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CHARACTERS

9 Mother-Child Sets in the order in which they are introduced

1. “Innes believes he is beholding a perfect rural Madonna, in profile, in a marvellously—he thinks—tight-fitting blue frock, with her baby slumbering a few feet away.” (Alexandra and her sibling)

2. Dorothy and her daughter Sandra/Alexandra/Lexie – ‘late summer in the mid-1950s’

“When her parents heard that Lexie was living with a man, they told her she was dead to them, that she should never contact them again. And so she didn’t. p118

3. Elina Vilkuna (31 yrs old) and her son, to be named Jonah Vilkuna

4. Ted’s ‘mother’ (Margot Kent) and Ted – a mention p.18

5. Gloria, Innes Kent’s wife and her daughter, Margot Kent

Lexie to Felix P288-289:

‘I find it hard,’ she began, very slowly, ‘to say which part of that speech is more odious to me.Perhaps it’s the thought of my having any connection whatsoever to those evil, manipulative, devilish...’ she searched for the right word, before she remembered? ...maenads that strikes such sheer horror into my soul.”

6. Ferdinanda and her son Innes Kent

7. Lexie Sinclair and her son Theodore Innes Roffe/Theo

8. Elina and her mother whom she calls *Aiti* – memories of her childhood, her mother’s house, the phone chat p. 202

9. Geraldine Roffe, Felix’s mother, Theo’s grandmother – “Theo adores her”

Fathers in the order in which they are introduced

1. Innes Kent – Margot's non-biological 'father'
2. Alexandra's doctor father — a mention
3. Ted /Theodore/Theo Roffe (35 yrs old) – Jonah's father
4. Innes's father – "His father, he tells her, was English, but his mother was a mestizo from colonial Chile" – his father died in a motor accident when Innes was two. Do you remember him at all, Lexie asks, and Innes says, no, he does not.
5. Charles the lawyer – Margot's biological father
6. Felix Roffe, Theodore's father
7. Robert Lowe – p313– Robert rocks [Theo] back and forth, sings a song he used to sing to his own children a long time ago, his voice cracked and hoarse. (While Lexie is losing her battle against the current in the waters off the Dorset coast.)

Friends in the order in which they are introduced

1. Suki
2. *James Simkin – Simmy – "his family owns half of Dorset"
3. Hannah – Lexie's rooming house neighbour
4. *Daphne
5. *Laurence and David
6. Amelie

Other Characters

1. Mrs. Collins, Lexie's landlady
2. Oscar, Elina's boyfriend before she met Ted
3. Yvette, Ted's girlfriend before Elina
4. Mrs Gallo, neighbour who minds Theo
5. Eugene Fitzgerald, the "greatest living" sculptor – lives in Ireland
6. *Robert Lowe – Fitzgerald's biographer and Lexie's last boyfriend. Lowe is married to Marie, his invalid wife whom he has no desire to leave.
7. Ted's cousins Clara and Harriet

SETTINGS for the 2 stories

Lexie's story – mid-1950's in Britain

The border between Devon and Cornwall – The Sinclair family's house

London: Kentish Town/ Innes's flat on Haverstock Hill

Elsewhere Magazine, Bayton Street, Soho, London W1

Innes had been 17 when the war started, ...his mother Ferdinanda had refused to leave the house in Myddleton Square, even though air raid sirens were sounding all round them. ... When Innes returns from the war Gloria is occupying the whole house. "Ferdinanda was gone, put into a home for the elderly run by the church. P145

mid-60s

Lexie meets Felix when she turns 30 yrs, 4 years since Innes died, 9 yrs since she had escaped Devon for London

Paris – Lexie reports on the student riots

Fleet Street – Daily Courier:

Lexie's basement bedsit in Holborn

Two-roomed flat in Chalk Farm

The bottom half of a house in Dartmouth Park (after Theo is born by selling the Giacometti sketch)

Lexie drowns off the Dorset coast in late August – Lyme Regis

Ted and Elina's story

Ted and Elina's home in Gospel Oak near the Heath/near Parliament Hill – Ted works in Soho

Ted's parents' house in Myddleton Square, London

The Lagoon Café Bar – the old *Elsewhere* offices in Soho – p164 “It is early in the afternoon, just past the lunchtime rush. And sitting at the table where Lexie's desk used to be is Ted. He comes here quite a bit. The editing house is just around the corner, on Wardour Street.”

Visit to the National Portrait Gallery

Visit to Lyme Regis

PLOT: The revelation of Theo's family tree and the hope this offers for Theo's resurrection.

Innes Kent _____|_____

m. **Gloria Kent**– [Charles] |

|

Margot Kent — m. **Felix Roffe** — **Lexie Sinclair**

|

Theodore/Ted/Theo Roffe — m. **Elina Vilkuna**

|

Jonah Vilkuna

Ted's Memories and Dreams

Ted's flashbacks

Ted's bizzy's

The Lagoon Café Bar – the old *Elsewhere* offices in Soho – p164 “It is early in the afternoon, just past the lunchtime rush. And sitting at the table where Lexie's desk used to be is Ted. He comes here quite a bit. The editing house is just around the corner, on Wardour Street.”

p. 173 Simmy takes Ted and Elina with Jonah to the John Deakin photo show at the **National Portrait Gallery** and there they see “a portrait of a man and woman. The man has his arm lightly about the woman's shoulders and with his other hand he holds a cigarette. She is in black, a scarf around her hair, the ends of which trail over her shoulder. The man is looking sideways at her but she looks out, with a candid, assessing gaze, at the viewer. The sign on the wall behind them reads ‘elsewhere’, the end of the word obliterated by the man's head.”

p.174 ...in the café in the basement at the Portrait Gallery: “without warning, something rears its head. The recollection of himself as a child on a woman's knee. The woman is wearing a red dress of slightly slippery material and it is tricky for him to stay in position: he has to wind his arm into hers and this makes the woman laugh....This keeps happening, Ted finds, and more since Jonah was born. Flashes of something else, somewhere else, like radio static or interference, voices cutting in from a distant foreign station. He can barely hear them but they are there. A hint, a glimpse, a blurred image, like a poster seen from the window of a speeding train. It must be, he decides, that having a baby leads you to relive your own infancy. ...Are you OK? Simmy is asking...I'm fine.’ Ted stands...I'm going to the shop. He's suddenly remembered that there is a postcard he wants from the exhibition. [p176]

p.206 ‘God’ he whispers. I had this dream—a really horrible dream. That I was here in the house and I could hear someone, somewhere, talking. I was looking everywhere for you...then I came into our bedroom and you were sitting in the chair, with your back to me, with Jonah in your arms. And I put my hand on your shoulder and when you turned your head, it wasn't you at all, it was someone else, it was—‘ He rubs a hand over his face, ‘It was horrible. I got such a fright that I woke up.’...’Hmm,’ Ted says, scowling up at the ceiling, ‘but this was so real, as if—“

p.245 Here he is, back in his life. The weeds, the shears, the garden, Elina and Jonah somewhere behind him. But at the same time he is also a little boy, crouching at a lawn edge with a green plastic rake in his hand and people behind him. His father, sitting oin a deck-chair, and someone else, just out of sight: the hem of a long red dress and a bare foot, the nails painted purple, shoes lying discarded in the grass. His father is lighting a cigarette and his is speaking, his lips clenched around it. I never sad anything of the sort. There is a sudden movement and theo other person has got out of their deck-chair. Ted sees the red of her dress as it swirls about her ankles. ...It's out of the question, she says. And then she leaves.

P292 Ted at the **Blue Lagoon Café/bar**: He is early today. The waiter is still mopping, dipping the strings of the mop into the grey, greasy water, then slopping their tangled mess out on the floor. Ted watches the mop strings as they swish...And without warning he is suffused with the feeling he keeps getting—that something he's never seen before is oddly closely familiar. Importantly familiar. A mop swishing back and forth on a bare, wooden floor. Why should this sight fill him with such a sense of significance, of meaning? As if he believes it could tell him

something. Isn't that the first sign of madness, seeing signs in everything, believing mundane things and acts are imbued with messages?

Ted collapses on the **harbour wall in Lyme Regis**:

p. 305 'The thing is, Ted interrupts, ...none of it adds up. I just know that everyone's been lying. About everything. I see that now. And I don't know where to turn, who to ask because everything is deception, and I can't trust anyone. Do you see? He looks at her or near her or through her, "Do you see that?'

p319 Now old chap, Felix says, getting to his feet. I'm sorry, of course I am. Perhaps we were wrong—to hide it from you, I mean—but we—

You're sorry? Ted repeats, turning to his father. *You're sorry?* For lying to me my entire life? For passing off someone else as my mother? For pretending this never happened? It's—it's inhumane, he gets out, in a hoarse whisper. You realise that? I mean, how did you manage it? I was three, for God's sake. How did you do it?

We... Felix's shoulders slump. The thing is, you sort of ...forgot.

I forgot? Ted hisses. What do you mean, I forgot? It's not something you forget—seeing your mother drown. What are you talking about?

It sounds odd, I know. But you came back here and —

P 325...And then without looking at her, he says, Are you my mother?

The word has an extraordinary effect on Margot. It seems to fall all the way through her, like a coin in a slot-machine. It seems to unpick the threads of something that has been knotted at the very core of her for a long time now. ...Margot swallows. She licks her lips again. She takes his hand in hers. Yes, she says quickly, I am.

THEMES

Motherhood – 'From the Frontline of Motherhood' – From The Virgin and the Christ Child image to Nude Descending the Staircase

The nature of a mother's love for her child/The nature of a child's love for his/her mother

Heterosexual love

Art: The della Francesca madonna morphs before his very eyes into a version of Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*. What a sight! The woman coming towards him down the raised lawn echoes Duchamp's effect exactly! Her anger seems to spike the air. P7

Water as life sustaining/Water as destructive force

Writing – to record, to memorialize, to communicate with future generations

The underworld – maenads – the unbeatable current – infidelity

The passage of time and the fluidity/ indelibility of memory

Dreams

Background

Maps of Meaning: The Architecture of Belief by Dr. Jordan Peterson

I started writing *Maps of Meaning* in 1985. I was very upset by the processes of the cold war - by the superhuman energy of the arms race, by the terrible ideologically-motivated battle taking place on the world stage. Other aspects of political and social behavior and conception appeared equally mysterious and distressing to me. I could not understand what forces drove the Nazis, the Stalinists, or the Khmer Rouge. I could not make sense of the human propensity for belief-inspired violence. I had frightening, re-occurring nightmares about the possible destruction of the world. I decided, in consequence, that I would devote myself to the alleviation of my ignorance. I have attempted to do so, ever since - while finishing my doctorate at McGill University, while serving as a faculty member at Harvard and the University of Toronto.

I had no idea where my search would lead me. I came over the course of a decade and a half to understand the meanings of many things that had been entirely hidden from me - things that I had cast away, stupidly, as of little worth. I came to realize that ideologies had a narrative structure - that they were stories, in a word - and that the emotional stability of individuals depended upon the integrity of their stories. I came to realize that stories had a religious substructure (or, to put it another way, that well-constructed stories had a nature so compelling that they gathered religious behaviors and attitudes around them, as a matter of course). I understood, finally, that the world that stories describe is not the objective world, but the world of value - and that it is in this world that we live, first and foremost.

This all may appear as something far removed from the original problem, but that is true only in appearance. I have learned what it is that makes the tyrant, and how attractive it can be to participate in that process. I have come to understand what it is that our stories protect us from, and why we will do anything to maintain their stability. I now realize how it can be that our religious mythologies are true, and why that truth places a virtually intolerable burden of responsibility on the individual. I know now why rejection of such responsibility ensures that the unknown will manifest a demonic face, and why those who shrink from their potential seek revenge wherever they can find it. I learned what I wanted to know - at least enough so that my nightmares disappeared.

It is my hope that the transmission of this knowledge will help those who receive it withstand the forces of ideological possession, and that this will in consequence aid in some small way the establishment of a long and conscious peace.

Dorothy

Saint Dorothy (Dorothea, Dora; Italian: Santa Dorotea, Spanish: Santa Dorotea; died ca. 311) is a 4th-century virgin martyr. Evidence for her actual historical existence is very sparse. She is called a martyr of the Diocletianic Persecution, although her death occurred after the resignation of Diocletian himself. She and Theophilus are mentioned in the Roman Martyrology as martyrs of Caesarea in Cappadocia, with a feast day on 6 February. She is thus officially recognized as a saint, but because there is scarcely any non-legendary knowledge about her, she is no longer (since 1969) included in the General Roman Calendar.

Virgin and martyr, suffered during the persecution of Diocletian, 6 February, 311, at Caesarea in Cappadocia. She was brought before the prefect Sappricius, tried, tortured, and sentenced to death.

On her way to the place of execution the pagan lawyer Theophilus said to her in mockery: "Bride of Christ, send me some fruits from your bridegroom's garden." Before she was executed, she sent him, by a six-year-old boy, her headdress which was found to be filled with a heavenly fragrance of roses and fruits. Theophilus at once confessed himself a Christian, was put on the rack, and suffered death. This is the oldest version of the legend, which was later variously enlarged. She is regarded as the patroness of gardeners. On her feast (February 6) trees are blessed in some places. She is also patroness of brewers, brides, florists, gardeners, midwives, newlyweds and Pescia, Italy

Iconography: Dorothea is represented with an angel and a wreath of flowers. She is often depicted as a maiden carrying a basket of fruit and flowers, especially roses; also depicted wearing a crown of flowers (such as roses); depicted surrounded by stars as she kneels before the executioner; crowned with palm and flower basket, surrounded by stars; depicted in an orchard with the Christ-child in an apple tree; leading the Christ-child by the hand; veiled with flowers in her lap; depicted holding apples from heaven on a branch

Alexandra

Feminine form of ALEXANDER. In Greek mythology this was a Mycenaean epithet of the goddess Hera, and an alternate name of Cassandra. It was borne by several early Christian saints, and also by the wife of Nicholas II, the last czar of Russia. **Hera** – Uncertain meaning, possibly from either Greek ἥρως (heros) "hero, warrior"; ὥρα (hora) "period of time"; or ἄιρεω (haireo) "to be chosen". In Greek mythology Hera was the queen of the gods, the sister and wife of Zeus. She presided over marriage and childbirth.

Innes

an Anglicization of the Scottish Gaelic name Aonghas (Angus). In Irish myth, Aonghus was the god of love and youth.

Elina

a name for girls of Greek derivation, — means "sun ray". Elina is an alternate form of Elena (Greek): Italian and Spanish variation of Helen.

Margot

a girls' name — roots in Greek and French — means "pearl". Margot is a variant form of Margaret (Greek): a saint's name. Margot is also a variant of Margo (French).

Felix

a male given name and surname that stems from Latin (*felix, felicitis*) and means "lucky", "favored by luck" or "the lucky one". Its female form is Felicity (English), Felicitas or Felizitas (in German-speaking regions).

Theo

The name Theo is of Greek origin. The meaning of Theo is "G-d's gift". It is also of French origin, where its meaning is "gift of G-d". Theo is generally used as a boy's name. Theo is quite a luminous name and a welcome find. A name fit for a child full of a positive vibe and spirit, a little pioneer.

P282 “It means, “God’s gift,” he (Robert Lowe) said. What does? Lexie was distracted, straining her eyes into the traffic, searching for an orange light. “His name. Theodore.” She looked at him, amazed. “Does it?” “Yes. From the Greek *theos*, meaning God, and *doron*, meaning gift.” “I had no idea. God’s gift. You’re the only person in the world who’d know that.”

Jonah

Wikipedia

Jonah or Jonas (Hebrew: יוֹנָתַן, Modern Yona, Tiberian Yōnā; dove; Arabic: يونس Yūnus, Yūnis or يونان Yūnān ; Latin: Ionas) is the name given in the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh/Old Testament) to a prophet of the northern kingdom of Israel in about the 8th century BC. He is the eponymous central figure in the Book of Jonah, famous for being swallowed by a fish. The biblical narrative of Jonah is repeated, with a few notable differences, in the Quran.

Jonah is the son of Amittai,^[1] and he appears in 2 Kings^[2] as a prophet from Gath-Hepher, a few miles north of Nazareth. He is therein described as being active during the reign of the second King Jeroboam (c.786–746 BC), and as predicting that Jeroboam will recover certain lost territories.

Jonah is the central character in the Book of Jonah. Commanded by God to go to the city of Nineveh to prophesy against it "for their great wickedness is come up before me,"^[3] Jonah instead seeks to flee from "the presence of the Lord" by going to Jaffa, identified as Joppa or Joppe, and sailing to Tarshish, which, geographically, is in the opposite direction. A huge storm arises and the sailors, realizing that it is no ordinary storm, cast lots and discover that Jonah is to blame. Jonah admits this and states that if he is thrown overboard, the storm will cease. The sailors try to dump as much cargo as possible before giving up, but feel forced to throw him overboard, at which point the sea calms. The sailors then offer sacrifices to God. Jonah is miraculously saved by being swallowed by a large fish in whose belly he spends three days and three nights.^[4] While in the great fish, Jonah prays to God in his affliction and commits to thanksgiving and to paying what he has vowed. God commands the fish to spew Jonah out.

God again commands Jonah to visit Nineveh and prophesy to its inhabitants. This time he goes and enters the city, crying, "In forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown." After Jonah has walked across Nineveh, the people of Nineveh begin to believe his word and proclaim a fast. The king of Nineveh puts on sackcloth and sits in ashes, making a proclamation which decrees fasting, sackcloth, prayer, and repentance. God sees their repentant hearts and spares the city at that time.^[5] The entire city is humbled and broken with the people (and even the animals) in sackcloth and ashes. Even the king comes off his throne to repent.

Displeased by this, Jonah refers to his earlier flight to Tarshish while asserting that, since God is merciful, it was inevitable that God would turn from the threatened calamities. He then leaves the city and makes himself a shelter, waiting to see whether or not the city will be destroyed. God causes a plant (in Hebrew a Kikayon) to grow over Jonah's shelter to give him some shade from the sun. Later, God causes a worm to bite the plant's root and it withers. Jonah, now being exposed to the full force of the sun, becomes faint and desires that God take him out of the world.

And God said to Jonah: "Art thou greatly angry for the Kikayon?" And he said: "I am greatly angry, even unto death."

And the LORD said: "Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow, which came up in a night, and perished in a night; and should not I have pity on Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also much cattle?"

— Book of Jonah, chapter 4, verses 9-11^[6]

In the New Testament, Jonah is mentioned in Matthew 12:38–41, 16:4 and Luke 11:29–32. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus makes a reference to Jonah when he is asked for a miraculous sign by the Pharisees and teachers of the Law. Jesus says that the sign will be the sign of Jonah. Jesus

implies that Jonah's restoration after three days inside the great fish prefigures His own resurrection.

³⁹He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here."

— Gospel of Matthew 12:39-41 (New International Version [NIV] ed.).^[7]

Jonah is regarded as a saint by a number of Christian denominations. He is commemorated as a prophet in the Calendar of Saints of the Missouri Synod of the Lutheran Church on September 22. On the Eastern Orthodox liturgical calendar his feast day is also September 22 (for those churches which follow the traditional Julian calendar; September 22 currently falls in October on the modern Gregorian calendar). In the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Book of Jonah is chanted in its entirety at the Divine Liturgy on Holy Saturday before Pascha. He is commemorated as one of the Twelve Minor Prophets in the Calendar of saints of the Armenian Apostolic Church on July 31. Jonah's mission to the Ninevites is commemorated by the Fast of Nineveh in Syriac and Oriental Orthodox Churches.^[8]

The apocryphal Lives of the Prophets, which may be Jewish or Christian in origin, offers further biographical details about Jonah.

Jonah in Judaism

The Book of Jonah (Yonah יוֹנָה) is one of the twelve minor prophets included in the Tanakh. According to tradition, Jonah was the boy brought back to life by Elijah the prophet, and hence shares many of his characteristics (particularly his desire for "strict judgment"). The Book of Jonah is read every year, in its original Hebrew and in its entirety, on Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement, as the Haftarah at the afternoon mincha prayer.

Teshuva – the ability to repent and be forgiven by God – is a prominent idea in Jewish thought. This concept is developed in the Book of Jonah: Jonah, the son of truth (the name of his father "Amitai" in Hebrew means truth), refuses to ask the people of Nineveh to repent. He seeks the truth only, and not forgiveness. When forced to go, his call is heard loud and clear. The people of Nineveh repent ecstatically, "fasting, including the sheep," and the Jewish scripts are critical of this.^[9] The Book of Jonah also highlights the sometimes unstable relationship between two religious needs: comfort and truth.

Assessment (3,000 words)

The theme of characters struggling to find purpose and meaning in the modern world has dominated many of the novels we have read this past year. Every 'world' has a cosmology. The cosmology of the modern world outlined in the literature of today is a rubble of fragments of the religious beliefs and political –isms that were already well-shredded and hardly even smoldering through to at least the first half of the 20th century. Today we are searching for the 'green shoots' in this rubble that could at least herald more coherency if not some sort of reconstruction, and the stories we are reading are about this search. Put another way we are searching for the baby that may have been tossed out with the muddy bathwater of the destruction wrought by the revolutions and wars and cultural revolutions of the late 19th and early through to mid-20th centuries. This is not to overlook the many years of peace and prosperity we have enjoyed resulting from lessons learned, the advances made, and the myriad benefits of the technological revolution we are living through. In fact many of these are the legacy of this baby!

This 'modern world in and of literature', however, is about our value systems and where we find ourselves spiritually because, despite the many objectively measurable advances of modernity, the essential challenges of human existence remain, and to these we seem to have fewer answers and more distant sanctuaries to which there are few clear maps. This modern world is a place in which a transcendent divinity has been almost wholly discredited and discarded: without God death is finality and birth only the potential for further burden on an already threatened planet. 'Why am I here' has never confronted a more unresponsive silence. The heralded replacement of divine transcendence through human artistic creation seems to have degenerated into artifacts crafted with no need to regard rules or to communicate meaning, with their value assigned by the reigning tastemakers: songs without words, paintings for the purpose of individual expression and individual interpretation. Forgive my clichéd metaphors. In terms of the rich and fertile metaphors developed by Maggie O'Farrell in *The Hand that First Held Mine*, however, we are in a garden where, at first glance the 'perfect rural madonna' shatters before our eyes into "a version of Marcel Duchamps' *Nude Descending a Staircase*. Every insight the carefully and tightly interwoven plot in this novel offers into the search for meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in the modern world devolves from the dissolve of these two seminal works of art into one another.

While in France in September I visited the Louvre, and Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, and, in Strasbourg, the Fine Arts Museum in the Palais Rohan and the magnificent Cathedral next door. As you all know from your own gallery and church visits, the image of the Madonna and Christ Child is ubiquitous filling the first painting galleries and the various niches and chapels or indeed dominating the whole church as in Paris. In tempera, oil, marble and limestone, in stained glass, and tapestry —over and over one sees this same image in artifacts dating from early mediaeval times right through...well... even to today. The question begs asking: What has prompted for a thousand years at least, generation after generation of artists and artisans to rework this image, and why do they think there will be an audience for it? One answer—now almost incomprehensible to us— is because it was an expression of their own veneration and thankfulness. These works were selfless offerings to God in praise and thanksgiving. Indeed, any identification provided was usually about installation not self-promotion. Another answer —again almost incomprehensible today, is that this particular subject was the most concentrated iconographic expression of the complex meaning of Christianity that has ever been devised. In the adoring but carefully composed and often sad face of the Madonna contemplating her infant, in the curve of her hands as she cradles him or offers him her breast or some other symbolic gift of sustenance, in the often unbaby-like face of the infant variously fixated on his mother's face or some other manifestation of a heavenly presence, we see our own origins and destiny and how we are linked to our progenitors, our own offspring, to one another, and to God. This one simple image answers why we are here, how life's inevitable suffering can be endured, and where we go when earthly life ends. It is the primal subject of Western art. So it is no wonder that it has spoken for centuries, no wonder indeed that even now in our age of non-faith it remains decipherable.

In the nine sets of mother/child portraits in this novel, Maggie O'Farrell has shown us the degree to which modernity has 'worked over' the original Christian vision. As a result, in this story, construction of the 'family tree' or more accurately 'tree' of affiliation between the main characters—what should be a simple exercise—is complicated enough to be the plot of the story, complicated enough to require a plot or story-telling structure based on two regularly alternating timelines in which some of the key characters are the same, albeit disguised by age, by role, and by motivation. These intertwined time lines enable us to see the damaging effect of this degeneration on the emotional lives of many of the main characters, and especially the difficulty they have rebuilding and restoring their equilibrium following the untimely deaths of two of the main pro-generative characters. Overall the arc of the story is comedic in the sense that order is restored. The first word is "Listen" and the last scene is of the hero doing just that and thereby discovering his true origins —Ted becoming Theo again— and recovering his rightful legacy. Truthfulness, generosity of spirit, respect for the natural order of things ultimately defeat deception and avariciousness. But the battle is touch-and-go and not won without premonition that some of the damage may be irreparable. There is no offering of simple answers. It could be said that the novel ends with its world a little less messy.

Theodore, whose name we are told means 'God's gift', is both the ultimate victim and unexpected hero of the story. The duality of his role slowly reveals itself; his emotional torment intensifies through to the very end. A physically healthy man, a film editor by vocation, he has an odd, hard-to-connect collection of things he hates: "jazz, multiplex cinemas, swimming, dogs, and cars" and he is allergic to horsehair and dried mango. The linkage must be somewhere in his unremembered childhood. Slowly, for reasons suggested but not fully revealed—witnessing Elina's near death experience in birthing Jonah, attending to the demands of Jonah's colicky infancy, chafing under the limitations naturally inherent in the fatherly role—he suffers flashbacks, the return of his childhood affliction, the 'bizzy's' which causes temporary blindness in the centre of his field of vision, and heightened sensitivity to any implications in any slight turns of phrase relating to his childhood. He is haunted by places and by dreams. He starts to think he is going mad. [Isn't that the first sign of madness, seeing signs in everything, believing mundane things and acts are imbued with messages?] The flip side of his sensitivity surrounding his lack of childhood memory is his correspondingly heightened sensitivity to the needs and feelings of the people who are closest to him. This saving grace has earned him Elina's love, and the valuable and supportive friendship of Simmy, who, although a minor character plays a key role in leading Theo through the last steps he needs to take to finally confront the childhood trauma slowly paralyzing him:—the visit to the Portrait Gallery where Theo sees the John Deakin photograph of, although he does not know it, his mother with Innes Kent, and the trip to Lyme Regis where Theo collapses on the Harbour wall.

Theo's life is changed forever when, aged three, his mother Lexie drowns while they are holidaying together with her 'boyfriend' Robert Lowe in Lyme Regis. Returned to his father Felix, now married to Margot Kent, Theo, in a conversation with Margot in which she asks "Then who are you?" replies, "I'm a very sharp pair of scissors." Herein begins the dreadful unfolding of the deception in which, if it can be said of a three-year-old, he is partly complicit. His self-description as 'a very sharp pair of scissors' is his way of describing how the trauma of witnessing his mother's drowning has caused his memory loss. He then asks Margot if she is his mother. Margot, perhaps seeing her final opportunity to experience motherhood answers 'Yes'. The masquerade—similar to the masquerade Margot has lived throughout her own life—is on. When this conversation is revealed, it explains many of Theo's feelings and behaviours—his guilt over impregnating Elina and causing her caesarean birthing, his clearing of the weeds around her studio with garden shears, his careful snipping out of the wires intruding into the scenes of the film he is editing. Scissoring out things (not pulling them out by the roots!) has enabled him to survive and carry on, while also slowly paralyzing him emotionally and spiritually. The depth of Theo's despair and guilt is encapsulated in this surreal and startling exchange with Margot. That Margot fails to recognize, empathize and clarify her proper relationship with Theo, indeed that she should be complicit in creating a whole new identity for him—"I used to know someone named

Theodore but everyone called him Ted”— that fails to acknowledge and incorporate his existing identity is to her ultimate discredit.

But then, we must ask, what more could have been expected of Margot? Her mother Gloria, after all, is or was called a **maenad** by her husband, Innes. [Wikipedia] “In Greek mythology, maenads were the female followers of Dionysus, the god of the vine, grape harvest, winemaking, ritual madness, religious ecstasy and theatre. Dionysus is represented by city religions as the protector of those who do not belong to conventional society and thus symbolizes everything which is chaotic, dangerous and unexpected, everything which escapes human reason and which can only be attributed to the unforeseeable action of the gods. The maenads were the most significant members of Dionysus’s retinue. Their name literally translates as "raving ones." Often the maenads were portrayed as inspired by Dionysus into a state of ecstatic frenzy through a combination of dancing and intoxication. ...In Euripides' play *The Bacchae*, maenads of Thebes murder King Pentheus after he bans the worship of Dionysus. Dionysus, Pentheus' cousin, himself lures Pentheus to the woods, where the maenads tear him apart. ...A group of maenads also kill Orpheus. In ceramic art, the frolicking of Maenads and Dionysus is often a theme depicted on kraters, used to mix water and wine. These scenes show the maenads in their frenzy running in the forests, often tearing to pieces any animal they happen to come across.”

Admittedly Gloria has done much to earn this characterization before Lexie meets her: while Innes is two years a POW in Germany, she takes up occupancy of the whole of the house in Myddleton Square. Having told Ferdinanda that Innes wasn’t coming back, this news causing Ferdinanda’s “mind to wander,” Gloria moves her into a “home for the elderly” and then clears out the entire house by burning all of Ferdinanda’s things in the back garden. When Innes arrives home, he meets a lawyer called Charles “wearing his father’s dressing gown” and Gloria’s 4-month old daughter. They agree to a separation but not a divorce, and Gloria and Margot live on in Myddleton Square while Innes moves to a flat in Haverstock Hill into which he moves Ferdinanda. After Gloria hunts down Lexie, her maenadic qualities are even more apparent: “She began appearing at their office at regular intervals, sometimes, crying, sometimes demanding money, she called at the flat early in the mornings. She made scenes in stairways, in restaurants, in the foyers of theatres, in the doorways of bars, weeping and accusing, her daughter standing mute behind her. They seemed to come in waves, these visitations: there might be two in a week and then they wouldn’t see Gloria for months.” P146

On the other hand, the narrator’s voice breaks through on this issue not allowing for outright condemnation of Gloria. We are told that Innes will not answer Lexie when she asks whether he loved Gloria when he married her so soon after meeting her and so soon before his posting. The narrator also muses “there must have been some money from somewhere—Gloria’s, perhaps?” P145 (suggesting Innes may have married Gloria for her money). Innes’s numerous infidelities, and willingness to pretend to be Margot’s father, and indeed his rationale for doing so —“If I were to disown her, there would be no father at all. And having someone, no matter how feckless, is better than no one. Don’t you think? ... You young people are always so obsessed with truth. The truth is often overrated.” make it difficult if not impossible to wholly sympathize with Innes and to wholly demonize Gloria.

Margot’s portrayal, however, is arguably less equivocal, even against the backdrop of her own falsified parentage. As a teenager she is an unspeaking, staring, stalker of Lexie, whom she threatens saying, “It is your fault, she hissed. It is. You took him away from us and I’m going to make you sorry. I am. You see if I don’t.” p147. The revelation that “Ted’s Mother” is named Margot is chilling. Her claim to Elina when Elina discovers the hidden Jackson Pollock that, “It’s not something I know much about, I’m afraid.” P258 is completely undercut by her reaction to Felix’s request that she give the paintings to Elina: “Those paintings are mine, Felix, ... they were never Lexie’s. They were mine all along. I took what belonged to me and—it is difficult not to agree with Felix’s characterization of her response when he says, “Spare me your petty, avaricious—“ p333

Margot is a main synapse in the complicated network of affiliations resulting from the unconventional, promiscuous behaviour of many of these characters. While the reader knows that Margot's origins have never been fully revealed to her, the damage she causes to Ted by pretending to be his mother renders her less than sympathetic. On balance, she is arguably the anti-hero of the story, the living embodiment of the forces of chaos, of fateful intervention that upset order and wound the hero. Margot is a victim but also an aggressor, an oppressed child who becomes an oppressive, manipulative, and wholly self-focused, self-serving adult. Her infertility is another double-edged characteristic—on the one hand eliciting our sympathies, on the other metaphorically reinforcing or at least corresponding with her moral and spiritual unfitness for motherhood.

Lexie and Elina are the heroines and they are similar in character, motivation, and vocation. Although nurtured in loving families, both launch themselves into their adult lives by leaving their families of origin—Lexie for good, and Elina with a few backward glances. Whether or not she will ever return to Finland is unclear. Both are creative: Lexie a journalist and Elina a painter. Although they have other boyfriends, both meet a man with whom they enter into the one deeply loving relationship that changes their lives. Both fight to protect this relationship. Both become loving and devoted mothers who are surprised by the power and depth of their connection with their sons. Lexie's impetuosity and energy are her strengths but also the cause of her ultimate downfall. She is strong but no match for the power of an ocean current. She dies thinking only of Theo. Elina is softer and quieter than Lexie but equally tenacious and it is her brainwave, prompted by retrieving Lexie's typewriter for Theo, to research newspaper archives for Lexie's articles. She finds pieces Lexie has written specifically about and for Theo. Elina's hope is that reading these to Theo, allowing him to hear his mother's voice again, will restore him to sanity and spiritual wholeness. So in finding Elina, Theo also finds his mother again. Both are inspiring modern women: soulmates to their mates, devoted mothers to their children but also self-sustaining and self-motivated creatives.

I found my first reading an ordeal. Many of the passages, especially the ones about childbirth and infant care seemed overly long with too much detail I did not want to wade through. Too many memories! All worth it of course...but still! I was frightened by Gloria and Margot. Despite their symbolic identities, these characters are very real to me. I have a maenadic sister. Her daughter is the very essence of Margot. They brought our house down. They haunt me. Self-confessed hedonistic heroes don't charm me anymore. I worried about the characters. I found the two-track plot confusing. The ending had little impact and soon after reading it, it was gone. So I wasn't going to dig in but ... I liked the writing style, even though it scared the wits out of me the way Gloria and Margot jumped off the page, and I started to wonder whether all the other mother/child combos had any connection with my recent viewing of so many Madonna and Christ-child paintings. When I found the 'perfect rural Madonna' on p7 in her blue cotton dress with red buttons, her hair held back by a yellow scarf, the hunt was on.

No chapter titles, two parts, 341 pages ... not a word wasted.