked at Barner Funds and is currently suing the company for wrongful dismissal. The detectives elaborate that Maria, Pedro’s daughter, had an affair with Elliot. Pedro refuses to believe this and states that he did not kill Peter Mendelssohn.

The detectives then press Pedro on the argument that he had with Dandinho. Pedro confirms that it was just about their soccer betting pool. The detectives ask him if he has any other jobs. Pedro states that he is a vendor at a sports stadium. The detectives then inquire if he works at the Brooklyn Cyclones Stadium, and if so, did they give him a uniform. He confirms both of these queries. They ask Pedro if he wears his Cyclones hat to work, he states that he does.

Analysis

This chapter acts as a semi-resolution to the cliffhanger from Chapter 9. In short, we learn the meaning behind the statement that the detectives had run into the subject of the Brooklyn Cyclones during their investigation. For the detectives, this puts Pedro in very high suspicion regarding the murder. However, what the third person narrator does not discuss, is that it still does not seem like Pedro has a true motive to kill Peter, even if Elliot did have an affair with his daughter. It does not make much sense for one to attack the father of someone who has hurt your family. Until this point, it seems like Mendelssohn had not even heard about this lawsuit. It would make more sense to just attack Elliot when he left without his father.

However, there is still one missing detail hinted at the end of Chapter 9. In Chapter 9, the detectives state that they viewed a Brooklyn Cyclones poster at some point during their investigation. The poster does not appear in this chapter. This could be explained in two possible ways. The detectives could have seen the poster prior to the events of this chapter which lead them to ask the Cyclones question to Pedro, or they see the poster after the events of this chapter. The author leaves this intentionally unclear to continue the cliffhanger.

Discussion Question 1

Why would Pedro refuse to believe that his daughter had an affair?



Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of the female, Latino police woman?

Discussion Question 3

Does this chapter explain why Dandinho looked so intensely at Elliot?

Vocabulary

monotone, unadorned, liaison



“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 12

Summary

This chapter takes place after Mendelssohn has left the restaurant and is walking home. Mendelssohn found it odd that Dandinho did not wrap his leftovers properly. He thinks to himself that he should probably call a cab or ask Sally to pick him up, but he decides against it. Mendelssohn realizes that the snow is so bad that his visibility is very impaired. Behind him, someone says Elliot’s name, Mendelssohn turns around and does not see the source. Eventually the speaker becomes visible, he is wearing a hat and has a snarl on his face. Mendelssohn initially thinks the man is Tony, but eventually realizes that this is not the case. The man then punches Mendelssohn.

Analysis

The author’s purpose of this chapter is to show the scene of a murder from another angle. Through this, readers learn that Mendelssohn has as much knowledge about the identity of his assailant as the detectives initially do. As we will learn in the next chapter, even during the trial phase, the identity of the killer is still hazy.

It is also implied through the words spoken by the murderer that his/her intended target is Peter’s son, Elliot. While this is never stated, it is possible that the assailant could not tell the difference between Peter and Elliot due to the low visibility because of the snow. However, this is not very clear.

Discussion Question 1

What could be the reason that Dandinho does not wrap Mendelssohn's food well?

Discussion Question 2

Is it possible that the assailant killed Peter, specifically, on purpose?

Discussion Question 3

Why would Mendelssohn try to walk home by himself?

Vocabulary

chakri, precariously, lopsided



“Thirteen Ways of Looking:” Chapter 13

Summary

The third person begins to narrate what would have been seen by the cameras and onlookers if the murder occurred any other day with different weather. If the weather was better and the cameras were posted at different angles, the detectives could have seen Pedro's face during the murder. If the cameras in the restaurant were placed differently the detectives could have seen Pedro go outside, return, stuff his hat deep in his pocket, and put his wet jacket under others at the coatrack. If the street cameras were placed differently, the detectives may have seen Pedro and Dandinho commute home together and possibly make a pact.

Regardless, Pedro was arrested and charged with the murder. The narrative shifts to the present during the trial. The jury is shown the murder video and a restaurant video showing Pedro possibly warming his hands in the warm sink above the Cyclones poster. Elliot, Rosita, Eagleton (the restaurant manager) all testify and state that they do not know why Mendelssohn was murdered. Maria testifies and says that she did not tell her father, Pedro, about the affair. It is revealed that Dandinho has left the country. It is also revealed that the lawsuit between Maria and Elliot's fund company is about to come to a settlement. After 12 days of testimony the jury reaches a verdict. The chapter and the story then end.

Analysis

This chapter essentially confirms that Pedro is indeed Peter's killer. This is revealed by the narrator stating what the detectives could have seen if things like the cameras and weather were different. It would be rather wasteful for the narrator to tell the reader these things that could have been seen if they did not happen at all. These series of events also could explain why Dandinho leaves the country, as perhaps he knew about the murder or was an accomplice in some way (as suggested by Dandinho's behavior towards Elliot).

However, what is not explained is if Maria really did not tell Pedro about the affair that she had with Elliot. In short, if she did not, Pedro's motive for killing Elliot or Peter becomes much less clear. A wrongful termination is usually not a common motive for a crime such as murder. As the narrator is not privy to the real thoughts and actions of these characters, this remains unclear.

Finally, the author intentionally leaves the story unresolved. The reader never learns the jury's verdict. This could either be a simple intentional cliffhanger or a possible comment that justice does not always end up being completely just.



Discussion Question 1

What could be the reason for Dandinho and Pedro's pact?

Discussion Question 2

Does it seem like Pedro has remorse for his actions?

Discussion Question 3

Does this chapter basically confirm Pedro's guilt?

Vocabulary

rakishly, scaffold, foyer



“What Time is it Now, Where You Are?”

Summary

This short piece of fiction is narrated by a third person narrator. The narration follows the thought process of a writer who is tasked with writing a New Year's Eve Story for a newspaper. In May, he begins to craft the main character, a female Marine named Sandi. Sandi is from South Carolina, and she has a son at home. She is in Afghanistan and is alone taking a nightly post. The author also decides that Sandi is originally from Toledo, Ohio and comments that he is originally from Dublin. He decides that at midnight, Sandi will have access to a satellite phone, so she can call her family. The author briefly thinks about having a sniper fire on her, but decides against it. He also decides that Sandi's son is 14, but since he wrote that Sandi is 26, he decides to change the son, Joel, to actually be Sandi's lover's (Kimberlee) son.

Later, the author decides that Sandi has a hand tattoo with a man's initials, someone who was an old lover. In September, the writer decides that Kimberlee is a university professor, had a son with an ex-lover, and recently had an argument with Sandi about the length of her tour. The author then begins to question himself and the next step of the story. The author wonders whether the story should then follow something like Joel's liaison with his girlfriend at the bleachers or Sandi's ex-lover. He questions whether Joel will tell Sandi about his girlfriend. The author then writes some of the phone conversation between Sandi and Joel, and Sandi asks Joel the titular question. The author wonders how his children will be doing on New Year's Eve. In the final section, the author writes a sentence about a phone ringing multiple times and the way that people look at darkness.

Analysis

A very interesting thing about the form of this short story is that it really does not have any completed narratives. The author within the work is tasked with writing a New Year's Eve story, but the story never actually reaches the New Year's Eve in the story's author's narrative, in fact, the story is not even completed by the piece's end. This may be due to the story's constant diversion from narrative conventions.

The writer within the work even comments on this. His main goal is to write a New Year's story that is not just a New Year's story. The fact that the story takes place on New Year's Eve is not the central theme of the story, it is instead about the relationship between Sandi and her family. This seeps into the narrative of the author as well, as towards the end of the story, he begins to think about his family. Like the last story in this collection, this work ends on a cliffhanger, and we never learn if anyone picked up the phone.



The story can also be interpreted as being a story about the author's creative process. It can be argued that the story is not really about the author nor Sandi, but instead about the process the author goes through in order to create the narrative in which Sandi and the rest of the short story resides. This could be considered evident as we slowly see the elements of the story come together as the author makes decisions about the story's content and message.

The story ends with a comment about how people look at darkness. Here, darkness is being used as a possible symbolize for a variety of things throughout the story. Probably the most evident is the darkness in which Sandi stands in while making the phone call. As the author implies, the darkness could be filled with a sniper or RPG fire, all dangers that Sandi ignores in order to call her family. The aforementioned comment could be stating that people sometimes ignore the darkness in order to accomplish an important goal. The darkness could represent the blankness of the author's mind towards the end of the work. At this point, the author asks many questions and is unsure about the path that the story is going to take. The author cannot decide and there is no concrete path within his mind, the space where the path should be is dark and empty, like one would describe the presence of darkness.

Another symbol in the story is a story itself. The story represents reflections of real life, which is clear due to the fact that the story makes the writer reflect on his children.

Discussion Question 1

What are the usual elements of a New Year's Eve story?

Discussion Question 2

What is the point of using a soldier as the story's main character?

Discussion Question 3

What does the ending say about the writer as a father?

Vocabulary

hipheavy, synthetic, enormity



“Sh’Khol”

Summary

The story begins with a third person narrating telling the reader that the story starts with a mother and son during their first Christmas in Galway, Ireland. The woman, Rebecca bought a wetsuit set for her son, whom was adopted from an eastern European country. Readers learn that Rebecca and her ex-husband, Alan, adopted the boy, Tomas, seven years prior to the start of the story. Thomas is 13 during the story. Readers are also informed that Tomas was completely deaf. Tomas wore the wetsuit all morning while playing video games and doing a physical Charlie Chaplin impression. This made Rebecca proud, as she was a competitive swimmer when she was young, but was put out of commission by a rotator cuff injury.

During the afternoon, Tomas swam too far into the ocean and Rebecca jumped into the water (with her phone) to retrieve him. At night, Rebecca held Tomas while he was having seizures, resulting in Tomas bruising Rebecca’s face. Rebecca then drank some wine and went to sleep. She awoke to find both Tomas and the wetsuit gone. She could not find him around or outside the house. Since she jumped into the water with her phone, she Skyped Alan and told him that Tomas was missing. After this, Rebecca put on her old wetsuit and searched for Tomas.

During her search she thought about her job as a literary translator (Hebrew to English). She was currently translating a book about a set of parents who lost their children, but she was struggling finding a word to describe their situation. The Hebrew word was Sh’Khol which roughly translates to bereavement, but unfortunately, Rebecca could not find an apt English translation. During this thought process, the reader also learns that Rebecca was originally from Dublin.

Rebecca was yanked out of the water by the Coast Guard and told to go back home. At home, she told the police that she wanted to join the search, but they declined her request. While Rebecca sat at home, the police took hair samples and collected some of Tomas’ clothing for the search dogs. The police also questioned her about the mark where Tomas had previously bruised her, she stated that she did not know how it got there. After this, Alan arrived and asked her many questions about the situation, which made Rebecca feel very guilty. She thought back to the story that she was translating and how in it, the father who lost his children collected all of their things in a shipping container and moved it with a crane every day.

Rebecca later joined the searches. When she went back home and saw a group of teenagers, Tomas suddenly appeared. He wore a man’s clothes and was holding the wetsuit. When Rebecca attempted to undress Tomas in the house, Tomas pushed her arms away. This made Rebecca think that Tomas was abused during his disappearance. This caused her to take him to the hospital, and the doctors assured her that Tomas had not been abused. Rebecca also decided that the English word



“shadowed” is the closest translation to “Sh’Khol.” After this, Rebecca decided to bathe Tomas. During the bath, Tomas seemed very uncomfortable and eventually tugged at his shorts and clearly wanted Rebecca to leave. She left acknowledging that Tomas was on his own now.

Analysis

The author seems to use the titular word “Sh’Khol” and the feelings associated with the word as metaphors for each other. Throughout the entire story, Rebecca struggles to find an English translation for the word. However, towards the end of the story she decides that “shadowed” is the most apt translation. There is a reason that Rebecca could not initially find an English word that truly means what “Sh’Khol” means; the reason is that during most of the story, she had never experienced losing her child. Basically, the author is commenting that there are some words or feelings that one just cannot describe until they have experienced the definition themselves.

A symbol used in the story is that of the ocean. Here, the author uses it in a very similar way to the way darkness was used in the previous story, “What Time is it Now, Where You Are?” As stated in the analysis section of that story, one of the things that the author could be symbolizing with darkness is a place where many unknown dangers lurk. However, Rebecca ignores these dangers for the happiness of her son, Tomas. At the beginning of the story, it is made very clear that Rebecca is a very protective parent and tends to set very clear limits for Tomas. She even enforces those limits when she pulls Tomas out of the water during Christmas. In short, she knows the ocean is full of dangers. However, it is very clear if the danger of the ocean is the primary danger to Tomas within the story. Swimming also seems to be a symbol. Swimming was a form of freedom for Rebecca, but this was squashed when she was injured. Letting Tomas swim gave him freedom, which he used to rebel against his mother.

The author leaves Tomas’ experiences during her disappearance very open to interpretation. What the reader does know is that after he returns, he is rather dismissive of his mother, and that upon returning he is wearing a man’s clothes and not his own. Rebecca initially thinks that Tomas was sexually abused, but the doctors state that this is not true. All the reader can infer is that Tomas encountered someone during his disappearance (this may also tie into the darkness symbolism, as to everyone but Tomas, the dangers that he faced are shrouded).

Finally, Rebecca’s acknowledgment at the end of the story regarding that fact that Tomas is on his own now is not explicitly explained. All the reader is privy to is that Tomas tugs at his shorts for some reason and that Rebecca understands why. During this scene, it is implied that the tugging of the shorts is due to an erection, which may have resulted in the shooing of Rebecca due to Tomas’ embarrassment. This seems to be an indicator that Tomas is now going through puberty. This would explain his rather dismissive behavior towards his mother and why he disappeared in the first place. It is entirely possible that Tomas swam without supervision as a rebellious act against his mother’s strict limits. Rebecca states that Tomas is now on his own as male puberty is



generally interpreted as the transition between a boy and an adult, meaning that Rebecca acknowledges that Tomas is now a man and can take care of himself.

Discussion Question 1

Why would Rebecca think that Tomas had been sexually abused?

Discussion Question 2

Does the search for the translation of Sh'Khol parallel the events of the story?

Discussion Question 3

How would the story have been different if a daughter took the place of Tomas?

Vocabulary

bereaved, cetacean, saunter



“Treaty”

Summary

The story opens with a narrator describing a woman (in present tense) being shocked with someone she sees on a television. The television shows men at peace talks, one of them being the woman’s torturer and rapist while she was captured in South America. The woman had been all around the world, but is currently in Long Island, in a house full of other nuns, in order to rest and deal with her mental state. She watches the later broadcast of the news to assure herself about the identity of the man, and she becomes more sure that the man is who she thinks he is. Worried, she burns a hole in the house’s carpet and is scolded by another nun.

The narrative flashes back to Beverly, the main character, escorting women to an abortion clinic at the dismay of protesters and some preachers. She soon became exhausted and was sent to Long Island. The narrative then goes even further back, to the time of her capture and rape. The man was 23-24 and a right-wing military commander. After her capture, she spent five months being moved around the jungle and four weeks in a safe house. The narrative then shifts back to the present. She questions whether the man had become a man of peace, but she doubts it. She cannot sleep and is approached by Sister Anne. Beverly tells Anne that she has to go to London because her brother is sick (she does actually have a brother in London, as the two are originally from Dublin).

When she arrives in London, she attempts to get a cab but struggles to find her brother’s address written on paper within her bag. The cab driver has a vine tattoo that forces her to have a flashback about her time in the jungle and how she constantly prayed from the beginning of her capture to her release. She gets to her brother’s house and sleeps in his double bed with him. Beverly wakes to find that her brother has printed out research about the man for her, while she becomes upset for missing mass. He now goes by the name Euclides Largo, a left-wing politician that fights for the rights of miners (which is odd as he was previously a right-wing commander). She is also told that the peace talks are happening at an Institute, Beverly then walks to the Institute and sits at a sandwich shop across the street.

On the fifth day, Euclides enters the sandwich shop. Beverly stands and tugs at his jacket, telling him that she is an interested observer but not a journalist. It becomes clear that he does not recognize her. She begins unbuttoning her shirt in an attempt to reveal the scars on her breasts where he ripped them open. She keeps calling him by his older name, Carlos, which upsets him. He gets in a car and leaves but immediately comes back. He attempts to converse with Beverly, but she ignores him. He calls her Puta, something he used to call her. He leaves, and Beverly asks the shopkeeper to destroy the shop’s security tapes. The shopkeeper assures her that no one will see the tape.



Analysis

One of the major themes of this short story is faith. Through Beverly's actions and thoughts (which the reader is privy to thanks to the third person narrator) it is shown that Beverly's faith is rather complex. Through her position as a nun, it is implied that she is Catholic, however it becomes clear that Beverly does not follow every tenant of the Catholic faith. For example, in one of the story's many flashbacks, the reader is told that Beverly used to escort women in and out of abortion clinics, and while doing this, she dealt with angry preachers and active protest groups. Even though she seems to be pro-choice, she does not leave the Catholic church and keeps her faith. The complexity of her faith lies in the fact that she has devoted herself to her god, yet strays away from some aspects of her organized religion. Her reasoning for this is not explicitly explained, but it complicates Beverly's character.

Another interesting theme within this story is many changes in power dynamics. Probably the clearest example of this is the change in the power dynamic between Beverly and Carlos (Euclides). During their time in the jungle, Carlos seemed to have complete control over Beverly. However, during the present time within the story, Beverly holds the power. She could easily report Carlos to the authorities or the press, but she does not. She lets go of the situation while Carlos seemingly does not. Towards the end of their interaction, Carlos seems to beg for forgiveness, but Beverly ignores him, not even acknowledging his existence. In short, Beverly has power over Carlos' forgiveness and the situation in general.

Another power dynamic which was previously touched upon is the power dynamic between religion and its clergy. Generally speaking, the clergy of a religion are usually encouraging, if not required, to follow all of the rules of their particular religion. In a way, the religion pushes its ideologies onto its clergy. Beverly does not allow this to happen to her. She incorporates her own ideology into her religion. She is pro-choice, while her religion is not. Most importantly, she does not believe that this does not make her a good nun or Catholic. She is taking control over her own faith and doing what she thinks is right, rather than having someone else tell her what to do.

The author does not answer one of the biggest questions posed within the narrative of the story. Throughout, Beverly wonders if Carlos has actually changed and become a man of peace. The evidence to support this is that he is at a peace summit and seems to be supporting the common people of his country. However, before this, he was a brutal rapist military commander. This poses the interesting idea of whether people can change this drastically. Is it possible for a rapist military commander to repent and become a man of peace? Carlos even seems to want to ask for forgiveness, but the conversation does not proceed, not giving the reader this important information.

Two minor symbols appear in this story. The first is mass, which represents Beverly's faith. It seems that Beverly's faith is very important to her and may have kept her alive during her captivity. This could be the reason that missing mass in London upset her so much. The second symbol is Beverly's scars. The scars represent her ordeal in South



America, an event in the past. Rebecca uses these to bring Carlos back to the past and remember what he did to her.

Discussion Question 1

How does Beverly's faith interact with her trauma?

Discussion Question 2

What non-obvious roles does Beverly's brother play in the story?

Discussion Question 3

Why does the shopkeeper state that no one will see the tape?

Vocabulary

dignitary, pendaja, puta



Characters

Peter Mendelssohn

Peter is the main character of the titular story, "Thirteen Ways of Looking." Peter is an elderly Jewish man, living in New York. Prior to the start of the story, Peter served as an aircraft pilot and later a county supreme court justice.

Peter acts like a stereotypical crotchety elder. He complains about his lack of mobility, the actions of his son, Elliot, and the face-paced nature of everyday life. He lives with his housekeeper, Sally, who has a nephew whom Peter inserted into his will for educational purposes.

Half of "Thirteen Ways of Looking" consists of the investigation of Peter's murder, as he is slain outside of a restaurant where he had lunch with Elliot. It turns out that Peter was murdered by Pedro, who was angry at Elliot for having an affair with his daughter.

Overall, Peter is kind yet frustrated and is killed without logical cause.

Sally

Sally, an immigrant from Tobago, is Peter Mendelssohn's housekeeper. Sally is charged with not only keeping Peter's house in order, but also taking care of him due to his lack of mobility and other physical functions. Sally is protective of Peter and is quite upset when she is told that he was murdered. Sally immediately comes under suspicion for the murder due to the money meant for her nephew in Peter's will. However, after the investigation of Pedro, Sally is cleared.

Elliot Mendelssohn

Elliot is Peter's son. Elliot is quite a rich man who works for a fund organization known as Barner Funds. Even though Katya was clearly the favorite child in the family, Peter still loves him. However, Elliot's actions cause Peter's death. After having an affair with Pedro's daughter and later firing her, the daughter sues Elliot's company. Pedro eventually heard about some of these details and plotted revenge against Elliot. Unfortunately, Pedro ended up killing the wrong Mendelssohn.

Katya Mendelssohn

Little is known of Peter's daughter, Katya. At the time of the story, she is working on a peace project in Israel with her husband and children. Katya is the favorite child in the family, even though she has had quite the rebellious streak.



Eileen Mendelssohn

Eileen is Peter's deceased wife. Even though she is dead during the time of the story, she is always on Peter's mind. It is very clear that Peter loved Eileen very much and is quite distraught without her.

Pedro

Pedro is Peter Mendelssohn's murderer. After hearing about the affair between Elliot and his daughter, and her later firing, Pedro created a vendetta against Elliot. He kills Peter during a snowstorm, which is possibly accidental.

Sandi

Sandi is the main character of the story within the story of "What Time is it Now, Where You Are?" Within the framed story, Sandi is a soldier in Afghanistan. She has a lover in Ohio whom she calls during the time of the New Year. Sandi develops over the story's creation and becomes more and more fleshed out. Many of the background details of this character are left open on purpose in order to portray that the writer is not yet sure about the characters he is creating and what will become of them.

Rebecca

Rebecca is the main character of the story "Sh'Khol." Rebecca, originally from Dublin, lives in Galway with her deaf adopted son, Tomas, whom she and her ex-husband adopted from Eastern Europe. Rebecca works as a Hebrew-to-English translator. During the narrative, after giving Tomas a wetsuit Christmas, Tomas disappears. After this, Rebecca struggles with the grief of losing her child. While trying to find Tomas, she struggles to find the most accurate English translation for the Hebrew word "Sh'Khol."

Tomas

Tomas is Rebecca's adopted son. He was adopted by Rebecca and her ex-husband from an impoverished Eastern European country, Tomas is deaf, which makes the later search for him very difficult. After going missing, Tomas eventually reappears wearing a man's clothes. The details of exactly what happened during his disappearance are not given.

Beverly

Beverly is the main character of the story, "Treaty." She is a nun who served as some sort of missionary in South America. During her time in South America, she is captured by a right-wing commander named Carlos, who tortures and rapes her. After this and

many emotional issues, she is transferred to a home in Long Island where she lives with other nuns. After seeing Carlos' face on television, she decides to confront him in London. She eventually does and seems to successfully shame him.

Carlos

Carlos is the man who raped and tortured Beverly during her time in South America. He eventually seems to become a left-wing labor activist, contrary to his previous ideology. It is unknown whether this transition is genuine or is being used for political gain. He is eventually confronted by Beverly and they have a very tense and awkward interaction.



Symbols and Symbolism

Diaper in "Thirteen Ways of Looking"

In "Thirteen Ways of Looking" the author uses Peter's diaper in order to highlight the effects of his old age. This is evident through Peter's constant acknowledging of it and stating that he used to be "dapper" instead of "diaper."

Curtiss SOC-3 in "Thirteen Ways of Looking"

In "Thirteen Ways of Looking," the Curtiss SOC-3 aircraft represents Peter's past. The fact that he used to fly war aircraft shows that he was once able to do things that most people could not. However, this has changed with his old age.

Black Ribbon in "Thirteen Ways of Looking"

In "Thirteen Ways of Looking," the Black Ribbon that Elliot wears represents the grief that he has over his father's death. It is unknown where he gets this ribbon or if his grief is genuine.

New York City in "Thirteen Ways of Looking"

In "Thirteen Ways of Looking," the story's present New York City symbolizes the external changes that have occurred since Peter was young. Peter explains that New York is now a place of fast movement and rushing bodies.

Stories in "What Time is it Now, Where You Are?"

In "What Time is it Now, Where You Are?" the author uses the idea of stories as a reflection of life. This is evident through the story's writer's reflections about his family while writing the story about Sandi and her family.

Darkness in "What Time is it Now, Where You Are?"

In "What Time is it Now, Where You Are?" the darkness represents the imminent danger that Sandi faces. This is clear through the writer's explanation that he thought about having gun or RPG fire erupt from the darkness.



The Sea in "Sh'Kol"

In "Sh'Kol," like the darkness, the sea represents danger. However, this danger is one that Rebecca cannot see which makes her fear for the safety of Tomas.

Swimming

In "Sh'Khol" swimming symbolizes a certain aspect of freedom. For example, Rebecca used to be an excellent swimmer and once had the ability to go to school in America with a swimming scholarship. This was negated once Rebecca injured herself. In the story, Tomas now has this freedom and uses it to rebel against his mother.

Mass in "Treaty"

In "Treaty," mass represents Beverly's faith. Her faith is important to her as it is implied that she believes that it helped keep her alive during her ordeal in South America. This is exemplified by Rebecca's negative reaction to missing mass in London.

Scars in "Treaty"

In "Treaty," Rebecca's scars represent the past. Rebecca mentions the scars many times and uses them to force Carlos to remember what he did to her. In short, Beverly uses the physical manifestations of the past to make the past clear to Carlos.



Settings

New York City

New York City is the main setting of "Thirteen Ways of Looking." The city is home to the vast majority of the story's characters. However, the city of the story is not the New York that Peter Mendelssohn remembers. According to Peter, the story's New York City has become far too fast paced and hectic. Through Peter's narration readers learn the New York is a diverse city who elected him to the Supreme Court because he was a Liberal Jewish man.

Dublin

Dublin, Ireland is the one-time home of many of the collection's characters. Peter, Eileen, Rebecca, Tomas, and Beverly all lived in Dublin at some point. The city symbolizes the home-place of these characters.

Galway

Galway, Ireland is the main setting of the story "Sh'Khol." Rebecca and Tomas moved to Galway after Rebecca separated from her husband. It is a shore town, which is essential to the nature of Tomas' disappearance.

Afghanistan

Afghanistan is the main setting of the story within the story of "What Time is it Now, Where You Are?". This location was chosen for the story due to the United States military presence in the area. Essentially, the author wanted Sandi to be a soldier, so Afghanistan is one of the most logical places for the story to take place.

Long Island

Long Island is the location to the nun home where Beverly lives for a time. Little is told about the house other than its location and the fact that it was a gift to a convent. The house seems to be used to house struggling nuns.

South America

South America, particularly the jungle, is where Beverly worked as a missionary. The particular part of South America where Pedro and Beverly meet is rather war-torn and poor. South America is a place of trauma for Rebecca and rightly so.



Themes and Motifs

Home

For many of the characters in the stories within this book, the idea of home is not a static or physical location, but instead "home" is a state OR place in which a character feels at most comfortable and safe, mentally and physically.

For Peter Mendelssohn, home is wherever Eileen lived. When Peter's family moved away from Eileen in Dublin, Peter wanted to go back to live and visit her. Even after the couple both moved to New York, the location of Eileen was home. After Eileen died, it is implied that Peter became very uncomfortable in New York even after Sally moved in. A similar representation can be seen in Sandi's story, as she seems to believe that the house of her lover and son is her home.

For other characters, like Beverly and Rebecca, home is a physical place away from possible danger. For Beverly, her home is where she is safe from the tortures and abuses from Carlos. The most clear physical representation of this is the nun's home in Long Island. For Rebecca, home is her house and a certain distance from it into the water. This can be seen when Rebecca begins to panic when Tomas swims too far away from the house.

Frame Story

The motif of the frame story is used in "What Time is it Now, Where You Are?" Essentially, what a frame story is usually when a character is telling a story within the text of the story that the reader is reading. There are many examples of this in nineteenth-century American literature such as Mark Twain's "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" and T.B. Thorpe's "The Big Bear of Arkansas."

The author of "What Time" uses the story that the writer is writing as a frame. In short, readers are hearing the story through the writer and not a direct narration of the events of the story. This creates a double narrative, as the reader is exposed to both the narrative of creating the story as well as the narrative within the story that the writer is writing. Some consider this technique to utilize a meta-narrative.

Loss of Innocence

In the short stories "Sh'Kol" and "Treaty," the author challenges the traditional interpretation of "loss of innocence" being married to the idea of a child's loss of innocence through trauma, sex, or puberty, and instead broadens the idea of "loss of innocence" to any characters' change from an optimistic viewpoint.



The most obvious example of this is Tomas in "Sh'Kol" towards the end of the story, it is heavily implied that Tomas is in the process of going through puberty. Evidence for this lies in Tomas' rebellious nature and the possible erection within the bathtub. Rebecca realizes this and acknowledges that Tomas is no longer a child, implying a loss of innocence.

A more figurative loss of innocence lies in "Treaty." It is implied that before Beverly's ordeal in South America, she was an optimistic woman who very much wanted to help people. However, after she is tortured and raped, part of that attitude is lost and she becomes somewhat mentally broken. Her ordeal directly caused the loss of her previously innocent worldview.

Memory

The theme of memory is used in two distinct ways within the stories of this work, one positive and one negative.

The first use of memory is used within "Thirteen Ways of Looking" in regards to Peter. Peter looks back within his memory to a time when things were better. For example, in the past, Eileen was still alive, New York was a much more comfortable place to live, and he still had access to all of his bodily functions. In short, Peter looks back into his memory and it makes him happy. Of course, he wants the present to be more like the past, but he does seem to enjoy looking back into the past.

The same cannot be said for Beverly in "Treaty." It is implied that for a very long time after her ordeal in South America, she was utterly and completely traumatized. She did not like looking back into the past as it reminded her of the things that happened in South America. However, it becomes clear that by the end of the story, Beverly is no longer traumatized and she confronts the person who traumatized her.

Family

The importance of family and its value in one's life is demonstrated through the main characters in each of the short stories.

The first and most obvious example is Peter Mendelssohn and his family. Regardless of the fact that Peter seems to be rather strained with some of his family, like Elliot, Peter still clearly loves Elliot - even after his incident with Pedro's daughter. In the same story, the most important thing to Sally is her nephew. It is implied that the only reason that she is working for Peter is to provide for her nephew's education.

Family is also important to Rebecca, Sandi, and the writer of "What Time is it Now, Where You Are?" In a way, Tomas is the only real family that Rebecca seems to have and he becomes the most important thing to her. The writer of "What Time" also cares very much for his family, as at the climax of the story he wonders how his children are doing. This is reflected in the writer's character Sandi, as she attempts to call her family

while in a war zone. Family is shown more subtly in "Treaty," as the relationship between Beverly and her brother seem rather important to one another.

Styles

Point of View

Most of the stories ("Treaty," "Sh'Khol," and "What Time") within this collection make use of a semi-omniscient narrator who narrates in present tense. This is clear through the narrator's ability to reveal the thoughts and feelings on the main characters, but not of other minor characters. This type of narration does not occur in "Thirteen Ways of Looking." During half of the chapters, the story is narrated by Peter Mendelssohn in the present tense. In the other half of the chapters, the narration shifts to a third person omniscient narrator. The omniscient nature of the narrator becomes very clear when the narrator explains exactly what Dandinho and Pedro did after work, including making some sort of pact.

Language and Meaning

The language and meaning within the work consists of mostly standard British/Irish English. This is due to the fact that many of the work's characters originate from Dublin, Ireland. However, in "Thirteen Ways of Looking," the language is quite different. There are points in the story where Peter will use Yiddish or Hebrew phrases. He does this because of his family's Jewish heritage.

Structure

As the work is made up of a collection of short stories, each section of the book consists of a different story. The longest story, "Thirteen Ways of Looking," takes up most of the book's length and is split up into 13 chapters. The other stories within the collection are not split up into chapters.



Quotes

I was born in the middle of my very first argument.

-- Peter Mendelssohn ("Thirteen Ways of Looking:" Chapter 1 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote is the first in a series of sentences of Peter explaining what shaped him as a person. In this sentence, he explains that his first law argument "birthed" him.

They will find out that it was Mendelssohn's son, Elliot, who secretly installed the nannycams to keep an eye on Sally.

-- Narrator ("Thirteen Ways of Looking:" Chapter 3 paragraph 5)

Importance: The sentence acts as a form of characterization for Elliot. Through this, we learn that Elliot does not trust Sally for some reason.

Used to be that he'd read the paper cover to cover, minus the sports, then fold out the crossword puzzle, finish it in twenty minutes flat. Not anymore.

-- Peter Mendelssohn ("Thirteen Ways of Looking:" Chapter 4 paragraph 4)

Importance: Here, Peter compares what he can mentally and physically do compared to when he was younger.

The nurse is, by all appearances, well looked after. She wears a large coat with fur on the collar.

-- Narrator ("Thirteen Ways of Looking:" Chapter 5 paragraph 9)

Importance: The unnamed narrator states this to either bring suspicion to Sally (as she may have had Peter killed for money) or to characterize Peter as being kind to Sally.

Curious thing, the blood we inherit.

-- Peter Mendelssohn ("Thirteen Ways of Looking:" Chapter 6 paragraph 6)

Importance: Peter reflects on the blood and traits he inherited from his family and what Katya and Elliot inherited from him.

Oh, how quickly the dark clouds appear. From dapper to diaper.

-- Peter Mendelssohn ("Thirteen Ways of Looking:" Chapter 8 paragraph 10)

Importance: This play on words shows that Peter once considered himself to be quite dapper, but in his old age, he is now simply diaper.

All the beginnings he attempted---scribbled down in notebooks---wrote themselves into the dark.

-- Narrator ("What Time is it Now, Where You Are?" paragraph 3)



Importance: This sentence reveals to the reader that the writer did not know how to start the story, which begins the journey of following the unnamed writer writing Sandi's story.

Where will his own children be this New Year's Eve?

-- Narrator ("What Time is it Now, Where You Are?" paragraph 20)

Importance: This sentence reveals that the story the narrator has written about Sandi has caused him to reflect on his own family life.

He knew the rules. No diving. Stay in the cove. Never get close to the base of the seastack.

-- Narrator ("Sh'Khol" paragraph 23)

Importance: The purpose of this detail is to show that Tomas did know the rules, but broke them intentionally as a possible act of rebellion.

You're on your own now, she said.

-- Rebecca through Narrator ("Sh'Khol" paragraph 133)

Importance: Here, Rebecca realizes that Tomas is no longer a child and lets him bathe himself.

And yet there's something about the man's face---if only for a split second---that sluices a sense of ice along the tunnel of her spine.

-- Narrator ("Treaty" paragraph 5)

Importance: This detail explains that Beverly still has a physical reaction to the thought of Carlos.

It's good, Carlos. Your English.

-- Beverly ("Treaty" paragraph 121)

Importance: Here, Beverly reveals that she knows Euclides' true identity.