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Abel Sánchez (1912)

Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936)

OVERVIEW

Author Miguel de Unamuno was arguably the most important author in the Spanish modernist or fin de siècle period. He was born in 1864 in Bilbao (in the Basque Country) and died in Salamanca at the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. Unamuno studied at the esteemed University of Salamanca and was even the university rector until he was ousted by the Primo de Rivera dictatorship in 1924. Later, in the last years of his life, Unamuno would vacillate between supporting the socialist Second Republic and siding with the Nationalists, although he eventually denounced leaders on both sides of the Spanish Civil War. Along with Ramón de Vallé Inclán, Pío Baroja, and Antonio Machado, Unamuno was a prominent member of the so-called Generation '98. This literary group experimented with a variety of literary styles and movements, from late Romanticism and symbolism to modernism and existentialism. Although Unamuno is best known for his sociocultural and sociopolitical treatises such as *Tragic Sense of Life* (1913), he also wrote a number of novels and plays. Unamuno used fiction to delve into stories from the Bible and Greek mythology, as well as the nature of small town, rural Spain. His most famous novels, *Mist* (1914), *Saint Manuel Bueno, Martyr* (1930), *Aunt Tula* (1921), and the subject of this essay, *Abel Sánchez* (1917), all depict the protagonists going through an existential crisis as they deal with local upheaval and family conflict.

Novel *Abel Sánchez* (1917) is a "modern" retelling of Cain and Abel from the Old Testament. In Unamuno's version, Joaquín competes with his friend Abel and resents him throughout his life. In true modernist form, the two rivals compete not only in relationships, but also in intellectual pursuits: Abel exemplifies artistic excellence, while Joaquín excels at science. The style of the novel is unique in that Unamuno combines perspectives and points of view in nearly every chapter: there is the third-person, omniscient narrator who tells the overarching story, but there are also first-person excerpts from Joaquín's memoirs, or Confession, that appear in italics in almost every chapter. Ironically, it is the third-person narrator who decided which excerpts to insert into the over-arching narrative (and where they occur).

Style and Movement As a member of the Generation '98 group of authors, Unamuno experimented with multiple styles and movements in his writing. His depictions of abulia, or national ennui, characterized the blend of modernism and existentialism that was typical of the period. In addition, Unamuno used the concept of casticismo, or Castilian culture, as a guiding theme in many of his essays. Unamuno frequently pontificated on the growing divide between Castilian culture, politics, and language, and the regional cultures on the "periphery" of the peninsula, which included Cataluña and Unamuno's own home region, the Basque Country. For his works of fiction, Unamuno created his unique modernist style in which ancient themes and stories mixed with the hallmarks of Spanish modernism: pessimism, nostalgia, a wistful and melancholic tone, and an exploration of the individual's place in a society grappling with modern contradictions.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Abel	painter
Joaquín	Abel's rival and doctor
Helena	Abel's wife and Joaquín's cousin
Abelín	Abel's son
Antonia	Joaquín's wife
Joaquina	Joaquín and Antonia's daughter
Federico Cuadrado	cynic at the gentleman's club
Juaquinito	Joaquina and Abelín's son
Aragonese man	disinherited father of five

STORY

Joaquín Monegro, a town doctor in the Basque Country, tells the story of his cursed life growing up beside his classmate and rival, Abel Sánchez. In addition to Joaquín's perspective as the protagonist and antihero of the novel, there are occasional observations of the third-person narrator that are not directly from Joaquín's inner monologues and address other characters' perceptions and perspectives.

In Joaquín's eyes, Abel has always tried either to best him or humiliate him. As boys, Abel is more popular, sociable, and talented, but Joaquín is the conscientious student. Joaquín resents that his classmates prefer Abel. As young men, Joaquín chooses medicine and vows to conduct amazing research and make scientific breakthroughs. Abel paints brilliant artwork and gains prestige.

Joaquín's resentment grows into full-fledged hatred and envy when his beautiful cousin, Helena, rejects him (Joaquín) and sleeps with Abel. Even though Abel tried to advocate for Joaquín as Helena's suitor and potential husband, Joaquín blames Abel for her disinterest and insists that Abel stole Helena from him. Despite everyone else's assertion that Helena never would have married Joaquín, the doctor stews about this "treason" for the rest of his life.

When Helena and Abel marry and have a son also named Abel, Joaquín vows to "keep up" with his rival. Joaquín marries the saintly Antonia, and the two eventually have a daughter, whom they name Joaquina. In addition, both men flourish in their respective careers, although Joaquín wishes he could give up his patients and concentrate on research.

When Joaquina declares that she plans to join a convent, Joaquín convinces her to stay in the house and marry Abelín, instead. Both children agree to the match, and they end up having two children: Joaquinito and a daughter (whose name is not revealed). Despite getting and keeping a family, Joaquín continues to obsess and harbor his hatred for Abel. In a final confrontation between the two men, Joaquín throttles Abel and incites a heart attack that kills him. Joaquín confesses to the murder on his deathbed and dies a few months later.

CHAPTER DESCRIPTIONS

(NOTE: Quotes and citations are taken from Anthony Kerrigan's translation from 1956)

Chapter 1

The History of a Passion The novel begins with a description of Joaquín Monegro's memoir full of confessions, which was found upon his death. The memoirs were called Confession and were addressed to Joaquín's daughter. The compiler of the following narrative explains that "he" has placed sections from the memoir throughout the larger story. The quotes from Joaquín's Confession are set in italics to distinguish his diary-entry style memoir from the other parts of the narrative. The narrator comments that Joaquín suffered from "a dark passion which had devoured his life" (3).

Joaquín and Abel's Childhood The third-person narrative describes how Joaquín and Abel were always together, even as infants, and even though they were not technically brothers. They went to the same school but always had very different personalities. Joaquín dominated and Abel yielded to his demands, even though Joaquín was irritated that Abel was such a pushover. Joaquín wrote in his Confession that he was always the mean one, whereas Abel was always congenial. The third-person narration continues by explaining that Abel was wittier, faster, and more gregarious that Joaquín, but Joaquín was more diligent and conscientious in school. When Joaquín attempted to tell jokes, his classmate Federico quipped: "those jokes of yours would do well at a wake" (6).

Art Versus Science; Science as Art As the two men finish school and pick careers as adults, Abel decides to become an artist, and Joaquín enters medical school. Abel suggests that medicine is really more of an art, or "a professional practice based on the sciences" (7). Joaquín declares that he will not minister to the sick but rather aspires to a higher purpose—medical research. This type of medical science will, according to Joaquín, "fortify and expand the spirit with Truth" (6). Abel suggests that Joaquín is really after fame and fortune, and Joaquín replies that Abel also wants to become famous for his art. After squabbling, Abel asks Joaquín about the status of his courtship of Helena, his cousin.

Joaquín rants that he doesn't understand her and thinks that she is in love with someone else. He explains that she never gives him a straight answer about her intentions. Joaquín offers to introduce Abel to Helena, but immediately regrets the offer. Abel suggests that he could paint Helena's portrait.

Chapter 2

Abel Assesses Helena After Abel and Helena meet, Joaquín asks Abel about his impressions of her. Abel replies that although she is a beautiful model with striking features, she is also arrogant like a "female peacock" and "cold and indifferent" like a panther (13). Abel brags that he will give Joaquín a "stupendous" portrait, but Joaquín retorts that the painting is not for him. Abel offers to act as a matchmaker or go-between for Joaquín. For the first few painting sessions, Joaquín stands over Abel, and both men "devour Helena with their eyes" (14). Helena poses with "disdain, like a goddess borne along by destiny" (13).

Abel Paints and Beds Helena When Joaquín does not attend the third painting session, Helena walks over and looks at the painting. Abel asks for her opinion, but she vacillates. Abel calls her stunning and quips that Joaquín would agree with him. Helena gets increasingly irritated as Abel defends his friend and asks Helena not to toy with Joaquín's emotions. Helena protests that she has rejected him openly and he should no longer pursue her. Abel explains Joaquin's deepest fear—that Helena loves someone else. Helena bites her lip and blushes, and the two gaze at each other fixedly. The narrator reports that the two became lovers and that Abel "painted no more that afternoon" (17).

Chapter 3

Abel Confesses to His Affair with Helena The portrait of Helena is a great success. Joaquín becomes increasingly bitter and laments that Helena is acting "worse than ever" (18). When Joaquín interrogates him, Abel admits that he and Helena are lovers. Joaquín becomes incensed and complains that Abel will forever be "the most attractive, the most pampered, the constant victor, the artist" and that Helena will become his "Giaconda" (18-19). Abel explains that he would willingly give Helena to Joaquín, but she is not in love with him. Joaquín insists that Abel try to convince her and have mercy on him. Abel walks away, exasperated.

Joaquín's Hateful Tirade in his Confession Joaquín describes (in his diary) the horrible, feverish night he spent tossing and turning. He plots the murder of both Abel and Helena "as if it were a matter of a drama or novel I was creating" (23). Joaquín also fantasizes about "possessing" Helena next to Abel's cold, dead body. He describes the night as full of "vile appetites" and "futile wrath," but it is not just one night (23). Joaquín declares the rest of his life a hell in which he was "predestined to bear the weight of hatred upon me and its seed within me" (24).

Chapter 4

Abel and Helena Discuss Joaquín's Wrath Abel talks to Helena about Joaquín spiraling rage and laments his poor state. Abel expresses regret about their love affair, but Helena retorts that women should have a choice about their destinies and should not be "handed round" and "rented and sold" like animals (25). Abel insists that they invite Joaquín to the wedding, despite Helena's protests. Abel argues that if he doesn't come, he won't upset the celebration, and if he does come, perhaps he has overcome his rage.

Chapter 5

Joaquín Feigns Forgiveness When Abel invites him to the wedding, Joaquín pretends to surrender graciously. He writes a letter to Abel saying that he forgives him and that he (Joaquín) will endeavor to live his own life. Joaquín sends the couple a wedding gift of damascened pistols "worthy of an artist" (27). Helena quips dryly that the pistols are to be used for Abel's future suicide. Abel chides her, but Helena reminds him that Joaquín "spends his life plotting" (28).

Joaquín's Post-Wedding Confession In his Confession, Joaquín describes how the cold hatred inside him grows and spreads. The hatred is both petrified like a rock and takes the form of "flames of ice suffocating me" (28). He blames Helena for being sadistic and humiliating him, and he blames Abel for

his egoism and ignoring others' pain. Despite the ice in his heart, Joaquín attends the wedding and waits for the fateful "I do." In the coming months, Joaquín throws himself into his medical research in an attempt to be more famous and accomplished than Abel. His practice grows. Joaquín reports that he turned "science into a narcotic, at the same time that I used it as a stimulant" (31).

Chapter 6

Joaquín Treats Abel After returning from their honeymoon, Abel falls seriously ill with a fever. Helena calls over Joaquín in a panic and begs him to cure Abel. In his delirium, Abel begs for forgiveness. Joaquín declares that he can save his life, but leaves with the feeling of his own "icy fever" (33). When Joaquín returns home, he fantasizes about letting Abel die and courting the widowed Helena, who this time will love him. However, Joaquin realizes that his honor demands that Abel live. Upon declaring "he must live!," Joaquín's soul trembles "as the foliage of an oak…in the upheaval of a storm" (33). These observations of the third-person narrator are echoed in the excerpt of Joaquín's Confession, in which he continues to fantasize about Abel's death but puts up a fight against "that foul dragon which has poisoned and darkened my life" (34).

Joaquín Vows to Find a Wife During a later visit, Joaquín assures Helena that Abel will recover. She thanks him profusely. Joaquín admits that he is suffering from his own mental sickness and has resolved to get married. Helena inquires if he has a girlfriend. Joaquín says no and asks her if she thinks he will ever find a woman who will love him. Helena assents and encourages him to find love. Joaquín declares that he will settle for an honest woman even if she doesn't really love him. He admits that he is afraid that he is unable to love at all. Helena admonishes him and says that not loving is the work of the devil. Joaquín responds darkly: "And the devil is right here on earth, Helena" (36).

Chapter 7

Antonia Pursues Joaquín Joaquín treats a sick widow, and her daughter, Antonia, falls in love with Joaquín: "The cold, curt words of the doctor who had no faith in the goodness of others exercised a mysterious attraction for her" (37). When Antonia's mother dies, Joaquín comforts her in his cold way "Science is powerless" (38). The two discuss the nature of death and debate the existence of God. Joaquín remarks that true solitude is being a "person to whom no one will tell the truth" (39). Antonia tells him her truth—that he is an "unfortunate man who suffers" (39). Joaquín appreciates her compassion, and the two decide to get married. In his Confession, Joaquín expresses guilt for bringing his saintly wife into the pit of his depression and sickness, which he describes as "the leprosy of my soul" and "the gangrene of my hatred" (40).

Chapter 8

Famous Artist or Famous Scientist? Both the narrator and Joaquín himself describe Joaquín's envy of Abel's talent, prestige, and fame as an artist. The narrator claims that Joaquín thought himself to be an artist of the sciences, both intuitive and creative in his diagnoses. However, Joaquín ultimately prioritized the money he was making with his patients over the glory of ingenious research. In the Confession excerpt, Joaquín himself confirms the narrator's assessment and adds that success in his career fed his lust for revenge on Helena and Abel, which he describes as "murky passion" and an "extravagant grudge" (42).

Joaquín Obsesses Over His Patients' Mental and Physical States The narrator resumes the story-telling and describes several patient cases in which Joaquín empathized with them, which was natural, as the narrator declares: "His patients were not infrequently mirrors for him' (44). In one instance, Joaquín resents a widow who quickly marries her late husband's best friend. In another case, Joaquín seriously considers performing an assisted suicide on a desperate patient who asked the doctor to kill him. The third case—a woman who looks for a "potion" to make her husband come back to her (and reverse the love potion that the mistress gave her husband)—inspires a new obsession in Joaquín. He tells himself: "That (using potions) is the original sin!" (46).

Chapter 9

Joaquín and Antonia's Early Marriage The narrator describes how Antonia realized that her duties as Joaquín's wife included acting as his muse and playing nurse to the 'incurable spiritual invalid" that her husband had become (47). Antonia first attempted to bring up Helena in conversation, but she soon learned that it was better to avoid the subject. When Helena becomes pregnant soon after her wedding, (and Antonia is not pregnant yet), Joaquín thinks that he is not a man and that he will lose yet another contest with Abel.

Antonia Confronts and Comforts Joaquín When Antonia notices how distraught Joaquín is about Helena's pregnancy, she asks him outright if he is still in love with Helena. Joaquín says no but confesses that he is obsessed with competing with Abel and hates them both. He declares that even though Helena and Abel are legally married, the ceremony cannot "change an affair into a marriage" (50). Joaquín goes on to rant about Abel's fame and successful career. Antonia suggests that they move into her parents' house in Renada and that he dedicate himself only to research, thereby gaining recognition for scientific discoveries. Joaquín retorts that the move will not solve the fact that they do not have a child. Antonia promises that she will be pregnant soon, as she has been praying to the Virgin Mary and asking for a child from the "holy water of Lourdes" (52). Joaquín asks her wryly: "Do you believe in potions, Antonia?" and she replies: "I believe in God" (52). Joaquín vows to "find Him." (52).

Chapter 10

Abelín is Born In a Confession rant, Joaquín laments that Helena gave birth to a beautiful and healthy baby boy: "a beauty, a masterpiece of health and vigor, a little angel" (53). He explains that he did not attend to Helena in labor, but he still had fantasies about smothering the baby under the guise of performing as an obstetrician. Joaquín vows to keep up with Abel by making sure that Antonia bears him a child. In addition, he declares that the baby with the same name as his father will "be the instrument of my revenge" (54).

Chapter 11

Abel Researches for His Painting When Joaquín visits Abelín, he also checks on Abel, who is in his study. Abel explains that he has decided to paint the Old Testament scene of Cain and Abel, given that his own name is Abel. The painter says he will depict the moment right before Cain strikes Abel. Joaquín asks him for his sources, and Abel recites passages from the Bible and Lord Byron's *Cain*. Abel reads about how God accepted Abel's gift and rejected Cain's, and Joaquín defends Cain's anger by saying: "Sin dominated him…because God had abandoned him" (57). When Abel proceeds to read the Bible, Joaquín himself gets angrier and fixes Abel with a "sharp, frozen stare" (58).

Joaquín Continues to Defend Cain Joaquín continues to state his case in which he defends Cain and condemns Abel. First, Joaquín explains that if God's favor had been reversed, Abel would have killed Cain. Then, he suggests that Abel, as the favored one, held blame for flaunting his unearned blessings in front of Cain. Joaquín rants about the arrogance of the blessed, who are "bent on crushing others under the ostentation of their 'justice'" (59). Finally, Joaquín argues that heaven and hell was invented by the Abelites to revel in their own glory and enjoy the suffering of the Cainites. Abel exclaims: "Joaquín, Joaquín, how very sick you are!" (59) Joaquín ends his treatise by saying that there is always a woman to be blamed in every tragedy, and in this case, it may have been Eve's milk—or potion.

Chapter 12

Life is a Spectacle Which Prompts Suicide In his Confession, Joaquín describes how reading Byron's *Cain* resonated with him and fed his anger. He declares that all human misery and achievement becomes fodder for a performance: "life itself is no more than a spectacle" (61). He admits that even the writing of his Confession is not just an "unburdening of the soul," but also a performance of his struggle (61). Joaquín goes on to wonder why those who suffer do not immediately commit suicide. He muses that perhaps, the human experience is a tragedy that repeats itself, and the performance of humanity on earth was merely "opening night" (62). Then, Joaquín wonders if his hatred makes him immortal, or whether hatred exists in the soul and therefore lives past the body's demise. He compares Cain's wife, Adah, with Antonia, and laments that while Adah did not understand Cain, Antonia understands him all too well. Joaquín hopes that a child will cure him, but he suspects that he will merely transfer his hatred to

his child. He then admits that Abel paints with purpose and did not try to impose on Joaquín; still, Joaquín feels compelled to "overturn Abel's altar" (65).

Chapter 13

Joaquina is Born Joaquín rejoices when his daughter is born and hopes that she will be his salvation. At first, he resents the fact that Abel has a son and he has a daughter. But, upon gazing at his beautiful baby, Joaquín vows to free himself of his "infernal chains" so that Joaquina will flourish in love and purity (66). Joaquín decides that the best antidote to his hatred is to become "the chief herald of Abel's greatness" (66).

Joaquín Contemplates the Painting and Plans a Banquet When Joaquín first looks at the completed painting, he worries that the figure of Cain will resemble him. Joaquín is relieved when he sees no resemblance, but then he is embittered at the thought that Abel and Helena do not even think about him. Joaquín wishes that Abel hated him in return, as that "could have been my salvation" (68). He decides to plan a banquet that celebrates the grand debut of Abel's painting, and he prepares a speech. The narrator explains that Joaquín's colleagues hated his speeches on medicine, even though they were well composed. Joaquín always presented a "pessimistic skepticism" in which "everything was hypothetical and a constant raveling and unraveling, that distrust was the most justified emotion" (68). For this reason, in addition to Joaquín's disdain for Abel, many people warn Abel about attending the banquet. Abel defends him and says that he would like to paint a portrait of Joaquín as "a fiery, turbulent soul" (69). Joaquín obsesses over this comment to the point that he makes overtures to Abel and Helena's servant in the hopes of getting inside information. When she tells him that her masters do not speak about him, Joaquín makes up an infraction so that Helena will fire the servant. Joaquín feels deeply ashamed for his behavior and for getting the girl fired.

Chapter 14

Joaquín's Masterful Speech at the Banquet Joaquín kisses his daughter before he leaves the house, and she smiles. Antonia declares that his daughter blesses him and wishes him luck, although Joaquín notices that she is praying to the Virgin Mary as he leaves. After dessert, Joaquín begins his speech, at first trembling, but then gaining force and conviction. The narrator declared that "a more ardent, more impassioned eulogy had scarcely ever been heard, or one more filled with admiration for the artist and his work" (72). Joaquín first describes how he and Abel grew up together, and how he had always been inspired by Abel's work. He explains that one can only know oneself by looking at others: "it is in others that we see the best part of ourselves" (72). Joaquín argues that the admiration of Abel's glory allows him (Joaquín) to "be a satisfied subject of my mediocrity" (73). Then, Joaquín begins to analyze and interpret the painting. He notes that Abel Sánchez has painted Cain with compassion and love, just as Milton sympathized with the Devil in *Paradise Lost*. When he stops speaking, Joaquín is met with silence, then "a salvo of applause thundered out" (73).

The Reaction to the Speech Abel and the audience are moved to tears by the speech, and Abel even proclaims the speech to be a work of art. In addition, Abel proclaims that his painting has found new meaning with Joaquín's interpretation: "I did not know what I had accomplished until I heard you" (74). Some attendees even suggest that the painting be referred to as "the Painting of the Speech" (75). Despite the unanimous praise, Joaquín feels that his demon has not disappeared, and he even fantasizes about crushing Abel in his arms when they embrace. When Joaquín arrives home, Antonia praises him and tells him that the painting will have value only because of his speech. Joaquín agrees, but starts to admit that he still has dark thoughts. Antonia kisses him, and Joaquín suggests that she could suck out the Demon. Antonia offers to absorb him completely. At Abel's house, Helena warns her husband that Joaquín has sinister plans and is always motivated by envy. Abel defends him, but Helena says that he (Joaquín) "has had to swallow your triumph." (76). Abel becomes increasingly upset at Helena's prognostications.

Chapter 15

Joaquín Goes to Church In his Confession, Joaquín expresses regret for praising Abel's painting. He wishes he had let "his evil passion pour forth" and "ruin his fame" (77). Antonia, seeing Joaquín's

downward spiral, suggests that he go to church, even though he is a man of science who doesn't believe. He resists, but then Joaquín considers the possibility that the church can cure him. When Joaquín speaks to the priest, he confesses his hatred for Abel. The priest explains that he suffers from envy and should strive to convert his hatred into "noble emulation" (79). Joaquín debates the existence of free will with the priest, and the priest tells him that it is evil to doubt God. Joaquín retorts that God made him evil, just as he did with Cain. When Joaquín asks why he was born, the priest replies: "Ask rather to what end" (80).

Chapter 16

Abel Denounces Joaquín's Conversion Joaquín looks at Abel's new painting of the Virgin Mary with Child, which has an obvious likeness to Helena and Abelín. Joaquín secretly wishes that Abel would die so that he could be with Helena. Abel confronts Joaquín about his sudden conversion and calls him a reactionary. Abel asks him why he is going to mass every day given that he does not believe in God or the Devil. Joaquin replies that he needs to believe. Abel retorts that Joaquín has embraced "the mediocrity of the vulgar" and "stupid conservatism and prudery" (82). When Joaquín asks him to defend the accusation, Abel explains that unremarkable people hide their lack of specialness by joining the dull masses in dogma. Joaquín tries to defend the common man. Abel reminds him that Cain was special and his envy was "grandiose," whereas the inquisitors are "miserably small" (84). Joaquín marvels at how intuitive Abel is.

Chapter 17

Helena Confronts Joaquín When Joaquín hears rumors that Abel is sleeping with his models, he realizes that he is still in love with Helena and still longs to steal her from Abel, despite his declaration that Antonia "was superior" to "the other, but the other was the other." (85). He visits Helena when Abel is not there. She asks him why he attends mass faithfully and whether it is to please or avoid Antonia. Joaquín insists that his conversion—or at least, wanting to believe—is real. Helena accuses him of "impiety" and declares that his "new devotion is no more than a farce, and perhaps something worse" (87). She goes on to assert that Joaquín "cannot endure Abel's existence" (87).

Joaquín Propositions Helena Helena accuses Joaquín of being envious of Abel's fame and success. Joaquín admits that he longs to make a scientific discovery, but even that success would leave him cold if he could not "place the triumph at her feet." Helena lashes out at Joaquín and calls him "sick" and a "hypocrite." (89). Joaquín argues that since Abel is straying, Helena can give him up and save him, the one who really loves her. Enraged, Helena wakes Abelín up and says: "This child, the son of Abel, orders you from his house. Get out!" (89).

Chapter 18

Joaquín Fires the Pious Maid Joaquín stews about how Helena rejected him, and he takes his anger out on a timid maid who goes to mass every day. Joaquín scolds her constantly without cause, and the maid also replies with "The master is right" (90). He interprets her submission as hypocrisy and an effort to "bring out the virtue of her patience." (91). Joaquín prompts the maid to rebel, but Antonia retorts that any backtalk would result in Joaquín becoming even more infuriated. Joaquín suggests that the maid consider herself "the greatest woman sinner" in a similar vein as Saint Louis Gonzaga (92). He fires her on the spot, and the maid responds that she forgives him, as God will. Later, Antonia begs Joaquín to put an end to his madness.

Chapter 19

Joaquín Dotes on Joaquina Joaquín decides to focus all his energy on educating his daughter and "keeping her free of the world's immoralities" (94). He tells Antonia that it is fortunate she is an only child, and that more children would inevitably cause an imbalance in affection. When Antonia retorts that parental love grows with the number of children, Joaquín rebuts her argument by telling the tale of Ramírez the solicitor, who had two daughters and two sons. Because they were a poor family, Ramírez was the only one who ate a full meal. At times, he would share food and affection with one child and ignore the other three. Or, he would kiss two good night and ignore the other two. In another case, a

father rejects his youngest child as a burden and calls her “The Intruder” (96). Antonia expresses horror at these stories of favoritism and abuse, but Joaquín insists that life is “a seed-bed of horrors” (96).

Chapter 20

Joaquín and Abel Discuss Abelín’s Future Joaquín ends up spending time with Abelín and becomes like a second father to him. When Abelín shows more interest in medicine than in art, Joaquín asks Abel why he isn’t training his son in painting. Abel responds that he has neither the interest nor the touch, so he is letting his son pursue what he wants. Joaquín asserts that it is a good thing that Abelín is not an aspiring painter, as that would inevitably lead to jealousy and rivalry between father and son. Joaquín explains that it is better to be bested by a stranger than “that one of the same blood should triumph” (98). Abel balks and says that he is more motivated by money than by jealousy—he knows that Abelín will make more money as a doctor even if he were to gain fame as a painter. Abel even suggests that his son might want to sign his name with a different surname just to differentiate himself.

Chapter 21

Joaquín Frequents the Club Joaquín starts going to a club at night in the hopes of forgetting his obsessions and engaging in witty repartee. He hopes that like other men who drink away their sorrows, he might also “drown his passion” and allow his “frustrated love to flow away with the wine” (100). Joaquín soon realizes, however, that “the remedy turned out to be worse than the ill.” (100). The company of the other bitter men incites his “suppressed evils,” yet Joaquín realizes he cannot endure solitude, so he keeps going back.

Joaquín Longs for Abel’s Hatred When Joaquín does stay home from the club, he engages in a vicious circle of interior monologues in which he speaks to his “other”—what Joaquín deems “solitary dialogues, or monologues in dialogues” (101). He continually asks himself why Abel doesn’t hate him, and why he can’t be the one who is envied. As the interior dialogue continues, Joaquín realizes that he hates himself as much as Abel, and he cannot love himself or his neighbor as God commands. When Joaquina bursts through the door and hugs him, Joaquín sobs into her arms.

Chapter 22

Federico Cuadrado Makes the Case for Schadenfreude Back at the club, Joaquín listens to two friends debate one aspect of human nature: whether anyone actually sincerely praises or feels sympathy for their friends. Federico Cuadrado, a dapper cynic, claims that men only praise other men in order to make a third man, their enemy, feel inferior to the one being praised. León Gómez argues that the politician Don Leovigildo never speaks ill of anyone. Federico replies that the politician will never insult or praise anyone out loud, but he will “delight to his very marrow” the misfortune of others (104). Joaquín interjects to ask why Federico has “an aversion” to Leovigildo. Federico replies that he does not have anything against Leovilgido as an individual, but rather hates mankind in general and “honorable men” in particular. Federico reminds the men that Christ himself said “he should not be called good, for only God is good” (106); therefore, calling oneself honorable is actually dishonorable.

The Men at the Club Debate the Nature of Sin When Federico declares that honorable men are actually dishonorable, the magistrate, Don Vicente, chimes in and says that the really honorable man admits that he is a scoundrel. Federico agrees partially, but also asserts that the sinner should go to confession and repent—although, he also describes confession as a vicious cycle of sinning and repenting simultaneously. When the other men try to resort to aphorisms, Federico warns them that empty philosophies are “inanities” (107). After the debate, Federico and Joaquín walk together, and Federico correctly intuits that Joaquín wants to be alone. Federico offers to “distract” him “from your burdens” (108).

Chapter 23

Abel, Joaquín, and Federico Debate the Case of the Disinherited Aragonese Man The narrator explains that there is an Aragonese dandy who lives in town and has five children. Rather than support his children, he blows what little money he has on cigarettes and food at the café. He also asks for money from others, including Abel. When Joaquín asks Federico for the full back story, Federico explains

that the man impregnated a woman of whom his father did not approve, and the father disinherited the Aragonese man and gave his estate to his second son. The brother also refused to help out the first born, so the Aragonese was cast out with his impoverished, pregnant, wife. Abel and Joaquín debate whether the Aragonese man deserves help and pity from the rest of the town. Abel argues that the man is selfish and wastes money on himself; moreover, he asks for loans knowing that he cannot pay them back. Joaquín retorts that the man chose love over fortune, then had to suffer because his father unfairly punished him. Federico argues that the man should have killed his younger brother so that he could be fed and sheltered in jail, then repent for his crime later. Federico declares: "Action liberates one and dissipates poisoned sentiment" (113).

Federico Reveals the Source of His Cynicism Joaquín asks Federico about his negative view of humanity, and he explains that all of his cynicism is "defensive" (113). He relates how he was born the fruit of an adulterous relationship, which led him to hate his adopted father—the one, according to Federico, "was the executioner of the other one" (113). In addition, the adopted father "weaned me on the venom of hatred" (113).

Chapter 24

Joaquín Becomes Abelín's Mentor Abelín continues to express interest in science, so Joaquín takes him on as a tutee and vows to "lead him to make the discoveries which this misbegotten restlessness of spirit has prevented me from making" (115). On one hand, Joaquín hopes to eradicate his evil passions by helping Abelín. On the other hand, he fantasizes about avenging himself through Abel's son, proclaiming that "the failure of the son would negate the pre-eminence of the father" (114). As the continue to work together, Abelín suggest that his Maestro (or teacher), Joaquín, compile his patients' stories and his diagnosis into a memoir. Joaquín scoffs at the value of such a tome and makes the excuse that it is difficult to get started on a big project. Abelín coaxes him and even offers to compile and write the text himself. Joaquín secretly revels in Abelin's admiration and plots to take him away from Abel—just as Abel had taken Helena from him.

Abelín Criticizes His Father When Joaquín asks Abelín directly about his lack of interest in painting, Abelín explains that it derives in part from his observation of his father's process. Joaquín asks him to go on, and Abelín says plainly: "I don't feel it, and I don't know whether he does, either" (117). Later, he expounds: "He paints like a machine. He has a natural gift for it. But feeling?" (118). Joaquín agrees with Abelín's assessment. Abelín continues to open up and describes his father as "a perfect egoist" who "doesn't love anyone else" (118)—even his own son. When Abelín laments how his father ignores him and won't answer his questions, Joaquín defends Abel and suggests that perhaps his father is masking ignorance. Abelín retorts that he simply doesn't care, which is evidenced by the fact that Abel never disciplines his son. Abelín also intuits that there is a sinister tension between his father and Joaquín, even though they only say kind things about each other— "He (Abel) speaks too well of you" (120). Joaquín does not confirm his suspicions, but he asks Abelín to expound on his theories.

NOTE: Chapter 25 is missing in this edition

Chapter 26

Joaquina Wants to Become a Nun Antonia tells her husband that Joaquina is thinking about entering a convent. She warns him that his affection for Abelín has divided his attention, just as he had railed against doing when he used to dote on his daughter. Joaquín begins to panic and blames the priest Echeverría for pushing Joaquina towards the convent. He theorizes that the priest is holding a grudge because he was unable to cure Joaquín of his evil passions during his fervent mass-going period. Antonia retorts that Joaquina has a calling. Joaquín argues that nuns are either lazy—trying to escape work and languish in a "mystic siesta," or they are "running away from home" (123). Antonia agrees that Joaquina might be trying to escape the toxic "capriciousness" of her father (123). Joaquín, desperate, begs his wife to prevent Joaquina's departure, and he vows that "this house is her convent" (124).

Chapter 27

Joaquín and Joaquina Debate Her Future Joaquina asserts to her father's face that she has heard the call to become a nun. At first, Joaquín argues that her desire is a phase brought on my dizziness

from fasting. Joaquina retorts that "A fasting heart breeds worse delusions" (125). Then, Joaquín accuses the priest of using insider information to manipulate her. Joaquina explains that she knew about her father's hatred from all the years of tension and silence that she experienced: "Here in this house we live as if in a spiritual darkness" (127). Joaquina admits that her desire is due in part to a wish to save her father's soul. Joaquín then suggests that she stay and cure him as if he were a leper. Joaquina asks if he would prefer that she marry rather than enter a convent, and he replies that it depends on which man. Inspired, Joaquín asks his daughter to sacrifice herself by marrying Abelín. Joaquina hesitates and describes her father's affection for his enemy's son as "monstruous, something infernal" (130). Still, she agrees to consider this alternate form of sacrifice.

Chapter 28

The Aragonese Longs for Death—In Some Form When Joaquín actually meets the disinherited Aragonese man, the latter tells him that he wishes he could be Joaquín. The Aragonese man expresses a desire to "throw myself in the river," but he claims that concern over providing for his family stops him. After more prodding, the Aragonese man admits that he really wants to kill off his memories rather than his whole essence. In fact, he wants his "my memories, my story, my history" to "accompany me beyond death" (133). When Joaquín implies that he has similar suicidal fantasies, the Aragonese man proclaims that no rich man with a family and good reputation can compare with his misery and humiliation.

Chapter 29

Joaquín Explains His Motivations in the Confession In his Confession, Joaquín addresses a section of his musings to his daughter. He explains that in order to get Abelín to propose to her, he had to convince Abelín that Joaquina was already pining for him. Joaquín goes on to describe his two conflicting motivations: to mix the family's blood to assuage his vengeance and find his salvation, and to perpetuate the hate for another generation. He thinks about how his grandchildren will carry both Helena's and Antonia's blood: the first, that which inhabits the "flowers in her cheeks" that "blinded him," and the second, the "spotless blood that can redeem us" like "baptismal water" (135). Joaquín realizes that Antonia can never see his journal.

The Newlyweds and Their Parents Enjoy a Brief Peace After Abelín and Joaquina marry, they quickly form an affection between them. Both understand that the other is the product of their father's ego and issues, so they strive to establish "a center of serene and self-sufficient love" and a "castle of solitude" (136). The narrator reports that Antonia was a source of support and sweetness, whereas the other parents gradually absorbed the good nature of the children. Even Joaquín underwent a "rebirth" in which he admitted that it was better that Abel had intervened and taken Helena from him.

Joaquín and Joaquina Chat Joaquín vows to help his daughter flourish and help Abelín succeed in his medical career. He also laments his lack of research, but Antonia reminds him that Abelín is working on his diagnostic memoirs. Joaquín vows to retire from his practice and mentor Abelín, thereby becoming "another man" (139). Joaquina rejoices at hearing her father's new lease on life, declaring: "What a pleasure it is to hear you talk this way!" (139). However, Joaquín quickly returns to resentment when he realizes that he is still the same unfortunate man he always was.

Chapter 30

Abel Tries to Talk Frankly with Joaquín Abel visits Joaquín and asks him to have a frank conversation about their relationship. Joaquín refuses to talk about the past. Abel pivots and broaches the subject of the children living under the same roof with Joaquín and Antonia. He argues that there will be too many people for one house, but Joaquín insists that he cannot be apart from his daughter. Abel retorts that he doesn't want to be separated from his son, either, but Joaquín argues that the father-daughter relationship is more precious. Abel gives in to Joaquín's demands. As he leaves, Joaquín begins to cry when Abel offers his hand "in a gesture of complete sincerity" (142). They both realize that they will never be boys again.

Chapter 31

Three Memoirs Joaquín's mood improves not only with the presence of his daughter and acolyte, who now calls him Father, but also with the knowledge that Abelín continues to work on the tome about "the medical work of Joaquín Monegro" (143). Joaquín enjoys the thought that Abelín is playing Plato to his Socrates and immortalizing his work. In this period, Joaquín also set about writing the *Confession* for Joaquina's eyes. The narrator places an excerpt in which Joaquín rails against the "infamous" behavior of Abel and Helena, but he also condemns all of humanity as vulgar and egotistical—especially those who rejected him (145). In addition, Joaquín decides to write a semi-fictional novel based on his own life entitled *Memoirs of a Doctor*, which in Joaquín's own words, would "be a mirror to life, but revealing the very entrails, the darkest corners of it; a descent into the abysses of human vileness" (145). Joaquín fantasizes that everyone will recognize themselves in the novel, and Joaquín will succeed in "painting you (Abel) just as you are, with my pen" (146), with the result that he will be Joaquín's "creation" who is "dragged along in the mud at my heels" like in Dante's *Inferno* (147). Joaquín begins to doubt his writing ability at age 55, but he calms his doubts by reminding himself that Cervantes wrote *Don Quijote* in his late fifties.

Chapter 32

Envy Between Father and Son Joaquín decides to broach the subject about career and legacy with Abelín. Joaquín asks again why Abel did not tutor his son in painting, and Abelín asserts again that he did not have an interest in it. Abelín senses a sinister inner monologue in his father— "a poisonous secretion"—and studies him carefully (150). Abelín quickly infers Joaquín's unexpressed thesis—that Abel fears his son would "eclipse him, his own name" (151). Joaquín confirms Abelín's guess, and he goes on to describe the inevitable envy between father and son. Abelín asks pointedly if the same vice festers between master and disciple, but Joaquín avoids answering. He asks Abelín to forget the whole conversation.

Chapter 33

Helena Embarks on Interior Design Unlike Abel, Helena frequently visits her daughter-in-law and gives her advice about how to run the house. While Helena thinks that she is mentoring Joaquina in order to make up for the "deficiencies" in her education, Joaquina resents her patronizing tone. When Joaquina gives in to her mother-in-law's suggestions, Helena notes her bitterness and tells her to calm down. Joaquina retorts that she will be an expert in raising the child but she will "submit to one who has been formed in the house of an artist" (154). Helena insists that social convention is important and that Joaquina should not scorn it.

Helena and Joaquina Fight Passive Aggressively When Elena visits Joaquina and they go for a walk, Helena revels in the fact that she looks like an older sister who is more beautiful than her companion. Whereas Joaquina dresses modestly and acts demurely, Helena prefers to show off in the latest fashion and to "overshadow" Joaquina with "the splendid beauty that the years had left intact" (155). One day, Helena suggests that Joaquina try to hide her pregnant belly, as that is more graceful. Joaquina retorts that Helena is motivated by a desire to appear young, and a pregnant daughter-in-law only emphasizes that Helena is too old to have a child—and will soon be a grandmother. Helena declares that she would like to go home, and Joaquina retorts that it is her home. Helena counters by accusing Joaquín of "hooking" Abelín and manipulating him into marrying Joaquina. Joaquina warns her not to repeat that lie (157).

Chapter 34

The Elders Debate the Name of Joaquina and Abel's Son When the grandson is born, the elders discuss whether it would be better to call him Abel or Joaquín. Helena pushes for Abel Sánchez III. Abel opines that three Abels in a row is too much, and he remarks that if the grandson takes up painting, there will be the confusion between the Elder and the Younger. Joaquín agrees but is internally "amused to have been proven so completely right in his conjecture" regarding Abel's fear that his talent will be eclipsed by his son (159). Eventually, Abel and Joaquín name the grandson Joaquín and declare that he should neither take up painting or medicine.

Chapter 35

Antonia Tries to Protect Her Grandson Worried about the family curse and rancor, Antonia frequently holds and cuddles Joaquinito. She attempts to keep the baby physically and emotionally distanced from his two grandfathers. Antonia prays that "the two warring bloods do not quarrel in you" (160). When Abel (senior) sketches a delightful drawing of the baby, Antonia refuses to even look at the drawing. Abel exclaims "It is an object of beauty," and Antonia quips "your sketch or your grandchild?" (161). When Abel answers "both of them," Antonia flees to the other room with baby in arms. She calls him the "sunshine of the house" and the "lamb of God," and she vows that he will never be "a model for any painter or a patient for any doctor" (162).

Chapter 36

Abel and Joaquín Compete for Their Grandson's Affection As Joaquinito grows into a toddler, Joaquín obsesses over which traits his grandson will display. Joaquín also resents that Abel frequently has the toddler brought over to his house, where he draws for the little one. Joaquinito grows to prefer the company of Abel because he agrees to draw him animals. Joaquín suggests that Abel collect the drawings and publish a children's picture book, but Abel insists that they are an exercise meant to please his grandson. Abel also admits that he hopes to inspire artistic genius in the child. Abelín (II) resents that his father is doting on Joaquinito when he always ignored his son, and Joaquín explains that they have become wiser with age. Joaquín also reveals to Abelín that his father is suffering from a heart condition that makes him more emotional. When Abel stays home and increasingly has Joaquinito brought to his house, Joaquín becomes enraged and interprets his actions as "vengeance" and an "attempt to steal all his love" (166). In actuality, Abel tells the little one to love all of his parents and grandparents equally.

Chapter 37

Joaquín Confronts Abel Joaquín visits Abel and ask him to move far away. He explains that Joaquinito loves Abel more than he loves him, and that Abel has "a perverse hold" on his grandson via the drawings he gives him (167). Joaquín goes on to accuse Abel of "hounding," "humiliating," and "denigrating" him his whole life, and he insists again that Abel stole Helena from him. Abel marvels at Joaquín's sickness and warns him that his rancor will exacerbate his (Abel's) heart illness. Joaquín begs Abel to leave, but Abel warns him that his absence will not magically make Joaquinito love him, especially once his grandson fears him and "senses the danger" (169). Abel declares: "It is impossible to love you…you repel everyone, you reject them;" then, Abel accuses Joaquín of infecting Joaquinito with "the contagion of your bad blood" (169). Furious, Joaquín lunges at Abel and strangles him, which causes Abel to suffer a heart attack. He dies immediately even after Joaquín released him.

Joaquín Shows his Grandson the Dead Abel When Joaquinito enters the room calling for his grandfather, Joaquín asks him which grandfather he wants. The child answers grandfather Abel, and Joaquín responds by pointing to Abel, dead, in his armchair. Joaquín declares: "There you have him, dead" (170). He goes on to explain to his grandson that he, Cain, has killed Abel because he was trying to steal him (Joaquinito). Joaquín cries out: "Won't they leave Cain anything? Come to me now, and put your arms around me" (171). Joaquinito runs away, uncomprehending, and flees to Helena. When Helena enters the room, Joaquín explains that Abel finally had a fatal angina. Helena looks at him coldly with "steady eyes" and says: "You…it was you" (171).

Chapter 38

Joaquín Atones on His Deathbed Instead of alleviating his hatred, Abel's death only causes a "blight" on the house. While Helena sells off items and dresses in a fetching series of black dresses, Joaquín himself takes to his bed. Although Joaquina gives birth to a baby girl, the elders distance themselves from her. When the family visits Joaquín on his deathbed, he admits that he killed Abel. Abelín rejects his confession as untrue and tries to comfort him. Joaquín exhorts that they must forget him completely, and he wonders aloud why he was so poisoned with envy. He asks to see Joaquinito and asks the child to forgive him. Joaquinito does forgive him, although he doesn't fully comprehend the situation. Joaquín then admits to Antonia that he never really loved her and had hoped that she would be his salvation. She disagrees and throws herself on him, begging him to live a few more years. Joaquín refuses, claiming that "egotistic old age is no more than a state of infancy" (176). After kissing his family, Joaquín takes his last breath.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

JOAQUÍN MONEGRO (SENIOR)

Joaquín is the medical doctor who is obsessed with competing with Abel. When he feels Abel has bested him in career or life, Joaquín becomes increasingly bitter and hateful, yet he also empathizes with other family members and friends. As the protagonist of the novel, the reader experiences Joaquín's perspective and inner monologues from his time in grade school until his death at the end of the novel.

Obsessed Joaquín obsesses about his patients and his career in general, and he is quite possessive of his daughter Joaquina, his son-in-law Abelín, and his grandson Joaquinito. He wants all of his offspring and disciples to live with him in the same house and under his influence. He insists upon codifying his achievements and struggles with three memoir projects. In addition, Joaquín holds onto all of his grudges against Abel and Helena, and he persists in his assertions that Abel is blessed and he is cursed.

Bitter Regardless of the objective facts of the matter, Joaquín always interprets Abel's successes as slights to him. Joaquín feels that he is treated unjustly and continuously humiliated, whereas Abel receives praise, admiration, and glory that he does not deserve. Even when Joaquín succeeds or moves forward, his bitterness towards Abel destroys his progress.

Empathetic Although Joaquín is mired in his own obsessions and bitterness, he also feels empathy for his patients, his wife, his daughter, and the misfortunate in town. When Abel scorns the Aragonese man, Joaquín defends his position. Joaquín also frequently sees himself in others, be it Cain or the woman who mourns her husband's betrayal.

ABEL SÁNCHEZ (SENIOR)

Abel is a talented painter who grew up with Joaquín. He is relaxed, sociable, flexible, and affable, and he is liked by almost everyone in town. He is also lazy and somewhat selfish, as evidenced by his womanizing and tendency to ignore his family. On the other hand, Abel shows genuine concern for Joaquín's sickness, and he often gives in to Joaquín's emotional meltdowns in order to assuage him.

Affable Abel gets along with almost everyone and maintains a pleasant and cheerful demeanor with his friends and family. Although he engages in debates with Joaquín, he frequently gives in to his friend and lets him have his way: from what games to play in grade school to letting the kids and grandkids live in Joaquín and Antonia's house early in their marriage. Although he ignores his son, Abel provides for his family generously and makes sure that Helena is well dressed and Abelín is well educated. In his old age, Abel dotes on his grandson to the point of spoiling him.

Sympathetic Abel sympathizes with Joaquín and frequently tries to help him overcome his obsessions and mental illness. When Joaquín is struggling to court Helena, Abel initially tries to convince her to date his friend. When Helena chooses him over Joaquín, Abel insists that he would give up Helena if she had shown interest in marrying Joaquín. Later, Abel forgives Joaquín's various attacks and accusations, and he goes out of his way to praise his friend when he succeeds.

Selfish / Egotistical While the objective reader will most likely agree that Abel is not selfish with respect to Joaquín, Abel does have a penchant for fame, adoration, and indulging in his vices—most notably, sleeping with his models. Abel craves both fame and money as a painter, and he puts his career over investing in his son. Abel later admits that he does not want to compete with any of his offspring so that he will remain the most prominent Abel Sánchez of his line.

JOAQUINA MONEGRO SÁNCHEZ

Joaquina is Joaquín and Antonia's only child. She wants to enter the convent, but she agrees to marry Abelín, instead, with whom she has two children: a boy named Joaquinito and a girl whose name is not revealed. Joaquina is pretty and demure in a subtle way (as opposed to Helena's flashy beauty). Joaquina is very sensitive and dedicated to her family, yet she will also assert herself and rebel when necessary.

Sensitive / intuitive As Joaquín's only child and his jewel, Joaquina senses her father's internal turmoil and secrets—including that he hopes she will be his salvation. For this reason, she feels compelled to become a nun and purge the house of sin. Later, when Joaquina marries Abelín and has children, she shows a similar sensitivity to her own nuclear family. In particular, she intuits that her husband, Abelín, has been neglected by his father just as she was suffocated by Joaquin.

Rebellious / defiant Although Joaquina gives into her father's wishes frequently, she also confronts him about his mental illness and bad behavior. In one instance, she refuses to kiss him when he asks her. When it comes to other relationships, Joaquina is more confrontational and holds her ground. This attitude is most explicit with Helena, who often tries to control or bully her daughter-in-law. Joaquina stands up for herself and calls Helena out for her pretensions and peacocking.

ABEL SÁNCHEZ (JUNIOR) / ABELÍN

Abelín is Abel and Helena's son who eventually becomes a medical doctor. He resents his father's emotional neglect and is not interested in painting; as a result, he decides to live with Joaquín as his mentee and adopted son. Like his father, Abelín is good-natured and is especially kind to Joaquín. Like his wife Joaquina, Abelín intuits the tensions between his father and Joaquín and also empathizes with Joaquín's family.

kind Although Abelín resents his parent's egos and indifference, he shows warmth and kindness to those around him. He openly admires Joaquín and offers to compile his diagnostic papers into a memoir. When Joaquín confesses to murdering Abel, Abelín consoles his mentor by reminding him that Abel had a terminal heart condition. Abelín agrees to marry Joaquina and tries to please all four grandparents—first, by living together under the same roof; then, by making sure that everyone has time with Joaquinito (and that the grandparents had the power to pick the name).

intuitive Abelín innately understands his father's motivations and attitudes. He does not understand his father's indifference to him, but he does see that his father's profession is more of a means to an end rather than a passion. Conversely, Abelín intuits that Joaquín holds a deep passion for medicine and that there is a strange dynamic between the two friends. As somewhat emotionally abused children within the toxic rivalry, Abelín is sensitive to his wife's needs as she is similarly in tune with him.

NOTE: The wives and mothers, Antonia and Helena, are also key characters in the novel, but their characterizations are flatter: Helena is a pretentious peacock, and Antonia is the sacrificial saint (see the theme Doubling / Dichotomies below).

THEMES

Society

Art Versus Science From very early in the novel, Unamuno juxtaposes Abel's painting with Joaquín's practice and suggest that each career is a separate path. The two men have "taken sides" with their chosen course of study, and they attempt to bring over the children and grandchildren to "their side." In this sense, the careers constitute a key part of the men's rivalry and Joaquín's general resentment of Abel. The conception of career as worth harkens back to the story of Cain and Abel in the Bible, where Abel's profession and offering (that of being a sheepherder) is accepted and appreciated, whereas God rejects Cain's gift (which is also a condemnation of his profession as a farmer). However, like most binaries that Unamuno presents in the novel, the men recognize that art and science are not mutually exclusive—in fact, several characters assert that art is a science and science is an art. By painting portraits, Abel tries to capture the essence of a person and hold a mirror up to nature. In addition, Abel is a clever technician in the way he paints, and Joaquín's assessment of the Cain and Abel painting is simultaneously a scientific analysis as well as a well-crafted, almost literary interpretation. At the banquet, the audience deems the painting The Painting of the Speech, which indicates that great art (the painting) requires proper interpretation in order to acquire meaning. In his practice, Joaquín depends on careful observation and sympathy with his patients in order to diagnose them correctly. When he sets to writing about his mania or his practice, Joaquín considers himself an artist of the pen. Thus, both men could be considered artists *and* scientists.

Science Versus Religion At first glance, it appears as though Christianity in general and Catholicism specifically form the foundation of the entire novel. After all, the story is a retelling of a seminal part of Genesis in the Bible. In addition, about a third of the narrative comes from Joaquín's written Confession in which he talks about God's curse, the salvation of his soul, and a superstitious obsession with potions. Joaquín goes through a period of religious fervor in which he confesses and goes to mass every day. Antonia and Joaquina are devout Catholics who pray to the Virgin Mary to save Joaquín from his sickness, and Joaquina nearly enters a convent. Even Helena, who is most decidedly not a virgin, is painted as the Virgin Mary after giving birth to Abelín. Despite this drumbeat of Catholic devotion, the majority of the characters are non-believers who show disdain towards organized religion. Abel condemns church-goers as vulgar and ordinary people who need religion to define themselves. After his religious fever breaks, Joaquín characterizes the church as a manipulative way of entrapping girls and controlling the masses. Joaquín's true religion is scientific research—although he never really gives up his practice in order to make discoveries. Joaquín's relationship to religion remains complicated up until his death, as he is never quite sure whether he truly believes in God.

Relationship

(Lack of) Siblings Abel and Joaquín are not related, yet their relationship has the dynamic of brothers. They compete with one another for friends and attention, and they fight over the same woman—Helena. Joaquín's seriousness and conscientious nature smacks of an older child, whereas Abel's sociable personality fits the profile of a youngest child. Curiously, there is almost no mention of either boy's parents, which could constitute a reference to Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome. In addition to the seeming absence of Adam and Eve, virtually all the characters are only children. It is only with the final generation that Joaquinito has a sister—although we do not know her name or anything about her. Because the characters do not have literal siblings, they look for camaraderie in other forms. Antonia and Joaquina find comfort and meaning in the brotherhood of the church, and Joaquina almost becomes a "sister" in a convent. Helena tries to pass herself off as Joaquina's sister so that she can avoid the realities of aging. Joaquín finds toxic communities, first in church, and then in the decadent men's club. The characters largely fail in their efforts to join a community, with the result that they remain trapped in their nuclear families.

Marriage Marriage and children are portrayed as requisite steps in a normal life—a duty rather than something that the characters really wish to do. Abel and Helena get married as a means to an end and to satisfy social conventions. Helena wants the financial comfort and social status connected to being an esteemed painter's wife. Abel is happy to oblige but continues to have frequent affairs with his models. For Joaquín, Abel and Helena's marriage constitutes the ultimate betrayal and yet another key point of competition. Joaquín respects Antonia but does not love her; he marries her to "keep up" with Abel. Antonia sincerely loves Joaquín, but her marriage quickly becomes a study in sacrifice. For the second generation, marriage offers an escape from their parents and a way of assuaging them. It is unclear whether Abelín ever intended to marry, yet he is willing to make a life with Joaquina in order to please his mentor. However, Joaquina and Abelín never quite have their own marriage, as they live with and deal with their parents on a daily basis. In this sense, marriage becomes a form of imprisonment for all of the characters.

Parenthood / Grandparenthood Most of the characters invest much more in their children and grandchildren than in their spouses or marriages. Joaquín considers both his daughter and his grandson instruments of his soul's salvation, yet he also worries about them inheriting his emotional "leprosy" and hatred. The fact that both his daughter and grandson carry his name exacerbates his obsession with them and his insistence that they love him more than others. Because both are only children, Joaquín pours his attention and effort onto them so that it won't be divided among multiple children. Ironically, Joaquín commits this sin by also investing attention and affection to Abelín as an adopted son and future son-in-law. Antonia, as a doting mother and grandmother herself, often worries that Joaquín is neglecting their daughter in favor of Abelín. Joaquín addresses this imbalance by compelling the children to marry each other and live with him. Conversely, Abel prefers that his son have independence and autonomy. Abelín interprets this attitude as indifference and emotional neglect—his father provides for him but doesn't really care about him. In the last years of his life, however, Abel finds a purpose in helping to

raise his grandson and drawing pictures for him. Both grandfathers dote on Joaquinito and hope to inspire him with their own talents.

Psychology

Madness Nearly all of the characters describe Joaquín's obsessions and hatred as a "sickness," and Joaquín's fixations do suggest some sort of psychosis. Joaquín himself compares his hatred to a disease that is never cured—he uses vivid self-diagnosis such as "leprosy of the soul" or "gangrene of the mind." Even though the reader experiences the world through Joaquín's perspective and his own words in the Confession, there is an understanding that Joaquín's perception of the world is warped by his hatred and envy. As literary critic Enrique Sánchez-Costa explains in his article on mimetic desire in the novel, Joaquín vacillates between "the envy that eats away at him, the interior demon that stokes his hatred, and his search for redemption" (72, note: the translations are mine). We, as the readers, are trapped within his sickness and recognize Joaquín's unreasonable and illogical conclusions—most notably, that Helena would have loved and married him if it weren't for Abel, which is proven false by Helena's own declarations. Joaquín seems particularly insane when he describes his vivid fantasies of rape, murder, and revenge, including penetrating Helena next to Abel's dead body. Throughout the novel, Joaquín fantasizes about crushing or suffocating Abel, which presages the moment when he lunges at Abel and strangles him. The nature of Joaquín's violent obsessions supports the diagnosis of madness. On the other hand, some of Joaquín's conclusions are confirmed by third-party perspective, such as his interpretation of Abel's relationship with Helena and Abelín, or Federico's treatises on human nature. Even if Joaquín's philosophy on life is based on science and logic, his mental state is embittered and pessimistic at best and completely psychotic at worst.

Ego Many of the characters throughout the novel, both big and small, struggle with narcissism and attacks on their ego. Abel wants both fame and money for his paintings, and he remains an artist not for love of art, but rather to gain these external commodities. Abel also names his son after him but does not help raise him, and he is relieved when Abelín shows no interest in painting—and therefore, cannot compete with him. When Joaquinito becomes obsessed with Abel's animal drawings, Abel finds a purpose and comfort in the admiration of his grandson. Helena's defining characteristic is her narcissism and ego / superego: she relishes her beauty and the effect that it has on men, and she wants the best fashion and interior design so that her home looks as beautiful as she does. Joaquín is less narcissistic but very selfish in his obsessions and lack of consideration for his family. Joaquín becomes increasingly focused on fame and admiration as a means of besting Abel. His ego motivates him. The ancillary characters of Federico and the Aragonese man struggle with their bruised egos: the first for growing up as a bastard and resenting the vile nature of man, and the latter for losing his inheritance and family identity. All of the elder characters (with the possible exception of Antonia) fixate on their reputations and measure success by the fame and attention of others.

Contrasts and Doubles Much of the structure of the novel is based on binary opposites and juxtapositions: Abel is warm and sociable, and Joaquín is cold and awkward. Helena is a radiant viper-seductress, and Antonia is a pure saint. Helena is sexy and fashionable while Joaquina is demure and faithful. Joaquín's hatred is somehow both icy fire and fiery ice. Joaquín uses these supposed oppositions, or foils, to characterize others and himself—in fact, Joaquín defines himself by declaring his nature as anti-Abel. Internally, Joaquín vacillates between indulging his hatred and trying to atone and cleanse himself of his sickness, which constitutes a juxtaposition in Joaquín's mind and subjectivity. Although these oppositions create compelling contrasts and lend themselves to vivid imagery, Unamuno quickly breaks down the binaries in order to demonstrate their inaccuracy. In particular, Unamuno presents the concept of art versus science, but immediately argues that there is science in art and art in science. Moreover, Abel and Joaquín often share more traits as they age. While the binaries create a structure, Unamuno paints the world of the novel with doubling and reflections. Abel paints portraits and attempts to mirror the person he paints—including himself. The painting of the Biblical scene mimics Abel and Joaquín's own relationship. Both Abel and Joaquín see their offspring as potential doubles of themselves, hence the repeated use of the same names across generations. Joaquín identifies with his friends and patients and sees their struggles as variations on his own internal sickness. He even finds a new obsession in the concept of potions, which was a superstition brought to his attention by a female patient mourning the fact that her husband had left her.

Flaws

Envy Although Joaquín himself characterizes his sickness as hatred, the other characters accuse him of an unending envy of Abel. Joaquín does covet Helena throughout his life, and he longs for the other things that Abel has: success, likeability, talent, and a son, among other attributes. As Helena astutely observes, Joaquín is always scheming and relishes stealing Abel's thunder. His overarching hatred, however, derives from the sense that he (Joaquín) deserves love and success, where Abel does not. In fact, Joaquín believes that his friend, like Abel in the Bible, flaunt their success to feed their ego and rub their preferred status in the face of the less fortunate. Joaquín envies above all Abel's sense of peace. While Joaquín exemplifies this obsessive envy, Unamuno highlights the vice as a universal part of human nature. The poor characters, especially the Aragonese man, envy the wealth and status that both the Sanchezes and the Monegros enjoy. The male characters, in particular, resent their misfortunes and mourn the curse that has brought them to their unfortunate state. The one possible exception is Abel (senior), who seems to pity Joaquín rather than envy him, which only stokes Joaquín's obsessions and hatred.

Discussion Questions:

1. Given that Joaquín himself (and his family) does not trust his own sanity, to what extent can we as the readers trust his version of events? Is the third-person narrator reliable?
2. How are the names of the characters symbolic? What are the references inherent in Abel, Antonia, and Helena? Why does the Aragonese man not have a name?
3. Did Joaquín actually kill Abel? What about himself?
4. What is Unamuno's perspective on human nature?
5. How does Unamuno use contrasting imagery to describe the characters?
6. What are some of the philosophical concepts that Joaquín, Abel, Father Echeverría, and Federico present?
7. What are the elements of Spanish modernism in this novel? Do you see influences from earlier movements discussed in this course?