

THEME: OVERTHINKING

“The more he surveyed the other customers, the more he realised that what seemed like a catastrophic event barely registered as a blip on their radar.”

– Chapter 4: Golden Wind

SPOILERS AHEAD!

EXPLANATION OF THE THEME

One of my friends once commented on the different postures between the hunched philosopher statue (just search this up if you are unfamiliar) and the relaxed openness found in the meditating Buddha. There's a fundamental difference between how their body interacts with the external world, the philosopher is bowed over, bent inwards and unreceptive to outside stimulus. The Buddha on the other hand sits calmly, his chest and mind opened to his surroundings.

It is with this metaphor that I want to introduce one of the core ideas found in *A Break in Rapport*, which is overthinking. In a lot of Eastern philosophies, to overthink doesn't have the rational and intellectual glamour found in ancient Athens, where being a philosopher meant dealing with abstract concepts (think of Plato proclaiming the Theory of Forms, the idea that everything exists in a perfect state in a parallel universe).

Ethan suffers from this fact, constantly needing to overanalyse, overthinking or even overfeel during every situation. He is fundamentally unable to do what the Buddhists or Daoists (a sect found in ancient China that focuses on harmony with nature) have always highlighted as the most important goal; to see the world exactly as it is, without applying a filter over one's eyes.

Ironically, a lot of the beauty and vivid descriptions found in this novel stem from Ethan's overworked mind, and his ability to transform even a mundane street into a van Gogh-esque image of swirling colours and lights. **“The street looked like a watercolour painting, with its rich pool of purples and blue dyes.”** – Chapter 9: Vertigo.

Ethan's desire to overthink cannot be separated from his romanticisation of the moment, where (once again), he is unable to just appreciate a moment without inserting his emotions and understanding. For example, in **Chapter 13: Asteroid Blues**, right after an important twist in the novel, Ethan states that **“It was as though the world was mocking him—as if the twinkling stars, swaying branches and flickering streetlights had all conspired to resurrect a phantom from his past.”**

Ethan's frequent recalls of the past or his extended flash back in **Chapter 9: Vertigo** highlight that he is a boy caught between both worlds; the past and the present, unable to fully reside in either. Notice that these thoughts or flashbacks are often filled with long sentences without many full stops to break the flow. This is because just like overintellectualising in real life, Ethan is sucked into a spiral of thoughts that has seduced him with their fantastical quality.

Once again, I just want to stress that this is not a healthy trait, and Ethan's inability to stop thinking is a primary reason why his relationship with his father had not healed. In **Chapter 19: Moxie**, Ethan's frustration is blunted as he really realises that the narrative that he had told himself regarding his father was simply that, a narrative. **"For years, he had tempered his fury for a single target. However, his father's confessions in the hospital courtyard disarmed him, and now his anger wandered without direction, lashing at anything that crossed its path."**

This move away from over justifying or overintellectualising was a slow and awkward one, as Ethan's mind was so effective at constructing a haunting yet beautiful narrative of the world, that it took Hua's eventual collapse and Mary's rejection to destroy this façade. Yet, we do see earlier moments where the veil over his eyes is momentarily lifted. In **Chapter 13: Asteroid Blues**, when Ethan finally reunites with his father, he comments **"No, his father had aged considerably, and it felt as if a slower, duller imposter had replaced the man that he was once so familiar with. Ethan felt a twinge of sadness in his heart."** Fundamentally, the stories and meanings that we construct in our head will never fully resemble the complexity of life, and for the first time Ethan begins to wonder if his hatred for Jun is misplaced.

However, this notion of overintellectualising is not displayed by Ethan, Mary is also a frequent daydreamer often found wandering the corridors of her mind. Having lost her sight at a young age, her entire identity has morphed around the hypothetical question of a hypothetical world "What if I wasn't blind"? **"Now, I am haunted by images that only exist as memories. I still remember what a sunrise looks like, but every time I recall it, the details distort a little more and I wonder if a day will come when I reach for the word and be left with nothing."** – **Chapter 14: Loveless**. Her willingness to flee into the recesses of her mind, like Ethan, are similarly unhealthy.

If read **Chapter 2: Clockwork** and **Chapter 4: Golden Wind** respectively, you will see that Mary is often described as a stationary person, who, similar to Ethan, is unable to progress forward. For example, **"Compared to the commotion around her, it was like her figure had congealed into a statue. Nothing about her moved; in fact, nothing about her even trembled. The long black hair thrown**

over her shoulders hung as if no breath of wind dared to shake its frame,” and “She tucked a lock of hair behind her ears while the crowd swirled around her, and for a brief moment, she appeared to be a statue frozen with a golden patina, as if she was the axiom on which the world revolved,” respectively.

In fact, the only character that seems able to observe the world without drifting into speculation or overthinking is Hua, a trait granted by her age. Alexander is too arrogant to understand the suffering of his employee and Jun is too caught up in his own melodrama to effectively reconnect with his son. While I did not write Hua’s character with this archetype in mind, it does seem that Hua’s collapse at the end of the book mirrors the Christ journey, in the sense that her martyrdom is ultimately what brings salvation to Ethan. Only by severing Ethan’s final stable relationship, is he forced to leave the cocoon he has spun and become the very thing that Hamlet was ultimately unable to, a man of action represented by his tears at the end of the novel.

In the last few pages of **Chapter 22: Moonlit Confessions**, Ethan declares that “**as much as he wanted to sink beneath the melancholic gloom, which beckoned to him like sirens upon the rocks, he realised that such thoughts would lead him back into the abyss from which his escape would be long and arduous,**” signifying his redemption and his first steps into adulthood.

SYMBOLS LINKED WITH OVERTHINKING	
DOORS/WINDOWS	×
CLOCKS/WATCHES	×
MOBILE	×
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 OVERTHINKING		
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 overthinking.

“Such late-night ponderings came with a heavy price, and he often awoke feeling like he had barely closed his eyes, yet he could not resist his imagination—a realm where all bent to his will.” – Chapter 6: Lightning in a Bottle

This quote does two things, firstly it presents another moment when Ethan has once again fled from the world to slip in the recesses of his mind. However, the main crux of this quote is the contrast between Ethan’s lack of growth compared to the escapism found in his imagination. The metaphor of the “realm bending to his will” is both ironic and sad when compared to the mundane reality that he must face when awake. Similarly to other motifs such as sound or time, dreams are intangible and leave no mark on reality, thus serving as the perfect symbol for Ethan himself. Fundamentally, this quote highlights the overthinking that Ethan often indulges in, and the lack of fulfilment that drives this habit.

OTHER QUOTES SHOWING OVERTHINKING	
QUOTE	CHAPTER
“Anxiety, which always lurked by, descended upon him, hooking its claws into his flesh and pulling him into a pool of regret that simmered like molasses.”	Golden Wind (4)
“He stifled a yawn while his computer loaded the caller’s account; he hadn’t been sleeping well as his bed had transformed into a stage where he would debate and ponder every hypothesis concerning Mary’s absence.”	Lightning in a Bottle (6)
“It mattered not that he wanted the world to stop; such desires could only exist in the sanctuary of thought, which upon contact with the spring elm, bumblebee or leaking gutter, would shrivel and die.”	Condemned (15)
“It was such a foreign set of beliefs, one that asked him to be at peace with the turning of the universe, where all collective human experiences were lived only to be smothered by the apathetic passing of time in the very next moment.”	Sisyphus (16)
“Even now, the memory seemed so vivid, as if it were still unfolding before him, as if dropping his hands to his side, his finger would brush along the water, or if, peering into the red skies, he would spot a flock of birds disappearing into the horizon.”	Moonlit Confessions (22)

IN CONCLUSION

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