



	"Knives Out" by Ryan Johnson
Where	Massachusetts, Harlan Thrombey's mansion
When	2010s (2019)
Theme or Issue	Family, Money, Class, Murder
General Vision and Viewpoint and its evolution throughout the text	Knives Out explores how money and wealth can define a family and their outlook, but also divide them. It shows how people prioritise money over family and even ethical and moral values.
Cultural Context	Class Structures, Family Feuds, Role of Women
Literary Genre	<p>Plot Dynamics: Knives Out is presented as a typical whodunnit film, with a number of plot twists and red herrings. However, in this murder mystery there are a number of false revelations and distractions that are then undermined further into the film. Throughout, the audience must adopt the detective character to identify the suspects for themselves.</p> <p>Characterisation: Marta is the central character of the film, and she was Harlan Thrombey's maid when he was alive. She had a much closer relationship to Harlan than any of his family members, and acts as his aid. She then acts as Benoit Blanc's aid during the murder investigation in which she is deeply involved, and believes herself guilty of. She is unable to lie, as it results in her vomiting. Benoit Blanc is the detective anonymously hired to uncover Harlan's murder. He is flamboyant, gentlemanly, and intuitive. Ransom Drysdale is the son of Harlan Thrombey's eldest daughter. He is a disruption in his family, and is revealed to be guilty of Harlan's murder, as well as the murder of Fran at the end of the film.</p> <p>Setting: The film is mostly set in Harlan Thrombey's mansion, which is a physical symbol of the wealth to be passed down after his death. The house is filled with props and memorabilia from Thrombey's successful career as a murder mystery novel writer. It is also the site of a murder, and thus is treated as a crime scene.</p> <p>Other style devices: The film is largely comedic, mixing the themes of family feuds and murder with dramatic irony. This is personified in Benoit Blanc's character, who is humorous and flamboyant even while working to solve a murder.</p> <p>The film also leaves a number of clues along the way which the audience must identify and use to solve the mystery.</p>



Money	Money appears to be the motivating force for many of the members of the Thrombey family. A number of feuds and divisions appear to be caused by money, including Harlan's daughter in law, Nell, having stolen \$400,000 from him and Ransom's fury at being cut from his will. The importance of money comes to a climax during the will reading, when the Thrombey family turn on Marta, who has inherited Harlan's entire estate.
Family	Knives Out presents a portrait of a family who value money and wealth above everything else. All of the Thrombey family are less interested in mourning their father and finding his murderer than they are to discover who will inherit his wealth. The foundations of the Thrombey family are unstable, and seem to become completely destroyed due to self-interest and greed after Harlan's death.
Class	There are clear class divisions between the Thrombey family and Harlan's staff, including Marta and Fran. While, at the beginning of the film, the Thrombey's offer niceties and politeness to Marta, this façade is uncovered when Marta inherits Harlan's estate, and the family quickly work against her. They view themselves as superior to their father's maid, and use this to rationalise how they deserve the money more than her.
Race	Race plays a large role in establishing the divide between the Thrombey family and Marta. Marta's mother is an undocumented citizen of the United States, as she emigrated there illegally. The Thrombey family use Marta's mother's immigration status as leverage to get what they want. The Thrombeys also discuss race in front of Marta, showing prejudice and ignorance and ask her opinion while claiming they are not racist.
Murder	The murder of Harlan Thrombey is the driving force of the narrative, and Blanc's attempt to solve his murder is the framework of the entire film. Ransom intentionally murdered his grandfather, and also murdered Fran, which epitomises the lengths that the Thrombey family were willing to go to for wealth and greed.



<p>Symbols</p>	<p>Knives: Knives are everywhere in Harlan Thrombey’s mansion, showing his successful career. The fact that many of the knives in the house are only props show the insincerity of the Thrombey family, as well as the violence that Ransom resorts to.</p> <p>Blanc’s Magnifying Glass: This adds to Blanc’s ability to add comedy to the film. It is ironic to see a stereotypical detective character in such a contemporary film. The scenes in which he uses logic and clues to solve the murder contrast the arguments of the Thrombey family over such real-world issues like money and inheritance.</p> <p>Marta’s Mug: Marta’s mug at the end of the film, which says “My House, My Rules, My Coffee” symbolises her victory over the family, her inheritance, and the authority she has over the house.</p>
<p>Real World Contemporary Cultural Movements/Beliefs</p>	<p>American Politics (Donald Trump), the economy, immigration, class divisions.</p>
<p>Key Moments</p>	<p>Opening Scene: The film opens with a shot of the Thrombey house, and a close-up of the coffee mug, with various shots of the props strewn around the house, which works to characterise Harlan. Fran discovers Harlan’s body, which establishes the drama and tone of the film immediately.</p> <p>Blanc’s questioning of Marta is the first moment of revelation for the audience, because Blanc has discovered that Marta cannot lie. Therefore, she tells him details of the night of Harlan’s murder. However, it is later revealed that while the details she tells are not technically lies, they are not the entire truth.</p> <p>The will reading is a turning point in the film, as it causes the Thrombey family to no longer work against one another but turn on Marta as a single unit, as it is revealed that Marta has inherited Harlan’s estate.</p> <p>When Ransom and Marta escape from the family, Ransom forces Marta to tell her what happened. This helps the audience to characterise Ransom as a ruthless and greedy person, but also misdirects the audience as he seems to be extending kindness to Marta.</p> <p>The scene in which Marta tricks Ransom into confessing by telling him that Fran is still alive can be seen as the climax of the film, because Marta has learned to, at least briefly, overcome her inability to lie, in order to reveal Ransom as the culprit. This is the largest moment of revelation in the film.</p> <p>Closing Scene: The final scene, in which Marta is sipping coffee on the balcony of the house overlooking the defeated Thrombey family displays her victory over them. She has inherited what she deserves far more than them, because she was kinder to Harlan.</p>