

THEME: LONELINESS

“As he ran onto the street, he began to register the pounding of his feet as his final traces of apathy disappeared, and the bloody hole in his heart started to ache.”

– Chapter 19: Moxie

SPOILERS AHEAD!

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME

Loneliness is one of the key themes throughout *A Break in Rapport*, I wrote this book with characters like Shinji from *Neon Genesis Evangelion* (1995-1996), Charlotte from *Lost in Translation* (2003) and Theodore from *Her* (2013) as inspiration.

In particular, there was a special type of loneliness that I wanted to evoke. The Japanese phrase “mono no aware (物の哀れ)” roughly translates to “*an awareness of the impermanence of transience of things and the gentle sadness at their passing.*” Perhaps the best example of this is found in the tradition of hanami (花見), where friends and families gather to drink alcohol under the cherry blossoms, acutely aware that the beauty of the falling blossoms also signals the death of the tree.

How ironic.

Ethan is suffering from a loneliness tainted with an immense appreciation of the beauty in the world.

In order to create this slow atmosphere, I often used long, immersive descriptions to paint a vivid picture. This is even found in the first sentence of the novel, where there is a complete lack of movement “**the smell of sweat hung in the air.**

Everything was blurry—from the posters to the dusty silhouette of a fan—as if the night had smudged the room’s outline with an indiscreet finger.”

Ethan’s loneliness cannot be separated from his overthinking (another theme), and it is represented in the motif of stagnation.

This is also the reason why the natural world is often personified throughout the story. For example, “**the route they took curved around a grove of jacaranda trees whose wilting petals looked like drops of tears upon the pavement.**” – **Chapter 14: Loveless.** In a world without human connection, the protagonist must use the romanticisation and personification of the natural world as a substitute for human contact.

As you continue through the book, you'll find out that Ethan only has two connections, *Mary* and his grandma *Hua*. Because of this, he is immensely defensive towards both, and only begins his journey towards adulthood when these relationships are severed for reasons outside his control.

“Perhaps it was shame that kept him from tearing away or the sinking realisation that the only two people he loved unconditionally had already been snatched from him, and that if he were to turn and leave, he would be truly alone.” – Chapter 21: Lost in Translation.

Interestingly, while we see the world through Ethan's lens. This sense of loneliness permeates every other main character as well. *Hua* is equally isolated, and her declining health has made her a stranger in her own body. *Mary's* disability erects a barrier between her and the rest of society and the phantom from Ethan's past is equally stagnant and without connection.

Throughout *A Break in Rapport*, I have constantly alluded towards that loneliness. This can be found in the names of most chapter with the first and last chapter being **Agoraphobia** (A disorder that makes one avoid places or situations that can cause panic or a sense of helplessness), **Whisper**, **Easy Come, Easy Go** and **Moonlit Confessions** to name a few. Similarly, it is also telling/symbolic that this story starts and ends at night under a full moon, both of which are symbols of introversion and silence.

Perhaps the most obvious example of Ethan's loneliness and stifled emotions is the fact that he turns down his grandma's offer of remembering his deceased mother's birthday in the first chapter. Instead, he chooses to wander and scramble down the house at midnight, afraid to show any sort of vulnerability to even his most beloved. **“Ethan kept his eyes on the ceiling, feeling no inclination to answer. He wished that her question would vanish like the musty scent of a cabin, which with the door being opened, would be swept away by the wind.” – Chapter 1: Agoraphobia.**

This is a story about a boy who finds himself unable to heal from a traumatic event in his past, and in an attempt to make sense of it, he has romanticised his loneliness transforming it from something to be acknowledged and overcome into a defining trait justifying his lack of friendship and growth. As Tyler Durden prophetically states in *Fight Club* (1999) “We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our Great War's a spiritual war... our Great Depression is our lives.”

SYMBOLS LINKED WITH LONELINESS	
DOORS/WINDOWS	✓ - check out this worksheet for more insights on this theme.
CLOCKS/WATCHES	×
MOBILE	✓ - check out this worksheet for more insights on this theme.
NIGHT	✓ - check out this worksheet for more insights on this theme.
SOUND	✓ - check out this worksheet for more insights on this theme.

CHAPTERS THAT FEATURE LONELINESS		
1	Agoraphobia	✓
2	Clockwork	✓
3	Spring Blues	✓
4	Golden Wind	×
5	Etched in Stone	✓
6	Lightning in a Bottle	×
7	A Lazy Sunday	✓
8	Whisper	✓
9	Vertigo	✓
10	Sunset Rollercoaster	✓
11	Only Shallow	×
12	Caesar	✓
13	Asteroid Blues	✓
14	Loveless	✓
15	Condemned	✓
16	Sisyphus	✓
17	An Ode to Heartbreak	✓
18	To Fall into Neptune	✓
19	Moxie	×
20	Easy Come, Easy Go	✓
21	Lost in Translation	✓
22	Moonlit Confessions	✓

ANALYSED QUOTE

I will analyse this quote through the theme of loneliness.

“By now, the sun had set, and the final traces of warmth began to evaporate. A roar of laughter erupted from the garden, but as Ethan peered upon the party through the narrow hallway, he felt so removed from the cheering, as if the final rays of sunlight had distorted their celebrations before it had reached his ears.” –

Chapter 9: Vertigo

As this quote occurs right before Hua reveals the extent of her dementia, the fading “traces of warmth” and “final rays of sunlight” serve as metaphors for Hua’s old age and approaching ‘nightfall’. Similarly, the theme of loneliness is reinforced through the physical separation of Ethan from the rest of the party, with the only connecting thread between them being the ‘distorted cheers’, his only tether to the rest of society being a translucent soundwave that disappears as quickly as it appears.

OTHER QUOTES SHOWING LONELINESS

QUOTE	CHAPTER
“Midnight had always stirred feelings of melancholy within him. Now, when everyone else had retreated to their dreams, time trickled by like sand from a clenched fist.”	Agoraphobia (1)
“Positioned on the fringes of the city—as the skyscrapers melted into the suburban sprawl—the office existed between both worlds; neither modern nor dilapidated, disguised by its blandness and tucked away in the quiet corner of a busy street.”	Clockwork (2)
The room around him felt both familiar and foreign, as if the moonlight were a pair of hands that sculpted his surroundings into something more serene than sunlight ever could.”	Vertigo (9)
“Watching the clouds bend and shift above him, he felt a sudden desire to be as shapeless and formless as those pools of moisture, untethered to all except the gentle whisper of the wind.”	Sunset Rollercoaster (10)
“He would no longer flinch at a ringtone, no longer be directing faceless traffic to their respective departments, nor be trapped in a chamber of white noise from morning to dusk.”	Easy Come, Easy Go (20)

IN CONCLUSION

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